

*National Association of Teachers of Singing ~ Mid-Atlantic Region*  
*Music Theater (MT) Category Guidelines*

*Music Theater Category Repertoire Requirements (Revised/Approved April 2010)*

G. One Music Theater legit (Head Register Dominant – cricothyroid [CT] muscle dominant) selection premiered in 1960 or before, sung in the original or published key (representative composers: Loewe, Rodgers, Gershwin, Berlin, Kern).

H. One Music Theater non-legit (Chest Register Dominant – thyroarytenoid [TA] muscle dominant) from any time period, sung in the original or published key.

I. One Music Theater non-legit (Chest Register Dominant – thyroarytenoid [TA] muscle dominant) selection premiered in 1960 or before, sung in the original or published key (representative composers: Lerner, Rodgers, Gershwin, Youmans, Berlin, Kern).

J. One Music Theater work premiered from 1961-1990 sung in the original or published key (representative composers: Lerner & Loewe, Sondheim, R. Adler, Schonberg, Lloyd Webber).

K. One Music Theater work premiered from 1991 to present sung in the original or published key (representative composers: Sondheim, R. Adler, Schonberg, Lloyd Webber, Brown).

**High School:** 2 or 3 selections – 1 from G, 1 from H, and optionally a third selection from G, I, J or K.

**College/Continuing Education:** 4 selections – 1 selection from each: G, I, J and K.

**Premiere Date:** Confirm at the Internet Broadway Database ([www.ibdb.com](http://www.ibdb.com)).

*Rationale for Music Theater Category Revisions*

In April 2007, it was determined that there was a strong need to update and refine the Music Theater Category. During the last 50 years the vocal requirements of the MT singer have changed and continue to expand. Our requirements in the MT categories had not kept up with these changes. These guidelines were revised and approved by the Mid-Atlantic Regional Board in April 2010.

Students earning a Music Theater degree or intending to pursue a career in Music Theater need to learn a healthy Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) technique to audition for roles in their chosen field. Many professional Music Theater auditions require the singer to demonstrate different vocal registers and musical styles; thus, it is important from a learning standpoint to require the same of the NATS MT Categories.

The Classical Categories require different periods and styles of music be represented by the singer. For example, the classical singer does not perform an art song the same way he performs an aria. Nor does the MT singer sing a torch song or ballad the same way she sings an up-tempo selection.

The Mid-Atlantic NATS continues to encourage teachers and their students to choose healthy MT repertoire for auditions. The revisions address this by implementing a requirement for all entries to sing a 'legit' selection premiered in 1960 or before. The revisions also protect our younger High School singers by encouraging them to avoid potentially unhealthy 'belt' literature written post-1960. Most 'non-legit' MT repertoire written prior to 1960 does not push chest register past an octave above middle C with only a few pieces up to a D. As always, the goal is to sing this style in a healthy way; therefore, full-out 'belt' throughout a song is not ever recommended.

The following may answer questions you have regarding the MT singer's tonal production and the judging of the Music Theater category.

Here is an excerpt from Johann Sundberg's article "Comparison of Pharynx, Source, Formant, and Pressure Characteristics in Operatic and Music Theater Singing," Sundberg, Gramming, Lovetri, *Journal of Voice*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1993:

***Scientific Characteristics of each style:***

- OPERA:** *Moderate subglottic pressure and glottal adduction, moderate jaw opening, lowered larynx, peak glottal permittance, short closed phase, good visibility of folds, strong fundamental, strong singer's formant.*
- MIXED:** *Moderate subglottal pressure, moderate glottal adduction, wider jaw opening, slightly raised larynx, second formant highest (but first was present,) side walls of pharynx slightly advanced, folds less visible, singer's formant present.*
- BELT:** *10 decibels louder, high subglottic pressure, high glottal adduction, widest jaw opening, raised larynx, side walls very advanced, sinus piriform small, no fundamental, long closed phase, folds almost hidden, low singer's formant.*

***Translation***

- OPERA:** *Moderate breath pressure and folds touching loosely, mouth open small amount, throat relaxed and open, larynx low, "ring" in sound.*
- MIXED:** *Moderate breath pressure, folds pressed together some, mouth moderately open, throat slightly constricted, larynx slightly raised, "ring" present but less than in opera.*
- BELT:** *High breath pressure and volume, folds pressed tightly together, mouth wide open, larynx raised, throat very constricted, no amplification of pitch being sung, no "ring".*

***Some technical elements of singing—Dr. Johann Sundberg:***

- 1. The vocal folds determine the airflow.*
- 2. The vocal folds vibrate differently in different registers.*
- 3. Our posture largely determines how much air we get.*
- 4. Singers have 20% more vital lung capacity, not because they take in more air, but because they squeeze out more air. We empty the lungs more completely than non-singers.*
- 5. The larynx itself can change shape.*
- 6. A register is a unified group of sounds with one tonal texture and acoustical behavior.*
- 7. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> formants determine the vowel; 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> formants determine the resonance and timbre (vowel color), and are often grouped together as the "Singer's Formant."*
- 8. The side walls of the pharynx are the constrictors (the swallowing muscles).*
- 9. More than 50 sets of muscles are involved in making sound; the tongue alone has 35.*

## ***BELTING***

The definition of, teaching of, and "safety" of belting are not without controversy

Most agree the muscle energy to produce belt exceeds that needed for other tone qualities

Frontal resonance is an undisputed characteristic

Most agree that a "mix" of head and chest voice is necessary for vocal health

Most agree that belt requires a higher laryngeal position than classical singing

(Provided by Edrie Means Weekly, VA NATS)

### **‘LEGIT’ & ‘NON-LEGIT’ within Music Theater Singing**

In the professional Music Theater world, the terms ‘legit’ (short for legitimate) and ‘non-legit’ are used to differentiate between the more classical singing style required for songs such as “Out of My Dreams” (*Oklahoma*) and the ‘belt’ singing style required for songs such as “Adelaide’s Lament” (*Guys and Dolls*).

If you review the characteristics of ‘classical’ singing below, you will find that only slight modifications will create the ‘legit’ Broadway singing style. In addition to vocal production considerations, text must be as clear as possible, and high-quality acting is prioritized. An ingénue and/or her romantic partner often sing ‘legit’ songs (for example, Julie and Billy Bigelow in *Carousel*).

‘Non-legit’ Broadway women’s singing style encompasses a range of possibilities, from a mix needed for “I Get A Kick Out of You” (*Anything Goes*) to the powerful belt required for Mama Rose’s anthem “Rose’s Turn” at the end of *Gypsy* to the rock-style belt used in “Defying Gravity” from *Wicked*. Character actors such as Ado Annie and Will Parker in *Oklahoma* usually sing ‘non-legit’ songs.

Men sing in both styles as well; however, the difference between their ‘legit’ style and ‘non-legit’ style is not as obvious, since their singing tone more closely resembles their speaking tone. It becomes more obvious in the rock musicals.

## ***A COMPARISON BETWEEN CLASSICAL AND MUSIC THEATER SINGING***

The following table provides guidelines for judging Music Theater auditions and has been adopted by the Mid-Atlantic Region. The guidelines are provided to each Music Theater judge at the state and regional auditions:

	CLASSICAL*	MUSIC THEATER
TONE	<p>Of primary importance and takes precedence at times over clarity of text</p> <p><i>Chiaroscuro</i> is the ideal – both brilliance and richness desired</p> <p>Low larynx, high soft palate, and consistent pharyngeal space maintained</p> <p>Breathiness and nasality are not present</p>	<p>Beauty of tone secondary to clarity of text; Speech-dominated</p> <p>Brighter tone quality ('brassy') sound may be desired</p> <p>Laryngeal height, oral and pharyngeal shape are variable</p> <p>Breathiness and nasality may be used for expression</p>
VOWELS	<p>'Tall' vowels – strong resonance in fundamental higher harmonics</p> <p>Formant tracked to permit projection over an orchestra</p>	<p>'Wide' vowels – stronger resonance in higher harmonics</p> <p>Speech-like, formant tracking less necessary due to amplification</p>
CONSONANTS	<p>Sometimes articulated softly or ignored for the sake of vocal beauty</p>	<p>Stronger consonant production for text definition and clarity</p>
DYNAMICS	<p>Crescendo often results in increased rate of vibrato and an opening of the vowel</p>	<p>Crescendo often calls for straight tone until the end, when vibrato is added ('belt' and jazz styles)</p> <p>Speech-like vowel quality maintained</p>
VIBRATO	<p>Initiated at onset of phonation; remains continuous and even throughout</p> <p>Excursion above and below desired pitch may be as great as a semi-tone</p> <p>Typically 4-7 cycles per second</p>	<p>Usually initiated near the end of sustained tone; used for expression</p> <p>Less excursion above and below desired pitch</p> <p>Faster and slower cycles acceptable</p>
RANGE	<p>Only pitches which can be produced freely &amp; beautifully are performed publicly</p> <p>Performer adheres to her/his <i>Fach</i></p>	<p>Extreme ranges of pitch and loudness are sometimes acceptable</p>
ACTING	<p>May be secondary to beauty of sound</p> <p>Of increasing importance, especially in operatic repertoire</p>	<p>More important than beauty of tone</p> <p>Projecting meaning of text through facial expression &amp; body language are essential</p>

\*In some cases, Music Theater singing more closely resembles classical singing (*Music Man* or *Phantom of the Opera*) but still requires clarity of text and strong acting skills.

(Provided by Sharon J. Mapes, SC NATS)

## ***MUSIC THEATER SINGING STYLE***

Music Theater demands a variety of singing styles, from 'classical' (*Phantom of the Opera*) to 'belt' (*Evita*) to 'pop' (*Mamma Mia*) to 'rock' (*Rent*). For non-classical styles, the following characteristics may be considered when judging Music Theater:

### **ACTING**

Is as or more important than sound quality  
The emotions of the character are expressed vividly, with use of facial expressions  
and body movement

### **STONE**

Beauty of tone secondary to clarity of text  
Speech-dominated  
Brighter sound, occasionally strident sound called for  
Laryngeal height and oral/pharyngeal shape are variable  
Operatic resonance may not be necessary due to amplification  
Breathiness and nasality may be used for emotional expression

### **VOWELS**

Vernacular speech is required  
"Wide" – stronger resonance in higher harmonics  
Frontal resonance is emphasized

### **CONSONANTS**

Stronger consonants for word definition  
The consonant /r/ is hit harder

### **DYNAMICS**

Depending on the style, crescendos call for maintenance of straight tone, until the end when vibrato is added  
Speech-like vowel quality is maintained  
Extreme ranges of dynamic levels are sometimes called for

### **VIBRATO**

May be initiated toward the end of a sustained tone  
May only used for expressive purposes on sustained tones  
May have less excursion above and below given pitch  
Faster or slower cycles than in classical singing are acceptable

### **RANGE**

Extreme ranges of pitch are sometimes called for

### **BELTING**

The definition of, teaching of and "safety" of belting is controversial  
Most agree the muscle energy to produce belt exceeds that needed for other tone qualities  
Frontal resonance is an undisputed characteristic  
Most agree that a "mix" of head and chest voice is necessary for vocal health  
Most agree that belt requires a higher laryngeal position than classical singing

Sharyn J. Mapes