

# Working With Advanced Belters: Beyond the Basics

## Who am I?

[You can learn more about me here!](#)

## Origin of belting

"The origin of the word "belt" to describe singing is a bit tricky to track. From the 1920s to the 1940s, belt was a boxing term that meant to knock someone out. By the 1950s, the word had begun being used to describe a style of singing. Many people attributed the word belt to Ethel Merman and even consider her to be the epitome of belting.

What is important to note is that while the word belt may have come into use to describe a singing style often found on Broadway stages, the sound was not born there. Humans across the globe have been "calling out" since time began, and it would only make sense that we would use those sounds in our musical communication. No one person created this sound quality that we call belting, and it was most certainly not created by White people in America on Broadway. Indigenous communities across the globe have been belting and using speech like qualities in their music since time began.

As we start to look at what we know as belting in the current musical theatre world, we cannot underestimate the importance of Black women. They belted before Broadway as we know it even existed. We can look at women like Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Ida Cox, and Ethel Waters, to name just a few. These women took speechlike qualities, calls, moans, and cries and imbued them with musicality and artistry.

White women began co-opting this sound on the vaudeville circuit. May Irwin was considered one of the first White women to make these speech-like, call qualities on the vaudeville stage. The sound became popular, and more and more folks began to sing in this style, which led to Ethel Merman famously belting out "I Got Rhythm" in *Girl Crazy* in 1930.

Taking a moment to appreciate the history of this sound is important. Belting is *not* a derivative of Western classical singing and observing it through that lens can be frustrating and confusing. As we explore belting, it is imperative that we understand that it is a natural, organic quality that *all* humans can make." –*So You Want To Sing Musical Theatre, Updated and Expanded Edition*

## The Basics

Chest voice connection

Speaking exercises on pitch

Laryngeal registration execution

Calling

## Belter Bridge

All singing changes higher and belting is no exception.

"One of the most confusing things about the higher belt range is understanding what it actually feels like to produce. It has been noted that successful belters tend to feel a shift as they ascend higher in their belt, but they also agree that belting is different than mixing in their higher belt range. What is so challenging is that most folks do feel a distinct difference between belting lower and higher, which can sometimes even introduce a "break" in their belt... The important thing to note is that successful belters can maintain a connection to chest voice throughout their belt range, despite the belt shifting higher. They can resist the "flip" into a lighter, more legit sounding head voice. This is something that newer belters tend to struggle with." –*So You Want to Sing Musical Theatre, Updated and Expanded Edition*

The Belter Bridge is the transition area from the lower belt range to the higher belt range.

Higher Voices: Bflat-D

Lower Voices: G-B/Aflat-C

Exercise for the Belter Bridge:

Calling through the Belter Bridge, even if there's a big break or an instability

53421 mamoma or mamima

Crescendo/Decrescendo Exercise

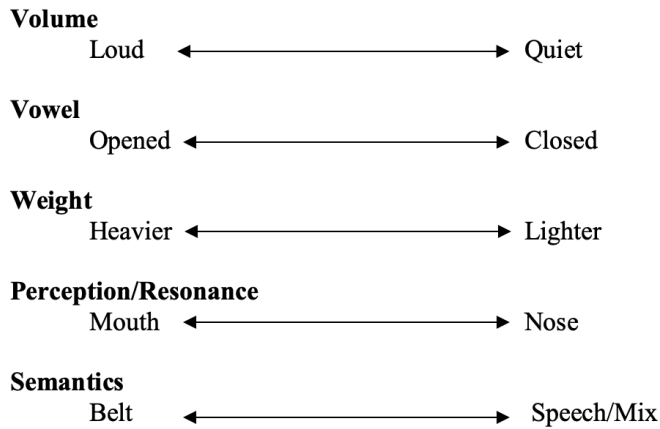
Witch cackle exercise

## Variation of Belting

Belting, like all singing, requires nuance. There are many sounds in the "belting sandbox."

All singers feel these variations differently. Below are some ways to explore them:

## Variations of Belting



Exercises for variation:

You would do that/we would do that 5 note scale

Why would you do that? Why?

Nope and Yep Arpeggio

Ma third slide

No way! 8531

## Sustaining

Once singers can call successfully, they often struggle with sustaining.

Exercises for sustaining:

Mom short and long

8888531 wəh or ma

## Agility

Agility can be tough when belting because of the higher pressure level and vocal fold closure.

Exercises for agility:

5 note runs on ma

1234565654321 ma into mo

## Body Connection

Belting is a full body sport!

You want to avoid over-engagement of the rectus abdominis.

Exercises for body connection:

Sit and twist

Hands on wall

Hands on knees

Engagement with a tool like a theraband, balance board, or exercise ball

### **All Skate**

More advanced singers should be able to switch from one set up to another very quickly.

Exercises for flexibility:

That's mine! Who's there? (belt into legit 5-1)

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