Accessorize Your DeLorean

Embellishments, featuring Frenzy, 2017 Queens of Harmony

Back to the Future
IES 2017

There are numerous kinds of embellishments and each and every one of them, no matter how seemingly insignificant has emotional value. *All* of them require some degree of finesse to be really effective. Dynamics (dramatic and subtle), vocal textures, ritard, accelerando, lyric inflection, artistic breathing and good, solid vocal production are among the many skills needed to sing truly effective BBS Embellishments.

Consider the following when working with BBS embellishments:

- All embellishments, no matter how small, are worthy of our musical attention and creativity.
- The listener wants (and needs) to hear the parts in motion – even if they are not the melody.
- The "stationary" parts AREN'T. Activate and impassion your sound to give it movement in order to maintain the forward motion of the phrase. (The notes don't have to be changing to maintain forward motion.)
- Remember, if you hold it-----
  - BUILD IT, or
  - do SOMETHING with it, or
  - BLOSSOM your sound…
- Pick your descriptor, but do more than just "sit" there or "wait" while the moving parts are in play.
- Strive to achieve a "no interval" vocal line – a breath driven sound. Finesse cannot be achieved without this. Remember, an embellishment is *moving sound*, NOT changing pitches.
- An embellishment should always be part of the overall "motion" of the phrase, never interrupting the flow and movement to the ultimate destination: the climax.
- Embellishments represent points of emphasis or heightened emotion within your phrasing plan. Use them to help you build momentum toward the climax of the song.
- Maintain context when deciding how to handle an embellishment. The effectiveness of what an embellishment accomplishes within your plan is determined by knowing its context - what precedes and what follows it – as well as ultimately, where the song is "headed."

Some of the commonly used embellishments and nuances include…

The echo:

- commonly used in BBS arrangements
- the primary lyric and repeat lyric should NOT be executed identically
- consider lyric inflection, rhythmic change, dynamic change, vocal color options, etc.

The power swipe:

- the movement of your sound should be in an arc up and away from you (build and lift) before the pitch begins in any direction

The contrary motion swipe:

- usually a three note (or chord) progression
- the two parts in opposing motion pass through an octave (perfectly tuned and synchronized) on the middle chord
- the "stationary" parts must actively participate in the vocal dimension of the swipe

Unison, to be totally effective requires:

- matched pitch
- matched singing space (resonation)
- as well as matched vowel

The peel off:

- frequently begins as a unison of two or more parts
- demands the skill required of the unison,
- followed by the singers' ability to maintain the shared space created on the unison *while* moving to separate notes

The melody hand-off:

- a more subtle and, therefore, more demanding kind of vocal nuance
- requires heightened attention to shared vocal space by the two parts executing the hand-off
- frequently found at tags; mostly when melody moves from lead to tenor
- can also happen in the body of a song; most often in this case moving from lead to bass, then back to lead…even in a contest song (generally limited to a maximum of 8 measures of non-lead melody)
- the listener's tracking of the melody should not be "jarred" as the melody moves from part to part

There's nothing more "BBS" than the BBS Embellishment. Not much will get a rise out of an audience like a well-executed embellishment, so be sure to add these exciting elements to your next performance and get your audience on their feet!

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