



## Techniques for *thoroughly* learning a piece of classical vocal music

- Christine Douglas, Artistic Director Classical

IMPORTANT - Look for a bonafide copy of the piece you wish to learn and, if in doubt, ask your teacher where to source a reliable edition of your chosen music.

1. FIRST THING - read through and take note of the key signature, time signature, any accidentals (sharps & flats) and any rhythmically tricky phrases.
2. Read through the text noting anything unusual or new to you, and research the meaning of those words or phrases.
3. If the piece is in a language you don't speak, find or make an accurate English translation for yourself and write it underneath the existing text.  
BEWARE – The English text beneath the original language is often inaccurate (or just plain wrong!). It's merely a singing translation written so people can sing the piece in English and is NOT an accurate translation of the original. Instead, make your own.
4. Once you have completed that, a useful way to work on the text is to write out the original language, followed by the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) followed by the English translation - *for example* :

### CHORUS

Italian	Placido e il mar, andiamo
IPA	'platʃido ɛ 'il 'mar an 'djamɔ
English	Placid is the sea, let's go,

Italian	tutto ci rassicura, felice avrem ventura,
IPA	'tut:to tʃi ras:si'kura fe'litʃe a'vrem ven'tura
English	everything reassures us, happy we will have good fortune,

Italian	su, su, partiamo or or.
IPA	'su 'su par'tjamɔ o'ror.
English	come, let us leave immediately.

(If you haven't learnt IPA before, don't worry, it's just a tool and you can pick it up online or from your teacher or place of learning.)

ALL of the above should be done BEFORE you start singing the piece of music. I KNOW! – it's soooo tempting to just have a bash, but in the end it will hold you back.

Get a regular learning process happening now if you don't already have one.



## **SOVT - Semi Occluded Vocal Tract exercise starter**

When you start singing your piece, consider starting on an SOVT – that is a Semi Occluded Vocal Tract exercise. Many of you have already used these I'm sure, but for those who haven't, here are some tips. You can also ask your teacher how to do them.

1. Try starting with the basic SOVT exercise - 'Puffy Cheeks'. You can also use a voiced consonant such as 'v' or 'n' or a rolled 'r' to phonate or sound the vocal line. Don't worry if you don't already know how to do this - there will be a video on 'Puffy Cheeks' and two others online for you to practice and we'll cover them in Masterclasses.
2. With your teacher's help, choose one of the above and phonate (sing) through the individual phrases just using the chosen SOVT. In this way, notice how you start to get a sense of the phrases and the demands on your breath. Note those breath demands and work on supporting each phrase before proceeding.
3. Once done, look at and read the vowels alone (without pitching). Try to string them together in a spoken stream of vowels (still no pitching).
4. When you feel confident you have the flow of the vowels and breath, sing the phrases through on vowels only.
5. Once this feels secure, try singing through on a pitched consonant.  
N.B. – the consonants that can be sung or pitched are:  
/l/, /m/, /n/, /ng/, /v/, /w/, /z/ and /zh/ (as in the "treasure").