

“BEYOND THE MAJOR SCALE: A PROPOSAL FOR CHANGE”

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Popular singing is the newest of the singing styles to enter into the world of academia and educational institutions. To date, pop singers have generally been untrained but many are now realising the limitations that can result from a lack of training. This has led to a surge of interest in contemporary/popular music courses and private vocal tuition throughout the world.

Due to its longevity in the field, Classical methods are still the prevailing models in vocal pedagogy and many mistakenly teach pop singers from this vastly different musical tradition. The majority of vocal exercises in common usage are based on de-constructed musical components of classical repertoire covering major, minor and chromatic scales and major, minor, dominant 7th and diminished 7th chords as a broad generalisation.

After many years teaching pop singers, it is my informed opinion that this specific clientele should be training not only with these more traditional exercises but more importantly with vocal exercises that are de-constructed musical components of commercial pop songs since this is the repertoire that these singers are being trained to perform. These exercises would be based on the following:

- the melismatic embellishments ('licks' or 'riffs') used particularly in black-influenced pop music
- the scales and modes used in pop melodies, e.g. the Blues scale, Major and Minor pentatonic scales, Dorian, Lydian, Mixolydian and Aeolian modes etc
- the more commonly used chords, e.g. dominant 9th, major 7th/9th, minor 7th/9th, augmented triad/7th, suspended chords (sus 2 and sus4) etc

Furthermore, these exercises should employ the syncopated rhythms that feature so heavily in commercial repertoire. This is an innovative proposal that, in addition to establishing the sound technique and vocal function which should be common to all styles of singing, has the potential to carve a fresh, musically relevant path as part of the effective training of the newest clients in vocal pedagogy – the pop singer.