

# ***Bel Canto Solfege – Learning the Fundamentals with Skill and Artistry***

Kristin Zaryski (kristin.zaryski@icsd.k12.ny.us)

Ithaca College ACDA Student Chapter

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## **The Process...**

**“In the Air”** – inspire singers face-to-face while training their ears

**“On the Board”** (Pitch and Rhythm Charts) – Focus on signs and symbols

**“From the Page”** – Develop reading skills with beautiful, healthy singing

## **IN THE AIR – Pitch**

- Singers read solfege from hand signs as YOU lead (like a conductor!)
- Show height, shape of each handsign
- Mr./Ms. Subliminal – anticipate handsigns, move on the off-beat
- Use facial expressions to help with intonation, accuracy, encouragement
- Familiar tunes (name that tune), melodic patterns
- Two-part (two-handed) harmony – keep it simple!

## **IN THE AIR – Rhythm (Game)**

- Sit in chair, invite mistakes
- Count *ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR* (out loud) tapping legs; then *one, two, three, four* (whisper), pulse with arms out to sides – students copy
- Clap rhythm over out-loud counts
  - o All whisper-count one measure (*one-two-three-four*)
- Then, students clap same rhythm over out-loud counts
  - o Followed by another measure of whisper-counts
- Keep rhythms simple, steady, symmetrical if needed

## **ON THE BOARD – Pitch Chart**

- Invite mistakes with beautiful tone and phrasing
- Start with a d-m-s, r-f-l double triad – letters only
  - o Stand to the side, body turned out
  - o Point to the chart (they sign), create tuneful patterns/melodies (move on the off-beat)
- Add circles around letters (d-m-s, r-f-l); more patterns/melodies
- Erase letters, keep circles
- Add lines to create a three-line staff (this may result in an “a-ha” moment from singers!)
- Transfer to staff in scale form with circles (now whole notes) – keep pitch chart!

## **ON THE BOARD – Rhythm Chart**

- Simple time, one ‘measure’ per line (2 or 4 lines)
- Tap and “ch” patterns, repeat
- ERASE technique – keep the stems!
  - o When ready, add snaps on rests and/or transcribe to conventional notation
- TIE technique – always do AFTER erasing
  - o When ready, transcribe to conventional notation
- Try it as a round with ‘fun’ sounds (Beep, Boop, Bap, Bop)
- Appoint a “Tempo Cop” if tempo rushes!

### **ON THE BOARD – Pitch AND Rhythm**

- Scale pattern on staff (D D R R M M F F S F M R D D D D) – whatever key works for YOUR group
  - o Use pitch chart, too!
  - o No need for bar lines, clef, etc.
- Erase and tie – avoid skips
- Try backwards, too!
- Create other melodies, use same techniques
- Move DO (pitch chart) to various lines and spaces (see below for key signatures, etc.)
- Show everything in BOTH clefs if there are mixed voices

### **FROM THE PAGE**

- Hold with one hand, sign with the other
- Use/create ‘Readers’ – printed versions of erase and tie techniques
- Identify: key (DO), same/skips/line jumps
- Break it down: “ch” rhythm, speak solfege with handsigns, sing with hand-sign solfege
- Get creative: step the bead, sing backwards, singing on letter names with handsigns, ‘go to corners’, use leaders, divide into mini antiphonal choirs – engage ALL skill levels

### **MOVEABLE ‘DO’**

- Don’t always warm-up/practice in C Major! Help them understand that “DO” can GO anywhere
- Use a new pitch chart for each new “DO” (key) that you’ll/they’ll need/read
- “The Farthest Flat to the Right is FA” – emphasize the F’s
- “The Farthest Sharp to the Right is TI” – make it sound staccato, pointy!

### **OTHER THOUGHTS...**

- Choose a variety of repertoire that will interest them while building their skills – their concert program is the LEARNING program
- Consider developing a choral curriculum around music literacy and choose repertoire accordingly! (Example: start the year focusing on F Major and D Major in simple meters – and pick choral rep in those keys/meters! This means you can also do relative minor keys)
- Keep them hooked – it’s okay to teach SONGS by ROTE! They can help teach tone, line, expression, harmony, etc.
- Handsign solfege means commitment – to each other, to learning, to confident singing for life!

### **American Music Literacy Association**

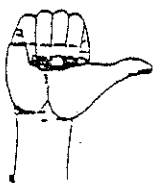
John Armstrong’s organization for choral/vocal teachers who believe in the Bel Canto Approach!  
Information about literacy courses, sure-fire winners, and his book *The Reading Choir Singer* (and more!)  
[www.americanmusicliteracy.com](http://www.americanmusicliteracy.com)

### **COME OBSERVE AT ITHACA HIGH SCHOOL!**

You are welcome ANY time – just email me first so I know when to expect you.  
Concert Choir – 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade, non-auditioned ensemble - 2:47-3:32 everyday  
(We also teach large group lessons, usually three per day; check with me about schedule)  
[kristin.zaryski@icsd.k12.ny.us](mailto:kristin.zaryski@icsd.k12.ny.us)

# Solfège Reference (Ascending Half Steps)

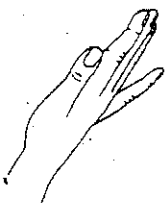
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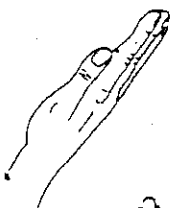
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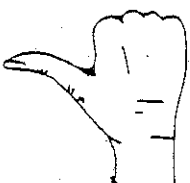
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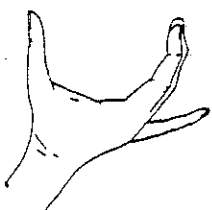
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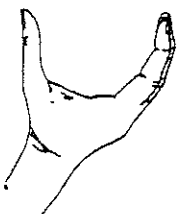
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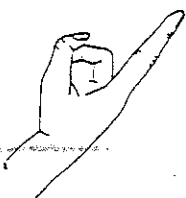
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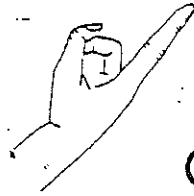


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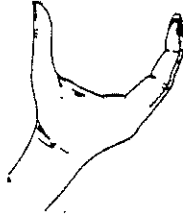
# Solfège Reference (Descending Half Steps)



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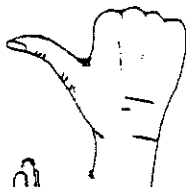
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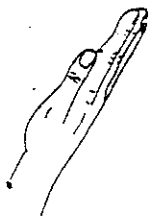
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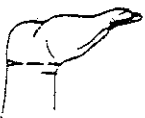


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# C - Quarter Note Reader in 4/4 with rests and ties

These examples will also work as rounds in two, three or four parts. We suggest the singers keep a constant tap or pulse for each beat, and count the rests out loud.

John Armstrong

The musical score consists of six parts, labeled A through F. Each part is written in 4/4 time and consists of two staves. The notation includes quarter notes, eighth notes, and rests. The measures are numbered 1 through 4. Part A starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The notes in each part are as follows:

- Part A:** Staff 1: Measure 1 (two chords), Measure 2 (quarter notes), Measure 3 (quarter notes), Measure 4 (quarter notes). Staff 2: Measure 1 (quarter notes), Measure 2 (quarter notes), Measure 3 (quarter notes), Measure 4 (quarter notes).
- Part B:** Staff 1: Measure 1 (rest), Measure 2 (quarter notes), Measure 3 (quarter notes), Measure 4 (quarter notes). Staff 2: Measure 1 (quarter notes), Measure 2 (quarter notes), Measure 3 (quarter notes), Measure 4 (quarter notes).
- Part C:** Staff 1: Measure 1 (rest), Measure 2 (quarter notes), Measure 3 (quarter notes), Measure 4 (quarter notes). Staff 2: Measure 1 (rest), Measure 2 (quarter notes), Measure 3 (quarter notes), Measure 4 (quarter notes).
- Part D:** Staff 1: Measure 1 (rest), Measure 2 (quarter notes), Measure 3 (quarter notes), Measure 4 (quarter notes). Staff 2: Measure 1 (quarter notes), Measure 2 (quarter notes), Measure 3 (quarter notes), Measure 4 (quarter notes).
- Part E:** Staff 1: Measure 1 (quarter notes), Measure 2 (quarter notes), Measure 3 (quarter notes), Measure 4 (quarter notes). Staff 2: Measure 1 (quarter notes), Measure 2 (quarter notes), Measure 3 (quarter notes), Measure 4 (quarter notes).
- Part F:** Staff 1: Measure 1 (rest), Measure 2 (quarter notes), Measure 3 (quarter notes), Measure 4 (quarter notes). Staff 2: Measure 1 (quarter notes), Measure 2 (quarter notes), Measure 3 (quarter notes), Measure 4 (quarter notes).



## Quarter Note Reader

with rests and ties

These examples will also work as rounds in two, three or four parts. We suggest the singers keep a constant tap or pulse for each beat, and count the rests out loud.

John Armstrong

**A**

**B**

**C**

**D**

**E**

**F**

Detailed description: The page contains six examples (A-F) of musical notation in bass clef, 4/4 time. Each example consists of two staves. The first staff of each example is divided into two measures, labeled '1' and '2'. The second staff is divided into two measures, labeled '3' and '4'. Example A starts with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat), then switches to bass clef. It features quarter notes and rests. Examples B-F use only quarter notes and rests. Example A includes a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) at the beginning of the first staff.