

## GERMAN

The choral singer should not encounter unusual diction problems in the German language because most of the sounds which occur in German are easy for the English-speaking person to comprehend. A small number of sounds which do not have direct English counterparts will be explained so that their use may become more natural and unaffected. While tradition and experience figure heavily in the forming of laws for pronunciation of Italian and French, the rules for German diction are presented in an official publication, *Deutsche Hochsprache; Bühnenaussprache*, by Theodore Siebs. The foremost experts in phonetic and stage (singing) diction are among its contributors.

### Vowels

As is the case in the Romance languages, the vowels are again the main elements on which the tones are built. German has long and short vowels, as well as diphthongs. All single vowels are pure, i.e., they are monophthongs, and therefore have no diphthongal glide as in the English letters *a* and *o*. The distinction between long and short vowels is very important but is not always indicated by spelling. Generally, however, a vowel is short when it is followed by a double consonant (*bitte*), or by two or more consonants (*binde*). A vowel is usually long when followed by an *h* in the same syllable (*gehen*), or when followed by a single consonant (*den*). This long-short differentiation is based on the proportionate duration of the vowel to the consonants, and affects the actual sound of the vowel to a greater or lesser degree.

VOWELS	LONG: AS IN	SHORT: AS IN	UNSTRESSED ONLY: AS IN
a	Saat (Eng. <i>father</i> )	satt (Eng. <i>cot</i> )	
e	Beet (Eng. closed "a" as in <i>say</i> , but without the diphthong)	Bett (Eng. <i>set</i> )	
-e (at end of word)			gebe (like Eng. <i>sofa</i> )

-er (at end of word)			Geber (like Eng. <i>sung</i> )
i	ihn (Eng. <i>see</i> )	in (Eng. <i>sit</i> )	
o	Ofen (Eng. closed "o" as in <i>so</i> , but without the diphthong)	offen (Eng. "aw" as in <i>saw</i> )	
u	Buhle (Eng. <i>soon</i> )	Bulle (Eng. <i>soot</i> )	

### Umlaut

The two dots over ä, ö, ü, are called Umlaut. Occasionally, especially in names, these sounds are spelled out ae, oe, ue (e.g., Goethe = Göthe). This is particularly useful to know when a mass is performed with Germanized Latin employing such words as *coelis*, rendered *cölis*. These vowels are also classified as either long or short.

VOWELS	LONG	SHORT
ä	Fähre (like Ger. <i>Bect</i> )	ertränken (like Ger. <i>Bett</i> )
ö	höflich (like Ger. <i>Bect</i> , but with lips rounded)	göttlich (like Ger. <i>Bett</i> , but with lips rounded)
ü	müde (like Eng. <i>see</i> , but with lips rounded)	füllen (like Eng. <i>sit</i> , but with lips rounded)

Notice that the same rules for determining length of vowels apply here. The letter "y" occurs in words of Greek derivation (e.g., *Kyrie*). It sounds like ü and follows the same rules for length, although both usually tend closer to *see*.

### Diphthongs

There are three German diphthongs, two of which can be spelled in two different ways: ei (ai), eu (äu), and au.

ei (ai) has the sound of "ie" in *vie*

eu (äu) has the sound of "oi" in *voice*  
 au has the sound of "ow" in *vow*

Like all German vowels, these must be pronounced more precisely and more clearly than their English counterparts. Incidentally, notice that "ie" is pronounced *ee*, but "ei" is *ah-ee*. In English terms, one pronounces the second vowel in these two German combinations.

## Consonants

There is a widely held misconception that German is the language of harsh consonants. Today German is usually sung according to the principles of classical Italian singing. While the characters of the consonants are not slighted in the least, they are handled lyrically so that the diction remains primarily based on pure vowels. Most consonants in German are pronounced in a fashion similar to their English equivalents. The German consonants b, d, f, h, k, l, m, n, p, t, and x are nearly the same as in English. B, d, and g are often given special treatment:

- b at the end of a syllable or before t is pronounced "p." Ex. *Lob, habt.*
- d at the end of a syllable or before t is pronounced "t." Ex. *Tod.*
- g at the end of a syllable containing a long vowel, or a short vowel and an r or l, is pronounced "k." Ex. *Burg.*
- in a word or syllable ending in -ig is pronounced like the forward "ch" described below. Ex. *König.* However, if another soft "ch" appears in the same word, the -ig retains its lightly voiced form. Ex. *Ewiglich.*

The following consonants also need special care in pronunciation:

- ch is pronounced as a forward sibilant (produced by exaggeration of the aspiration of "h" in *hue*) whenever it follows ä, e, i, ö, ü, ai, ei, äu, l, r, or n. Ex. *Bächlein, sprechen, Licht, feucht, mancher.*
  - is pronounced as a guttural sound (produced by aspiration between the back of the tongue and the soft palate) whenever it follows a, o, u, or au. Ex. *Bach, hoch, Fluch.*
  - is pronounced as "sh" in words of French origin. Ex. *Chef.*
  - is pronounced as "k" in words of Greek origin. Ex. *Chor.*
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g	is occasionally pronounced (in words of French origin) as the "s" in <i>measure</i> . Ex. <i>Genie</i> .
j	is pronounced like "y" in <i>you</i> . Ex. <i>ja, Jahr, Jugend</i> . is pronounced (in words of French origin) as the "s" in <i>measure</i> . Ex. <i>Journalist</i> .
r	is trilled in singing. Ex. <i>Krieg, Burg</i> .
s	is voiceless (as in <i>sat</i> ): (1) at the end of a word or syllable. Ex. <i>das, loskommen</i> . (2) when the spelling <i>ß</i> is used. Ex. <i>Fuß, mäÙig</i> . (3) in the middle of a word after consonants other than r, l, m, and n. Ex. <i>Erbse, sechse</i> . is voiced (as in <i>rose</i> ): (1) if it is an initial sound. Ex. <i>Salome, so, Segen</i> . (2) if it appears between vowels in the middle of a word. Ex. <i>Rose, Hase</i> . (3) if it appears between an m, n, l, or r on one side and a vowel on the other side, or after a prefix. Ex. <i>unser, Ab-sicht</i> . (4) when a word ends with <i>-sal, -sam</i> . Ex. <i>langsam, Schicksal</i>
sch	is pronounced like the English <i>sh</i> . Ex. <i>schön, Busch</i> .
st/sp	pronounced as written in the middle or at the end of word. Ex. <i>bester, lispeln</i> . pronounced as "sht" and "shp" at the beginning of a word or after a prefix. Ex. <i>Spinne, gesprochen</i> .
th	is always pronounced as a pure "t." Ex. <i>Theorie, Muth</i> .
-tion	is pronounced tseon.
v	is usually pronounced like the English "f." Ex. <i>Vater</i> . is pronounced as the English "v" in words of foreign origin. Ex. <i>Villa</i> .
w	is pronounced like the English "v." Ex. <i>warum</i> .
y	See ü in the section on vowels.
z, tz	always pronounced as "ts." Ex. <i>Herz, Kreuz, Platz</i>

Based on the Italian practice, sung German treats double consonants by giving them double time value when the drama demands. Therefore, one must shorten the preceding vowel and close to the consonant sooner. This is not natural

to the German language, according to Siebs, so it is necessary that the performer be careful to limit this practice to certain characteristic words such as *Himmel* (heaven), *Sonne* (sun), etc.

When two explosive sounds (not double consonants) occur together (t-t, d-d, t-d, etc.), the first is not exploded but suspended, and then the second is exploded well. Ex. *ist das*.

There are several situations in which final consonants and initial vowels, or two vowels, must be separated: (1) if a word must be isolated for euphonic reasons [Ex. Eng. *slumbers not*]; (2) if rhythmic or dramatic emphasis demands it; or (3) for general clarity of diction in large choral works. Where such separation is called for, the glottal stroke is necessary. Contrary to the teaching of some pedagogues, the gentle use of the stroke will never hurt a singer who has correct vocal instruction. In fact, gentle glottal strokes are regularly employed in any kind of staccato singing and are quite unlike the violent attacks which indeed do create hoarseness, thickening of the vocal cords, and even nodes on the cords. If you neglect to use the glottal stop, you may find yourself in an embarrassing situation. For instance, if your choir does not use the stop in front of *-au*, the audience may interpret the name of the village of *Himmelsau* as Celestial Pig instead of Heavenly Meadow.