The Vocalize!
Canon Collection

55 Rounds for Choral and Classroom Singing

Compiled and Arranged by Andy Beck
Ah, Poor Bird

Experiment with phrase lengths. Start with two-bar phrases, then try four, and eventually challenge yourself to sing the entire melody in one breath. Don’t allow the air to escape too soon. Instead, resist caving in to improve breath capacity.

Hint: Sing softly to conserve air.

Ahrirang

This gorgeous Korean folk song is an effective exercise to develop true legato. In order to achieve this most desirable technique, allow your voice to ride the breath, uninterrupted by momentary lapses in support or overdone consonants. Imagine the vowels as a long clothesline extending from your mouth, with consonants as the pins that gently grip the line.

Traditional Korean

Words by Andy Beck

Ah - ri - rang, Ah - ri - rang, Ah - ra - ri - o.______ Come with me, let’s climb the love - ly moun - tain

Ah - ri - rang. If you love me, then

walk with me to the moun - tain - top. There, we’ll hear our

voic - es ech - o over Ah - ri - rang.

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It's all about the vowels. Tall vowels encourage an open space, which improves tone quality. Vowels that are uniform across the choir help with blend and intonation. The word "Alleluia" includes just three pure vowels (the first and last syllables are the same). Concentrate on each as you perform. Also, note that the first four pitches step down a major scale. Be certain to sing descending intervals in tune.

Optional: Gesture with index fingers that float upward throughout the first phrase.

William Boyce (1711-1779)
All Things Shall Perish

This tuneful German canon should be sung with a well-supported but rather soft dynamic. Strive for consistent tone quality throughout, especially on the two phrases that include descending sevenths.

Traditional German

Are You Sleeping?

The familiarity of this popular French canon presents a perfect opportunity to check in on some basic techniques. How is your posture? Are you forming vowels carefully? How are the choral balance and blend?

Traditional French

("Z" as in "azure")
Bella Donna

This charming canon requires a relatively large vocal range. Note the optional pitch (for singers who may not be comfortable with the higher one) at the end of the third phrase. How can you approach a high note with ease? Check your posture, drop your jaw, and engage your breath support.

Pronunciation: BEH-lah DAW-nah
Translation: Beautiful lady.

The Bell Doth Toll

Initiate the letter “b” at the front of the lips, then close (and lightly hum through) the “m” in the word “bim-bom.” This approach will build resonance, while imitating the sound of a bell.

Pronunciation: BEH-lah DAW-nah
Translation: Beautiful lady.
Be Welcome

Franz Schubert is known for his lyrical melodies, and this lovely tune is no exception. As you sing, work for expressive phrases that gently crescendo toward the middle and decrescendo toward the end. Tapering to each of the final eighth notes will demonstrate musicality and enhance artistry. Take time to breathe at each rest, inhaling completely, without constricting the throat or making a sound. To emphasize vowels, place interior consonants at the start of the syllables that they follow.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)


(Say “eh” through rounded lips for “o”)

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Inhale completely before each of these long phrases. Resist caving in to spend (and save) breath wisely. Place a soft “t” on the quarter rest that follows the first two phrases, and a light puff of air on the letter “p” at the start of the word “peace.” Like a good apple … be crisp and tasteful.

Pair with the following Vocalize! exercises:
- Take Time to Breathe
- Resist Caving In
- Consonants Are Planned
- Listen and Blend

In the glow of candlelight,

all of the world comes together tonight.

And in the glow of the candles we see

peace for you and peace for me.
Chairs to Mend

Imagine old-time street merchants selling their wares in a crowded marketplace. Crisp diction (with enunciated consonants) and healthy projection (with solid support) were required in order to attract as many customers as possible. As you develop these same vocal attributes, be sure to anchor the sound with breath.

William Hayes (1708-1777)

1
2
3

Chairs to mend, old chairs to mend! Mack - er - el, fresh mack - er - el! Any straw - ber - ries, any straw - ber - ries?

A Child of Song

This jazzy canon was inspired by “Take Five” by the American pianist and composer Dave Brubeck. Its uplifting message and attention-grabbing rhythms offer a great way to begin a rehearsal. When you establish good singing habits at the start, those habits will continue for the remainder of your rehearsal. Posture, vowels, and vocal freedom are always important!

Derryl Herring and Andy Beck

1
2
3
4

Sing me a song when I wake in the morning.

Play me a tune in the cool of the night.
Sing this happy holiday song with a full voice, explosive consonants, and abundant joy. Joyful sounds require a smile in the eyes without spreading the vowels, so drop the jaw to create vertical space and avoid pulling the corners of your mouth back. Carefully tune the octave jumps.

Optional: Hold the palm of your hand in front of your mouth as you sing. Feel a light puff of air as each consonant is produced.

Traditional English

Christmas Is Coming

Christ - mas is com - ing, the goose is get - ting fat.

Please to put a pen - ny in the old man’s hat.

Please to put a pen - ny in the old man’s hat. If you have - n’t got a pen - ny, a ha’ pen - ny will do. If you have - n’t got a ha’ pen - ny, then God bless you. If you
Coffee

Wake up! It’s time to sing! Bright eyes and expressive faces are required. Performing with emotion adds so much. For fun, experiment with different moods each time you sing this playful round.

Carl Gottlieb Hering (1766-1853)

C - O - F - F - E - E. Pour me a cup, or two, or three,

early in the morning when I want to wake, and then later when I need a coffee break.

C - O - F - F - E - E. Oh, how I love coffee!

Come, Follow

This variation of John Hilton’s famous round descends a major scale, walks halfway back up, outlines some diatonic thirds, then continues all the way up before introducing only one large interval (a 6th) just before the final cadence. It all adds up to an effective sight-singing exercise.

John Hilton (1599-1657)

Come, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow,

follow me. Whither shall I follow, follow, follow?

Whither shall I follow, follow thee? To the greenwood,
**Day Is Ending**

Sing softly, with a warm and expressive tone. Always listen to and blend with others.

Traditional Austrian
Words by Andy Beck

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**Ding-a-Ding Dong**

Perfect for beginners, this simple canon is in just two parts. When sung in a round, the voices move in contrary motion and with unique melodic rhythms, ensuring success. Once you have mastered the part singing, experiment with different dynamics and articulations.

Traditional Canon
Dona Nobis Pacem

Anticipate large melodic leaps by aurally internalizing the pitches prior to singing them. Approach ascending intervals as if coming from above and landing on top. Treat descending intervals with a lightness on the lower notes. Intonation will be improved, vocal tone will be consistent throughout the range, and a legato line will be evident.

Traditional Canon

Pronunciation: DAW-nah NAW-bees PAH-chehm.
Translation: Grant us peace.
Donkeys and Carrots

This whimsical Belgian folk tune isn’t just for fun, it’s also a great way to work on crisp consonants and rounded vowels. The highest note is sung on an “ee” vowel, which can easily become strident if allowed to spread. Be sure to round the lips and create plenty of space inside.

Traditional Belgian

Let’s think about phrasing. If you observe the breath marks between each phrase, it will be important to place the final consonants together—and “s” can be tricky. Perform a light, short “s” on the sixth beat of the measure, followed by a swift but quiet breath. Taking time to breathe ensures that the sibilant “s” will not linger (or hiss) too long.

Early to Bed

Let’s think about phrasing. If you observe the breath marks between each phrase, it will be important to place the final consonants together—and “s” can be tricky. Perform a light, short “s” on the sixth beat of the measure, followed by a swift but quiet breath. Taking time to breathe ensures that the sibilant “s” will not linger (or hiss) too long.

The School Round Book, 1852

Words attributed to Benjamin Franklin

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The Ghost of John

The third phrase of this familiar round can be sung on any vowel of your choice. Choose a different one each time.

Traditional Canon

Have you seen the ghost of John?

Long white bones with the flesh all gone?

Oo.

Wouldn’t it be chilly with no skin on?

Goodnight to You All

Complete each phrase with a light consonant followed by a full but quiet breath.

Traditional Canon

Goodnight to you all and sweet be your

sleep. May angels around you, their silent watch

keep. Goodnight, goodnight, goodnight, goodnight.
Hashivenu

Focus on pure “ah,” “ee,” “eh,” “oo,” and “oh” for this traditional Hebrew round. Sing musically throughout, building and tapering every phrase. Additional breaths may be added as desired.

Traditional Israeli

Here’s a Merry Jest

Articulation adds another important layer to musicianship. The first notes of this canon are marked with three distinct articulations. Discuss, define, rehearse, and refine your marcato, staccato, and tenuto.

Optional: Add articulations (or dynamics) of your choice throughout.

Translation: Return us, O Lord, to you, and we shall return. Renew our days as of old.
Hey Ho, Nobody Home

Connect note to note for an uninterrupted line. Consistent use of breath ensures legato.

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Hey ho, nobody home. Meat nor drink nor
mon - ey have I none. Still I will be
ver - y mer - ry. Hey ho, nobody home.
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Hine Ma Tov

Perform this spirited Israeli folk song with great enthusiasm, incorporating healthy technique.

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Hi - ne ma tov u - ma na - yim she - vet a - chim gam ya - chad.
Hi - ne ma____ tov she - vet a - chim gam ya - chad.
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Translation: How good and pleasant it is for all of us to live together in peace.
How to Join the Choir

Try this round as a sight-singing exercise. The second half perfectly outlines a major scale, while the beginning includes some commonly used intervals. Practice with solfège syllables (or numbers) to drill diatonic 2nds, 3rds, 4ths, and 5ths. Note the contrary motion when sung in canon.

Traditional Canon  
Words by Andy Beck

I Love the Mountains

Develop musicianship by adding new dynamics each time. Perhaps the phrases will alternate from loud to soft, soft to loud, gradually crescendo, decrescendo, or terrace. No matter what you decide, be sure to require a free vocal tone. As a sight-singing extension, note that each phrase begins one step higher than the last.
Jubilate Deo

Sing expressively by giving direction to the musical line, as if stretching elastic or pulling taffy on every phrase. Enjoy the suspensions that are created when performing in canon. The brief Latin text requires pure vowels. Implose the letter “t” throughout.

Michael Praetorius (1571-1621)

Kookaburra

Repetitive notes have a tendency to lose energy, resulting in flat intonation. Use consistent breath support and sing lightly. This approach will not only keep the voice buoyant and in tune, but it will also ensure vocal flexibility. The octave jump halfway through this melody can be a challenge. Words of wisdom: Lighten up on the bottom to float up to the top.

Traditional Australian
Our voices are greatly affected by how we carry and hold our bodies. Get set for singing with well-aligned posture that is strong but not rigid. Avoid any kind of tightness in the body or throat. Additionally, never raise or lower the chin for high or low notes. Instead, allow the breath support (from below) and the space (up above) to work in tandem.

Andy Beck

Pronunciation: KEE-ree-eh eh-LEH ee-sohn.
Translation: Lord, have mercy.
What sets vocal music apart from instrumental music? The words! And with those words comes the responsibility to make them understood. A lot depends on the lips and the tongue, their placement and movement, and the amount of air used to enunciate. Sing this story paying close attention to diction. It’s a clever fable about the importance of listening to teachers.

In a snug little field at the edge of the park on a beautiful morning in spring, a bold little magpie once asked of a lark if he thought he could teach him to sing. “Oh no,” said the lark with a confident look, as he warbled and wagged his tail. “’twould be too much trouble and sorrow, I fear, and I know that I surely would fail. For he who won’t listen, the art of the teacher defies, and birds who chatter can never expect to be wise.”
This cheerful Czech folk song celebrates the sense of community that is felt when we sing with others. Though it may sound simple, this togetherness and commonality goes a long way toward enriching the quality of our choral ensembles. When we can collaborate with, trust in, and rely upon fellow singers and instructors, we are able to open our hearts, minds, and voices.

Let Us Sing Together

Traditional Czech

Let us sing together, let us sing together,

one and all together in song. Let us sing to-

gether, one and all together in song.

Let us sing again and again. Let us sing a-

gain and again. Let us sing again and a-

one and all together in song.
**Mi Gallo**

Choirs who breathe together will sing together! And this playful Spanish round offers logical places to breathe (on the quarter rests at the end of each sentence). Breaths should be full, but without any noise or tension. The intake of air happens quite naturally just by opening the thoracic cavity and mouth.

Optional: Develop a breathing exercise by performing the rhythm of this song on a strong “s” (instead of the text). Relax to inhale. Breathe as one with the ensemble.

**Accompaniment**

Traditional Spanish

1. Mi gal-lo se mu-ri-o a-yer. Mi gal-lo se mu-
2. ri-o a-yer. Ya no can-ta-rá “co-co-ri co-co-ra.”
3. Ya no can-ta-rá “co-co-ri co-co-ra.”

Pronunciation: Mee GAHEE-yoh seh moo-reeOH ah-YEHR. Yah noh kahn-RAH “koh-koh-REE koh-koh-RAH.”
Translation: My rooster died yesterday. He'll no longer sing “cock-a-doodle-doo.”

**My Paddle**

As important as consonants are, there are a few that can be problematic. The word “silver” includes two challenges. Both the “l” and the “r” should be minimized to avoid interrupting the vowels. Modify toward “ah” for higher notes.

Margaret Embers McGee (1889-1975)

1. My pad-dle's keen and bright, flash-ing like sil-ver.
2. Dip, dip, and swing her back, flash-ing like sil-ver.
3. Follow the wild goose flight, dip, dip, and swing.
4. Swift as the wild goose flight, dip, dip, and swing.
Oh, How Lovely

In an effort to unify vowels and develop legato, try singing this German round on vowels only, completely excluding the consonants. Suggested phrasing: Four bars, then two.

Traditional German

Oh, how lovely is the evening,
is the evening, when the bells are sweetly singing, sweetly singing.

Ding dong, ding dong, ding dong.

Oh, Music

This beautiful Lowell Mason canon requires a fairly large vocal range. Whether you are hoping to free the top notes or extend the bottom, it is desirable to develop a consistency of tone from high to low. Use plenty of breath and space at the top, and allow lower notes to resonate without pressure.

Lowell Mason (1792-1872)

Oh, music, sweet music, thy praises we will sing. We will tell of the pleasures and happiness you bring. Music, music, let the chorus sing.
One Bottle of Pop

This playful tune works best with a light and buoyant tone. Avoid the temptation to oversing. Allow the lilting phrases to dance on the breath and the consonants to speak clearly.

Camp Song

One bottle of pop, two bottles of pop,

three bottles of pop, four bottles of pop, five bottles of pop,

six bottles of pop, seven bottles of pop, pop!

Don’t throw your junk in my back yard, my back yard, my back yard.

Don’t throw your junk in my back yard, my back yard’s full.

Fish and chips and vinegar, vinegar, vinegar.

Fish and chips and vinegar, vinegar, pop!
Even as you imitate sounds from all four families of orchestral instruments, be sure to sing with a free and well-supported tone. Your vocal health is of greatest importance!

Traditional Austrian

The Orchestra Song

The violin's ringing like love-ly__

The clarinet, the clarinet plays doodle, doodle, doodle, doodle det. The clarinet, the clarinet plays doodle, doodle, doodle det. The trumpet is sounding taran-ta-
ra, ta-de-da, ta-ran-ta-ra, ta-de-da. The trumpet is
sound-ing ta-ran-ta-ra, ta-de-da, ta-ran-ta-ra! The
horn, the horn a-wakes me at morn. The
horn, the horn a-wakes me at morn. The
tim-pa-ni play two notes, just this one and that. The
tim-pa-ni play two notes, a-rat-a-tat-tat-tat.
A favorite for singers of any age, this bouncy canon hails from Morocco. Despite its nonsensical text (comprised of syllables that don’t mean anything), the silly sounds are excellent for working on diction. With a full octave melody, concentrate on consistency of tone throughout the entire range.

Traditional Moroccan
Rise Up, O Flame

Slurs indicate that one syllable of text will be sung on multiple notes. Sing slurred passages extremely legato, allowing the vowels to ride on a steady stream of breath.

Christoph Praetorius (1535-1609)

A Round

Sing lightly, with an agile and flexible voice. Tall, rounded vowels ensure quality.

Andy Beck
Adding simple movements to this energetic samba will relax the body and free the voice. Try the following, or create your own!

1. Roll fists low, R then L (2x)
2. Shimmy R-L (2x)
3. Roll fists high, R then L (2x)
4. Float both arms from high to low (4x)
Scotland’s Burning

At the upper end of this stately round, drop the jaw to make space for a tall “ah” vowel. Be careful not to let the urgency of the words create tension. Project with a well-supported tone.

Shalom Chaverim

This familiar Hebrew canon deserves the very best technique. Work for warmth by singing through an open, oval-shaped space in the mouth. Additionally, concentrate on maintaining consistent tone throughout the entire vocal range and smooth legato lines.

("ch" as in “Bach")
Translation: Goodbye friend. Until we meet again.
**Sing and Rejoice**

This joyful canon is appropriate for the start of rehearsal. The one-octave range and manageable phrase lengths are just right as a beginning warm-up. Combine with some physical movements (such as head rolls or back rubs) to relax the body. Set the tone for a productive rehearsal.

William Bradbury (1816-1868)

Sing and re-joice. Sing and re-joice.

Let all things liv-ing now sing and re-joice.

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**Sing We Merrily**

Sing lightly, with a feeling of buoyancy to ensure vocal flexibility. Experiment with staccato versus legato. The cue size notes offer options for range constraints and create additional harmony.

Antonio Caldara (1670-1736)

Sing we merri-ly, dance as well, ’til we hear the morn-ing bell. Fa la la. Fa la la la.

Fa la la la la la la la la. Fa la la la.

Fa la la. Fa la la la la.
Thula, Thula, Ngoana

Here's a wonderful folk song from the African country of Lesotho. Accent the syncopations to energize the rhythm throughout. Keep in mind that this is a lullaby, so perform the melody softly, staying within a dynamic range of pianissimo to mezzo piano.

Traditional Lesotho

With new material by Andy Beck

Pronunciation: TOO-lah, TOO-lah, nGWAH-nah.

Translation: Hush, hush, child.

Thula, thu-la, ngoa-na.___ Thu-la, thu-la, ngoa-na.___

Thula, thu-la, ngoa-na.___ Thu-la, thu-la, ngoa-na.___

Thula, thu-la, ngoa-na.___ Thu-la, thu-la, ngoa-na.___

Hush, lit-tle ba-by.___ Sleep, lit-tle child.

To energize the rhythm throughout. Keep in mind that this is a lullaby, so perform the melody softly, staying within a dynamic range of pianissimo to mezzo piano.

Vocalize!

exercises:

Pair with the following to energize the rhythm throughout. Keep in mind that this is a lullaby, so perform the melody softly, staying within a dynamic range of pianissimo to mezzo piano.

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To Make a Round

A great way to introduce canon singing for the very first time, this beginning round explains the concept and keeps count of entrances with its lyrics.

Optional: Add simple gestures to highlight entrances. Display numbers with your fingers, then shake hands with a neighbor on the final notes.

Ubi Sunt Gaudia

This lovely melody clearly outlines the key of C major. Note the descending scale in the fourth phrase, and the fact that every entrance point begins on a pitch from the tonic chord.

Optional: Sight-sing on solfège syllables or numbers.


Translation: Where there is joy, angels sing new songs. In the courts of the king, there is joy.
We Merry Minstrels

If you breathe only where rests are shown, you may find the phrases quite long and the rests rather brief. Be sure to conserve air as you sing, not deflating too soon after inhaling. Remember not to gasp for air, even though the time to breathe is short. As always, approach the Baroque style with lightness.

Optional: Try two-bar phrases at first, then work up to four.

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)
Approach this festive canon like a storyteller, singing each new verse with a unique attitude. There are three characters to portray: the narrator, the king, and the page. As you perform, be an actor by incorporating precise enunciation, healthy projection, and dramatic facial expressions.

Optional: Sing the first verse again for a fourth stanza.

Where is John? The cows are in the corn again!

Where Is John?

Emphasize this articulation: short, short, long, then legato to conclude the first two phrases.

Optional: Add a sforzando attack on the final “John” followed by a crescendo to the release.
Whether the Weather

This English tongue twister requires your very best diction. In addition to clear consonants, try to maintain top-quality vowels. Initiate the letter “w” with an “oo” vowel, then keep your lips forward and round for the subsequent syllables.

Optional: Go faster each time.

Andy Beck

Words from a Traditional English Rhyme

White Coral Bells

Practice this charming English round with solfège syllables (or numbers) to emphasize the following sight-singing concepts: descending major scale, melodic thirds, and notes of the tonic triad.

Traditional English
This stunning Thomas Tallis canon has been set with many different words throughout its long history. This particular text requires an understanding of diphthongs. Here's the key when singing: Sustain the primary vowel (the first one) for the greatest amount of time before lightly turning (gliding) to the secondary sound.

'Twas on a silent winter night, the stars a glow with radiant light, when from the sky to earth below, there came a gentle falling snow.