

Advice for Building a Wall of Sound

The elements of a solid wall of sound include:

- consistent and consistently moving column of air
- skillful use of resonance/sound shaping
- vocal flexibility, including the ability to move smoothly through a register break
- absence of tension, especially in the jaw and tongue

Since it's a challenge to master the above skills, careful consideration of the following challenges is necessary when making your music choices:

Range: Consider more than the highest note for the tenor and the lowest note for the bass. The song needs to help you show off the parts of your range that are the most skilled.

Tessitura: The tessitura of each part line is a factor in the successful presentation of your skills when singing. For example, if the tessitura of the baritone part is constantly in head tone and this is not a decided strength, accuracy and synchronization usually suffer.

Nature of the common vowel sound: If you are still learning how to resonate with any degree of consistency, consider a song that has OH, AH, AW or any combination of these as the primary vowels...especially on words on stress beats and chords to be held. They frequently help a singer enhance her ability to resonate.

Words per nanosecond: The basic (and extremely important) skill of singing vowel-to-vowel becomes very difficult in wordy passages. Without the skill to handle this, your sound will tend to become vertical and tuning and synchronization issues will occur.

Awkward voicing: Beware of transposed arrangements that were originally meant to be sung by men. Without appropriate revoicing, many chords can be very difficult to balance. Watch for songs that have the baritone almost consistently above the lead and numerous chords voiced to the 10th and beyond.

Really fast tempo: Be aware of the tempo needed for the finished product when you make your music choices. The faster a song goes, the fewer the beats to be stressed in order to maintain horizontal flow.
Caution: Really fast tempo in combination with lots of words per nanosecond can be a really deadly combination if you don't have the advanced skills necessary to handle the challenges they present.

Level of key change difficulty: Take time to examine the key changes in the songs you select. Charting Pythagorean values at the key changes will help you determine the difficulty level of each key change. If that's the only really P-tuning difficulty in the song, consult the arranger for the possibility of some help making it more doable for you by simplifying or even removing the key change.

Lots of "dementia" (outside of key changes): Look for areas of the song that have lots of accidentals. These are very often measures of unusual tuning difficulty, especially if the accidentals are in more than one part in the same chord.