German Pronunciation Guide
by Norbert Meyn

Ludwig van Beethoven
9th Symphony / Choral Fantasia

www.choraline.com
Introduction

This ChoraLine pronunciation guide comes in three parts.

1. THE CHORALINE GUIDE TO SINGING IN GERMAN  (Page 2)
   with clear examples and symbols for vowel sounds, important consonants and inflection.

2. A LIST OF SOUNDS AND SYMBOLS  (Page 7)
   for reference and practice: using English word comparisons.

3. THE COMPLETE TEXT OF THE CHORAL WORKS  (Page 11)
   • Choral Fantasia
   • 9th Symphony  (Page 14)
   with a word-for-word translation, phonetic (IPA) symbols for difficult vowel sounds and consonants, and clearly marked stresses of important syllables and words.

The introduction, the list of sounds and symbols and the textbook work in parallel with the ChoraLine Pronunciation CD, and we recommend using them together for combined aural and visual learning. You can find the CD trackmarks throughout the booklet.

Even if you do not speak any German, this guide will enable you to pronounce the text correctly and with confidence. With the word for word translation you can communicate the specific meaning of each word through your singing. It will also help you to enunciate the important words and syllables in each phrase, so that the audience can understand it clearly and enjoy the many expressive colours of the language.

Norbert Meyn

If you have purchased the ChoraLine Pronunciation CD, please play it now as you read on.
The ChoraLine Guide to Singing in German

In singing we use the highest and purest form of the German Language, Hochsprache or Bühnensprache (stage-language).

CD TRACK 1

VOWELS

German has a greater variety of vowel sounds than many other languages. All German vowel sounds have both open and closed variations.

OPEN VOWELS

Open vowels are usually short (when spoken), and mostly followed by two or more consonants.

Gott  Mutter
God  mother

CLOSED VOWELS

Closed vowels are usually long (when spoken).

groß  gut
great  good

THE WRITTEN VOWELS e AND i

The open and closed versions of these vowels are formed mainly by the tongue, which gradually assumes a higher position in the mouth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IPA SYMBOL</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>open e</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>closed e</td>
<td>e:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open i</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>closed i</td>
<td>i:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THE WRITTEN VOWELS o AND u

Here the open and closed versions are formed mainly by the mouth and lips, which gradually close.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IPA SYMBOL</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>open o</td>
<td>Ö</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>closed o</td>
<td>o:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open u</td>
<td>U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>closed u</td>
<td>u:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UMLAUTS ä, ö AND ü

Open or closed, they are formed with the same mouth shape as their counterparts without the two dots, by raising the tongue inside the mouth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IPA SYMBOL</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>å</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open ö</td>
<td>œ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>closed ö</td>
<td>ø:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open ü</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>closed ü</td>
<td>y:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the ChoraLine pronunciation guide, open (or short) vowels are marked with capital letters and closed (or long) vowels are marked with lower case letters.

For clarity it is very important that when singing, open and closed vowels are clearly differentiated. The only exception is the letter a, which can be spoken short or long, but is always sung as a bright Italianate a.
THE SCHWA SOUND

This is a very neutral sound, which is used when the letter e occurs in an unstressed position. An example would be the first syllable in the word Geduld (patience) or the last syllable in the word Leben (life). In singing this sound is usually bright and never strongly projected.

IPA SYMBOL

e (schwa) as in Leben (life) ə

THE SCHWA SOUND II

This sometimes replaces the letter r, for example in the German word mehr (more). This sound can also replace the ending -er, exactly as in the English word ‘better’, or in the last syllable of the German word Butter (butter).

IPA SYMBOL

-er, r (schwa II) as in Butter (butter) ɐ

DIPHTHONGS

Diphthongs are made up of two vowels. In singing the second vowel is only sounded at the very last moment.

IPA SYMBOL

ai as in Mai (May) aɪ
au as in Traum (dream) aʊ
eu as in heute (today) ɛ

The second vowel is not as closed as the spelling suggests, and closes only partly.

IMPORTANT CONSONANTS AND GROUPS OF CONSONANTS

h This is always silent after a vowel, and the preceding vowel is always long and closed, as in the word gehen (to go).

ch 1 (ç) as in the word ich (I). This sound can be difficult. It is produced by touching the edges of your tongue against the upper teeth at the sides of your mouth, and the tip of your tongue touching the lower teeth at the front of your mouth. The sound is then made quite high up in the mouth by passing air over the tongue. It is similar to the first part of the English word ‘huge’, but stronger and more projected.

ipa symbol

ch 2 (x) ‘ch’ can also be pronounced in the throat as in the word Nacht (night). It is made by air friction quite low in the throat and is the same sound as in the Scottish word ‘loch’.

ipa symbol

-chs If ‘ch’ is followed by an ‘s’, then it is pronounced as a ‘k’ – as in the word wachsen (to grow).

-ng When words end in -ig, this is pronounced ‘ich’ – as in the word König.

-iglich If the ‘-ig’ is followed by -lich the ‘g’ becomes a ‘k’ as in the word königlich (royally).

nk is pronounced as in English ‘thank’, or in German, Dank.

qu is pronounced ‘kv’ as in the word Quelle (source), not ‘kw’ as in the Italian word ‘quella’.

s If the letter ‘s’ is followed by a vowel, then it is voiced like an English ‘z’ as in the word Sonne (sun).

st is mostly pronounced ‘sht’ as in the word Stille (silence).

-sp becomes ‘shp’ as in Spiel (a game).

sch is pronounced ‘sh’ as in schön (beautiful).

z is generally pronounced ‘ts’ as in Zimmer (a room).

v is pronounced as the English ‘f’ as in Vogel (bird).

w is pronounced as the English ‘v’, as in the word Welle (a wave) or Wasser (water).
Voiced consonants like b, d and g become de-voiced if at the end of a word or before another consonant.

b becomes ‘p’ in gab (gave),
d becomes ‘t’ in und (and),
g becomes ‘k’ in Schlag (strike).

When singing, the letter ‘r’ is rolled with the tongue, and quite strongly in expressive words like Rache (revenge). But it may also be just flicked as in a word like kurz (short). When the letter ‘r’ occurs at the end of a word, it is often replaced by the neutral schwa sound as in the word der (the), as described above – schwa sound II.

THE GLOTTAL STOP

When singing in German the “glottal stop” is important, as it helps to achieve clarity. This means that words beginning with a vowel have to be separated from the previous word with a re-articulation.

Example: Am Abend (in the evening).

In a glottal stop the vocal folds are closed for a moment and then opened again with a gentle explosion. In singing this should be quite smooth and should hardly interrupt the line.

INFLECTION

All German words have one stressed syllable, and this is often the first syllable. When singing in German, inflection is the key to a beautiful line. Unstressed syllables are projected less than in other languages, and this results in a lilting line that moves from one stress to the next.

In the text of the ChoraLine pronunciation guide, we have underlined stressed syllables and we have also underlined the important words in a phrase. This is because German is a very onomatopoeic language, and the stressed syllables or words often carry the expression. This is especially true in singing.

---

Voiced consonants like b, d and g become de-voiced if at the end of a word or before another consonant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LETTER</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>gab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>und</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>Schlag</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When singing, the letter ‘r’ is rolled with the tongue, and quite strongly in expressive words like Rache (revenge). But it may also be just flicked as in a word like kurz (short).

When the letter ‘r’ occurs at the end of a word, it is often replaced by the neutral schwa sound as in the word der (the), as described above – schwa sound II.

THE GLOTTAL STOP

When singing in German the “glottal stop” is important, as it helps to achieve clarity. This means that words beginning with a vowel have to be separated from the previous word with a re-articulation.

Example: Am Abend (in the evening).

In a glottal stop the vocal folds are closed for a moment and then opened again with a gentle explosion. In singing this should be quite smooth and should hardly interrupt the line.

INFLECTION

All German words have one stressed syllable, and this is often the first syllable. When singing in German, inflection is the key to a beautiful line. Unstressed syllables are projected less than in other languages, and this results in a lilting line that moves from one stress to the next.

In the text of the ChoraLine pronunciation guide, we have underlined stressed syllables and we have also underlined the important words in a phrase. This is because German is a very onomatopoeic language, and the stressed syllables or words often carry the expression. This is especially true in singing.

---

Voiced consonants like b, d and g become de-voiced if at the end of a word or before another consonant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LETTER</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>gab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>und</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>Schlag</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When singing, the letter ‘r’ is rolled with the tongue, and quite strongly in expressive words like Rache (revenge). But it may also be just flicked as in a word like kurz (short).

When the letter ‘r’ occurs at the end of a word, it is often replaced by the neutral schwa sound as in the word der (the), as described above – schwa sound II.

THE GLOTTAL STOP

When singing in German the “glottal stop” is important, as it helps to achieve clarity. This means that words beginning with a vowel have to be separated from the previous word with a re-articulation.

Example: Am Abend (in the evening).

In a glottal stop the vocal folds are closed for a moment and then opened again with a gentle explosion. In singing this should be quite smooth and should hardly interrupt the line.

INFLECTION

All German words have one stressed syllable, and this is often the first syllable. When singing in German, inflection is the key to a beautiful line. Unstressed syllables are projected less than in other languages, and this results in a lilting line that moves from one stress to the next.

In the text of the ChoraLine pronunciation guide, we have underlined stressed syllables and we have also underlined the important words in a phrase. This is because German is a very onomatopoeic language, and the stressed syllables or words often carry the expression. This is especially true in singing.
### IMPORTANT CONSONANTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPELLING</th>
<th>IPA SYMBOL</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
<th>ENGL. COMPARISON</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ch</td>
<td>ç</td>
<td>ich (I)</td>
<td>huge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ch</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Nacht (night)</td>
<td>(Scottish) loch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chs</td>
<td>ks</td>
<td>wachsen (to grow)</td>
<td>axe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ig</td>
<td>g becomes ç</td>
<td>König (king)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-iglich</td>
<td>g becomes k</td>
<td>königlich (kingly)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>gehen (to go)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>ja (yes)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l</td>
<td>always forward</td>
<td>Himmel (heaven)</td>
<td>love (not: all)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### VOICED CONSONANTS AT END OF WORDS

| d        | becomes t | und (and) | - |
| b        | becomes p | gab (gave) | - |
| g        | becomes k | Schlag (strike/ hit) | - |

### FURTHER CONSONANTS

| ng       | nj         | Klang (sound) | doing, (not: finger) |
| nk       | njk        | Dank (thanks) | thank |
| qu       | kv not kw  | Quelle (source) | - |
| s        | z          | Sonne (sun) ansehen (to look at) | zip |
| st       | jt         | Stille (silence) | fish-tank |
| sp       | jp         | Spiel (game) | fish-pond |
| sch      | ß           | schön (beautiful) | ship |
| z        | ts         | Zimmer (room) | nets |
| v        | f           | Vogel (bird) | fun |
| w        | v           | Wasser (water) | vase |

---

**Note about Word for Word Translations**

The syntax (word order) of English sentences differs considerably from German. For this reason most singing translations or other available translations of poetic texts are not enough to identify the meaning of individual words in a text.

Word-for-word translations work around this problem, and they save you having to look up many individual words in the dictionary. Most of the time the meaning of a phrase is still obvious although the word order is unusual. If you cannot make sense of a line it is worth referring to a normal translation as available on the Internet or in a CD booklet. You should be able to piece together a coherent picture that way.

Knowing the exact meaning of individual words, which are often drawn out and repeated in music, is important for singing with the right expression and with confidence.
The Complete Text of the Choral Works

9th Symphony

CD TRACK 17

O Freunde, nicht diese Töne!
Oh friends, not these tones!

Sondern laßt uns angenehmere anstimmen,
but let us more pleasant ones intone,

und freudenvollere.
and more joyful ones.

CD TRACK 18

Freude!
Joy!

Freude, schöner Götterfunken
Joy, beautiful spark of the gods

Wir betreten feuervertrunken,
we enter, drunk with fire,

Himmlische, dein Heiligtum!
Heavenly one, your shrine!
CD TRACK 19

Deine Zauber binden wieder
Your magic binds again

Was die Mode streng geteilt;
what the custom strictly divided;

Alle Menschen werden Brüder,
all men become brothers

Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt.
where your soft wing dwells.

CD TRACK 20

Wem der große Wurf gelungen,
Who (with) the great throw succeeded,

Eines Freundes Freund zu sein;
a friend's friend to be,

Wer ein holdes Weib errungen,
who a lovey wife (has) won,

Mische seinen Jubel ein!
(shall) contribute his jubilation in.

CD TRACK 21

Ja, wer auch nur eine Seele
Yes, who even but one soul

Zaeh E a a E: Unt
his (own) calls on the Earth (round)!

Und wer's nie gekonnt, der stehe
And who (it) never could, he (should) steal (away)

Weinend sich aus diesem Bund!
crying himself from this brotherhood.

CD TRACK 22

Freude trinken alle Wesen
Joy drink all beings

An den Brüsten der Natur;
on the breasts of nature;

Alle Guten, alle Bösen
all good, all evil

Folgen ihrer Rosenspur.
follow her rose-trail.
**CD TRACK 23**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German Text</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Küsse gab sie uns und Reben,</td>
<td>ae t y: l o:t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a friend, proven in death;</td>
<td>vU v t e: vU e:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wollust war dem Wurm gegeben,</td>
<td>U t e: ke: Up jfe: fo: C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lust was to the worm given,</td>
<td>und der Cherub steht vor Gott.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and the cherub stands before God.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**CD TRACK 24**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German Text</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Froh, wie seine Sonnen fliegen</td>
<td>o: vi: za: zC i:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gladly, as his suns fly</td>
<td>durch des Himmels prächt'gen Plan,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>through the heaven's magnificent plan,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**CD TRACK 25**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German Text</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laufet, Brüder, eure Bahn,</td>
<td>aO y: aO a:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walk, brothers, your path,</td>
<td>C\Ö lC vi: ae \ë t tsU Zi:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>joyfully, as a hero to victory.</td>
<td>freudig, wie ein Held zum Siegen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**CD TRACK 26**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German Text</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seid umschlungen, Millionen!</td>
<td>i:z Us e: ts vã</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be embraced, millions!</td>
<td>Diesen Kuß der ganzen Welt!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This kiss to the whole world!</td>
<td>y: y: jfe tsõ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brüder, über'm Sternenzelt</td>
<td>U t a: i: fa: o:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brothers, above the starry dome,</td>
<td>muss ein lieber Vater wohnen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>must a loving father dwell.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**CD TRACK 27**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German Text</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ihr stürzt nieder, Millionen?</td>
<td>i: jTY ts i: l i:o:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You fall down, millions?</td>
<td>Ahnest du den Schöpfer, Welt?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense (do) you the creator, world?</td>
<td>zu:x i: jfe tsõ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek' ihn über'm Sternenzelt!</td>
<td>Such' ihn über'm Sternenzelt!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek him above the starry dome!</td>
<td>Über Sternen muss er wohnen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above stars must he dwell.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---
Choral Fantasia

**CD TRACK 28**

Schmeichelnd hold und lieblich klingen
Flattering, charming and lovely sound

unsers Lebens Harmonien,
our life’s harmonies,

und dem Schönheitssinn entschwingen
and (from) the sense of beauty arise

Blumen sich, die ewig blühn.
flowers (themselves) which forever bloom.

**CD TRACK 29**

Fried und Freude gleiten freundlich
Peace and joy glide friendly

wie der Wellen Wechselspiel.
like the waves’ changing play.

Was sich drängte rauh und feindlich,
What (itself) pushed rough and hostile

ordnet sich zu Hochgefühl.
orders itself to high feeling.

**CD TRACK 30**

Wenn der Töne Zauber walten
When the music’s magic(s) prevail

und des Wortes Weihe spricht,
and the word’s solemnity speaks,

muss sich Herrliches gestalten,
must (itself) something glorious create,

Nacht und Stürme werden Licht.
night and storms become light.

Äuss’re Ruhe, inn’re Wonne
Outer peace, inner bliss

herrschen für den Glücklichen.
reign for the happy one.

**CD TRACK 31**

Doch der Künste Frühlingssonne
But the art’s spring sun

lässt aus beiden Licht entstehn.
let from both light emerge.
Note about IPA Phonetic Symbols:

The symbols in this booklet conform with the book
_Deutsche Aussprache (Hochsprache-Bühnensprache-Alltagssprache)_

Most dictionaries use similar symbols, but occasional variations are to be expected. This does not diminish the immense usefulness of the International Phonetic Alphabet. Once learned, these symbols can be applied to any other language and are invaluable to the amateur or professional singer.

Acknowledgements

This pronunciation guide has been devised by Norbert Meyn.

A professional singer, Norbert received training in his native Germany and later at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. He has many years of experience as a soloist and choral singer, and teaches German Lieder, opera and diction at both the Guildhall School and at the Royal College of Music. He also enjoys working as a language coach for the BBC Singers and Symphony Chorus, as well as EMI, Deutsche Grammophon, Harmonia Mundi and Hyperion record labels. For comments or coaching enquiries please write to norbertmeyn@mac.com.
ChoraLine.com™

Join our Community

- Special discounts
- Choral information and news
- ChoraLine Voice Part
  Rehearsal CDs
- ChoraLine MP3 downloads
- Huge vocal score catalogue
- Large range of performance
  CDs with reviews
- Books
- DVDs
- Specially selected musical gifts
- Wonderful musical toys for
  children and grandchildren

Dedicated Service for Choirs

Our choir service team understands a choir’s needs when providing bulk
order discounted quotes for Vocal Scores, ChoraLine rehearsal CDs and
Choir Folders.

Please visit our website www.choraline.com and click
the ‘For Choirs’ tab at the top of the page to read about our service and to
request a quote, or place an order on-line.
We aim to provide a high quality service
Our full service commitment is outlined on our website