MUSICAL TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Set 1

Music – organized sound and silence in time
Posture - a good singing posture helps produce good breathing for singing.
   An effective singing posture includes:
   ✓ Standing with feet apart, one foot slightly in front of the other
   ✓ Toes pressed
   ✓ Knees flexed (unlocked or “soft”)
   ✓ Pelvis tilted
   ✓ Rib cage lifted
   ✓ Shoulders relaxed
   ✓ Back straight
   ✓ Head erect
   ✓ Hands at your side

Breath - an expanded rib cage increases breath capacity and provides the basis for a
   free, relaxed and pleasing vocal tone

Yawn - sigh - a useful exercise that helps prepare the voice to produce a full relaxed,
   free, and pleasing tone

Vowels - the basis for a good vocal tone. You should sing all of your vowels with a
   relaxed jaw, a vertical mouth shape, and space inside of your mouth.

5 basic vowel sounds for singing – ee (sleep), eh (elephant), ah (octopus), oh (Ohio),
   oo (moo)

Set 2

Physical exercise - a regular program of physical exercise is very useful in the
   development of a singer. Exercise improves breath capacity, the cardiovascular
   system, endurance and general good health.

Diaphragm - a muscle just below the lungs that moves downward during inhalation as
   the rib cage expands and air fills the lungs

Larynx - the source of vocal tone. It is a part of the respiratory system and is made of
   cartilage. It is located midway between the mouth, and the lungs and trachea below.

Trachea - air passages, “wind pipe”

Vocal folds (also called vocal cords) - a pair of muscles attached to the front and back of
   the larynx. They open and close somewhat like a valve: open for breathing, closed
   for singing and speaking. Exhaled air passes between the gently closed vocal folds,
   causing them to vibrate. The number of vibrations per second produces pitch.

Set 3

Resonance - the reinforcement and amplification of sound. In singing, it is the sound which
   comes from the vibrating vocal cords as it is amplified by coming into contact with
   the bony regions of the body and face. From the Latin word “resonare”, which
   means to resound.
Palate - the “roof” of the mouth
   Hard palate - the forward, more firm and bony upper part of the mouth’s “roof”
   Soft palate – the soft, “squishy” back part of the “roof” of the mouth. Raising the soft palate opens the space in the mouth and helps give the voice resonance.

Articulation - the adjustment of speech organs to shape vowels and consonants. Singing text requires articulation to produce the consonants.

Articulators - the articulators that are used in vocal music are the lips, teeth, tongue & jaw

Diphthong - a combination of two vowel sounds: the primary vowel sound and a secondary vowel sound. The secondary vowel sound is usually at the end of the diphthong, just before the final consonant or next word or syllable (examples of words with diphthongs: I, my, day, like, sight, mouth)

Set 4
Grand staff – the graph of lines & spaces on which music is written
   Treble clef – higher pitches
   Bass clef – lower pitches

Pitch - the highness or lowness of musical sound. Another name to refer to the musical notes that are written on a staff (e.g. How pitch are you singing?)

Melody - a succession of musical tones, often called “the tune” of a musical selection

Harmony - when two or more melodies are combined, musical tones sounded simultaneously

Unison singing - everyone singing the same notes at the same time

Choral music - music written for a choir or chorus; vocal music for more than one singer to the individual part.

Canon - a musical form in which a melody in one part is followed in a short time later by other parts performing the same melody. A canon is sometimes called “a round”.

a cappella - singing without instrumental accompaniment

Set 5
Scale - a succession of pitches higher and/or lower. From the Italian word “scala” meaning “ladder”.

Range - the gamut of pitches, from high to low, which a singer may perform

Human voice categories - usually divided into four basic ranges, based upon the highness or the lowness of the notes to be sung:
   Soprano - the highest treble voice, usually written in treble clef
   Alto - a treble voice that is lower than the soprano, usually written in treble clef
   Tenor - a male voice written in bass or treble clef
   Bass - a male voice written in bass clef that is lower than the tenor

Registers - The different ranges of the human voice. The singing voice can be divided into three registers: chest (low), middle, head (high). By working consistently on the breath, forming correct vowels, and producing a good tone, a singer can unify these registers to produce a smooth, natural sounding voice.

Falsetto - comes from the latin word “falsus”, meaning “false”. This is a fourth register in the male voice that extends far beyond the natural high voice.

Tessitura - the general pitch of a vocal part
Set 6
Musical alphabet – a rearrangement of the first seven letters of the written alphabet (CDEFGAB); the names by which musical notes/pitches are called
Key Signature - indicates what key a musical selection is in; usually written on the staff at the beginning of a musical piece and/or at the beginning of a new section in a piece of music if the key changes
Flat - b – indicated in the key signature or just before a note to indicate the lowering of that note’s pitch 1/2 step
Sharp - # - written in the key signature or just before a note to indicate the raising of that note’s pitch 1/2 step
Accidental - sharps &/or flats not normally found in the key signature
Natural - written just before a note to indicate the canceling out of a sharp or flat given to a particular note, returning it to its original pitch
Key of C Major – this key has no sharps or flats; on the keyboard it is played on the “white” keys starting with C
Barlines - vertical lines that divide the staff into smaller sections called measures
Measures – segments on the staff containing a specific number of beats
Interval - the distance from one note to another
Octave - an interval of eight notes, going from one note to the next note of the same letter name

Set 7
Sacred Music - music written to be sung in a worship service
Secular Music - music that is worldly in text or function
Dynamics - refers to the degree of loudness and softness in music
   Pianissimo - pp - very soft
   Piano - p - soft
   Mezzo Piano - mp - medium soft
   Mezzo Forte - mf - medium loud
   Forte - f - loud
   Fortissimo - ff - very loud
Crescendo - < - gradually get louder (“arrow” is usually stretched out when written)
Descrescendo - > - gradually get softer (“arrow” is usually stretched out when written)
Diminuendo - > - gradually get softer (“arrow” is usually stretched out when written)
Pianoforte - An Italian term meaning “soft - loud”, given to an instrument invented in Italy in the 18th century. It was called this because the piano's sound could be varied by the touch of the fingers; later the name was shortened to piano.

Set 8
Legato - to play or sing notes in a smooth and connected manner
Marcato – to play or sing notes in a march-like manner
Staccato - to play or sing notes in a short and detached manner
Accent - > - written above a note indicating emphasis on that note over others near it
Tenuto accent - "- -" written above a note indicating a slight stress of that note and to hold that note for its full value
Fermata – - written above a note indicating to hold the note longer than its written value; typically occurs at the end of a phrase, section, or entire piece
al fine - Italian terms meaning “to the end”
Set 9

**Tempo** - speed of the beat (see Italian terms used below)
- **Largo** - broadly, very slowly
- **Lento** - slowly
- **Adagio** - slowly, leisurely
- **Andante** - a walking pace
- **Moderato** - moderately
- **Allegro** - Italian term originally meaning “joyful”; at a quick pace, lively
- **Vivace** - lively
- **Presto** - very fast

**Accelerando** - *accel.* - Italian term meaning that the tempo should become faster
**Ritardando** - *rit.* - Italian term meaning to gradually slow the tempo
- **a tempo** – (Ital.) resume original tempo
- **poco a poco** – (Ital.) little by little
- **con moto** – (Ital.) with motion

Set 10

**Meter** - a form of rhythmic structure

**Time Signature** - the numbers that identify the meter; written in a fraction-like form
usually at the beginning of a musical piece or whenever the meter changes within
the piece
- 4 – top number indicates the number of beats in a measure
- 4 – bottom number indicates what type of note receives one beat/count

**Double Barline** - indicates the end of a section or piece of music

**Repeat sign** - :: occurs at the end of a section of music when that section is to be
sung/played more than once (may also occur at the beginning of that section to
indicate where the repeated section starts)

**Syncopation** - emphasis on the off beat

**Rhythm Training**
The names, symbols, and values for notes and rests used in writing music are taught
through activities such as flash cards, rhythm reading chart exercises, rhythmic pattern
writing, music reading, sight-singing, and rhythm BINGO.