**How to Be a Great Bass**

**(Or as Brian O’Dell would suggest)**

**How to Become a Better Bass**

**Vocally**

**Start out by actually having a bass voice!**

* If not, and you still want to be a great bass, work with a trained voice teacher to help extend your bass range.
* Avoid trying to sound like a bass; singing your bass notes will cause you to sound like a bass.

**Become a better singer. Great vocal production is required no matter what part you sing!**

* Always be working on basics: breath, space, placement, resonance, and diction.
* Spend at least 15 minutes per day on focused vocalizing. Great basses will spend one hour.
* Hydrate. Great bass voices love water. One half gallon per day beginning one week before a performance.
* Match resonance throughout your range and from vowel to vowel at all dynamic levels.
* Finding the optimal balance between brilliance and space.

**The Bass IS the barbershop quartet or chorus sound**

* The barbershop sound is built from the bass up 99% of the time.
* The bass generates the overtones that the other singers sing along with.
* Avoid over-singing on upper notes and when singing louder.
* Resist the temptation to push on lower notes. Let them happen.
* When singing softly, maintain resonance. Let the other parts do more of the soft singing.

**Musically**

**Become a Stronger Musician**

* The better your understanding of the language of music, the better you will be able to communicate it.
* Stronger musicians learn music faster, which leaves more time to work on nuance.
* Understanding intervals, chords, rhythm, phrasing and other elements of music is essential for great performance on any part.

**Understand your special role in a barbershop ensemble.**

* The bass IS the rhythm section of the ensemble.
* The bass is almost always singing locking roots and fifths of the chord.
* Be aware of those few times when you are singing other parts of the chord.
* The bass sings more octaves than any other part. Know who you are “octavating” with!
* The bass should sing with lead-like solo quality at all times, but especially when singing melody!
* In many arrangements the bass sings a lot of back time and many rhythmic propellants. Understand how they function and how to execute them.
* The lock between the bass and lead will make or break an ensemble. At least 50% of your rehearsal should be spent working this duet.
* Use different tone color for different phrases, but never forget your job as primary tone generator.

**Challenges for Basses**

* Bass parts are rangy and jumpy. Basses need to work extra hard to make them sound effortless and smooth.
* Arrangers often fail to give you any place to breathe. Great basses are very sneaky breathers. Leave off ends of words or entire syllables. Always plan your sneaky breaths.
* Finding the proper balance of space and resonance in the production of tone is especially challenging to and important for basses.

**Performance**

**If you got it, flaunt it.**

* Every great ensemble has a great bass or bass section. I guarantee it. But some groups are particularly gifted in the bass department.
* Outstanding execution in vocal extremes (Super low bass!)
* Excellent solo voice
* Musically virtuosic
* Compelling performer
* Extraordinary ensemble singer
* Whatever the strength or gift, find ways to highlight it.
* Avoid highlighting areas of weakness. Not all great basses are low basses or great soloists.

**The Role of the Bass in Performance**

* Foundational. Confident. Strong. Sure.
* Visually and emotionally supportive of the lead
* The secondary visual focus
* Maybe a little bit of attitude?
* Bass is the most fun part to sing. Let the audience feel that.

**Special Considerations for Female Bass Singers**

* Striking a balance between bass-like and feminine qualities
* Women basses draw on lead-like qualities perhaps even more than male basses
* Women basses have a register shift to negotiate in most arrangements. Having a smooth break and a strong mix voice is essential.
* Other considerations and differences?

**Top Three Tips from Some of the Best in the Business**

**Brett Littlefield – 1996 International Quartet Champions, Nightlife; 2013 International Quartet Champions, Masterpiece; Bass Section Leader, 8-time International Chorus Champions, Masters of Harmony**

1. Master consistency of energy, spin and resonance throughout register, maintaining a seamless vocal line.
2. Maintain freely produced tone; never pushed.
3. Never let the listener hear your technique; only your artistry.

**Tom Metzger – 2005 International Champions, Realtime; 2013 International Quartet Finalist, Via Voice**

1. Listen well.
2. Be authentic.
3. Love singing.

**Kim Chadwick-McCormic – 2013 Sweet Adelines, International Queens of Harmony**

1. Be very tight with your lead.
2. Know your role and play it well.
3. Sing with a great baritone.

**Brian O’Dell – 2014 International Quartet Second Place Silver Medalists, Forefront**

1. The rounder the instrument, the more it resonates. The more resonant the bass is, the better the chance that the other parts will latch onto the foundation.
2. The higher a bass note gets, the more basses tend to want to scream it. The lower a bass note gets, the more basses tend to get gravelly to try to get the sound out. Resist the temptation to try to force low notes to happen. Here’s an exercise to use for upper and lower vocal extremes: Gliss from a middle range to the extreme note and notice the pressure similarities when not jumping. Make it so the note doesn't jump out at you.
3. Here’s one other thing that I do when warming up. Warm up the high notes first, using no pressure whatsoever. Do simple exercises in the high register. It warms up the entire range and I end up with lower lows that last longer.

**Myron Whittlesey – 2014 International Third Place Bronze Medalists, Main Street**

1. Always work on the basics, no matter how great you become.
2. Know your limits and stay within them. Don’t sing something that you can’t sing well. Work to stretch your limits.
3. Listen to other great basses, and then try things. Listen more, and then try some more.