

Contemporary and Classical Singing Differences

By Leanne Hoad

Singing teachers and singers can be hesitant to sing in a different style if they have not been taught how or are not used to it.

A classical singer may say "I wasn't *born* with the voice to sing pop". Likewise, a pop singer may think they can never achieve the rich, 'full-bodied' sound of an aria.

However, singing different song styles is as much a learnt skill as learning to sing itself.

The basic techniques for singing such as breathing, breath support, posture, register transitions and so on are the same for any style of singing.

There are, however, certain techniques unique to different styles. It is these that usually need to be *taught*.

There is not a lot of documented information or scientific research done on the contemporary voice. Furthermore, unlike its classical counterpart, it does not have the benefits of research and application which comes with hundreds of years of existence.

Little wonder difficulty often arises for students in finding teachers who have the knowledge and experience in teaching more than one style.

The following table summarises some of the more obvious differences between the **classical** and **contemporary** styles of singing:

	Classical	Contemporary
Tonal Quality	Full-bodied and rich with overtones	Enormously varied. Styles include 'Speech-like' quality, breathy tone, head voice or thin-fold use, belting. Generally less overtones than classical.
Phrase lengths	Last for the entire length of each grammatical phrase. The composer determines phrase length.	Short depending on stylistic choice. The singer can determine this.
Breathing points	Taken at the end of the grammatical phrase with the occasional breath at the half way (comma) point. Grammar rules are followed. Once again, the composer determines where to breath and the singer learns the rules	More breaths are taken within a phrase for stylistic effect; even if grammatically incorrect. The singer determines this.



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Print music	Strictly speaking, must follow print music to the letter based on the composer's intentions.	Used as a guide only. Print music is often used—in conjunction with a recording (CD)—merely to learn a song. Some stylistic aspects of contemporary songs are difficult to convey by print music alone.
Music Theory	Must have a knowledge of theory. The equivalent to 2nd grade AMEB standard is generally a minimum requirement	Not necessary to know. Can learn music by listening to a recording for example. Certain terms will help the singer communicate with musicians.
Vibrato	A full vibrato from the onset of singing through to the end of the phrase.	Not used to the intensity of classical. Non-vibrato, straight or swell vibrato are used for effect on the longer held notes of a song.
Quality	'Opera' quality	'Speech-like' quality
Stylistic licence	A song is to be sung to the music as the composer intended.	Individuality—personal interpretation of a song—is a hallmark of contemporary music.
Pronunciation	Vowels are held for the longest time. Consonants are articulated clearly and not 'softened'	Consonants are held for longer. They are softened or even eliminated depending on the desired effect. Vowels are not held on to for as long and can be modified (sometimes heavily).