German Pronunciation Guide
by Norbert Meyn

Johannes Brahms
Ein Deutsches Requiem

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 WORK** (Page 10)

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

**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 (God)
- Mutter (mother)

**CLOSED VOWELS**

Closed vowels are usually long (when spoken).

- groß (great)
- gut (good)

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 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>e</td>
<td>A colon after a vowel means it is pronounced long.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e:</td>
<td>open e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>open i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i:</td>
<td>closed 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>o</td>
<td>open o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o:</td>
<td>closed o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u</td>
<td>open u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u:</td>
<td>closed 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>ä</td>
<td>å</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ö</td>
<td>ò</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ü</td>
<td>ù</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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) | a |

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) | ə |

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) | ə ə |
| au as in Traum (dream) | ə ə |
| eu as in heute (today) | ə ə |

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. |
| 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 that in the Scottish word ‘loch’. |
| chs (ks) | If ‘ch’ is followed by an ‘s’, then it is pronounced as a ‘k’ – as in the word *wachsen* (to grow). |
| -ig (ç) | When words end in -ig, this is pronounced ‘ich’ – as in the word for king – *König*. |
| -iglich | If the ‘-ig’ is followed by -lich the ‘g’ becomes a ‘k’ as in the word *königlich* (royally). |
| ng (ŋ) | This is always pronounced with a soft ‘g’ as in the English word ‘sing’, and not with a hard ‘g’ as in ‘finger’. |
| nk | is pronounced as in English ‘thank’, or in German, *Dank*. |
| qu | is pronounced ‘kv’ as in the word for *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 (ʃt) | is mostly pronounced ‘sht’ as in the word *Stille* (silence). |
| sp (ʃp) | becomes ‘shp’ as in *Spiel* (a game). |
| sch (ʃ) | 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.

List of Sounds and Symbols for Reference and Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPELLING</th>
<th>IPA SYMBOL</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
<th>ENGL. COMPARISON</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>a, a:</td>
<td>Vater (father)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ä, open e</td>
<td>ɛ</td>
<td>Bett (bed)</td>
<td>bed, better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>e:</td>
<td>Leben (life)</td>
<td>eh?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>i;</td>
<td>Bitte (please)</td>
<td>it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o</td>
<td>ɔ:</td>
<td>Rose (rose)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u</td>
<td>u:</td>
<td>Ruhe (rest)</td>
<td>two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ö</td>
<td>œ</td>
<td>Götting (Goddess)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>õ</td>
<td>ø:</td>
<td>schön (beautiful)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ü</td>
<td>y:</td>
<td>Glück (happiness)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>û</td>
<td>y:</td>
<td>süß (sweet)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Remember: a colon after a symbol means the vowel is pronounced long.

Schwa sounds I and II:

| e, -er    | a           | Geduld (patience) | the Leben (life) |
| mèr       | ɛ           | mehr (more)        | better Mutter (mother) |

DIPHTHONGS

| ai, ei    | aɛ           | Mai (May) | try |
| au        | aʊ           | Traum (dream) | house |
| eu, äu    | ɔʊ           | heute (today) | boy |
## 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 (always forward)</td>
<td></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 | ñ | Klang (sound) | doing, (not: finger) |
| nk | nk | Dank (thanks) | thank |
| qu | kv not kw | Quelle (source) | - |
| s  | z  | Sonne (sun) | ansehen (to look at) | zip |
| st | ßt | Stille (silence) | fish-tank |
| sp | ßp | Spiel (game) | fish-pond |
| sch | ß | schön (beautiful) | ship |
| z  | ts | Zimmer (room) | nets |
| v  | f  | Vogel (bird) | fun |
| w  | v  | Wasser (water) | vase |

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**GLOTTAL STOP (GENTLE RE-ARTICULATION):**

Between words: **am / Abend** (in the evening)

Within a word: **un/ausgeglichen** (unbalanced)

**INFLECTION (STRESSING UNDERLINED SYLLABLES):**

**und kommen mit Freuden** (and come with joy)

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**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 Work

JOHANNES BRAHMS – EIN DEUTSCHES REQUIEM

MOVEMENT I

CD TRACK 17

ze: ç  zi  t  i:  a:  aet  t  a:
Selig sind, die da Leid tragen,
Blessed are, who (ever) suffering bear

vi:  ë  z  i:  zΩ  ø:  v  e:
denn sie sollen getrostet werden.
for they shall comforted be

i:  I  ë  zÈ
Die mit Tränen säen,
They (who) with tears sow,

ve:  I  Ω  ë
werden mit Freuden ernten.
shall with joy reap.

Zi:  e:  I  Ut  v  æ
Sie gehen hin und weinen
They go forth and weep

Ut  a:  e:  Za:
und tragen edlen Samen,
and bear precious seed,

Ut  Ω  I  ë
und kommen mit Freuden
and come with joy

Ut  I  i:  a:
und bringen ihre Garben.
and bring their sheaves.

MOVEMENT II

CD TRACK 18

ε  æʃ  ë  l  v  a:
Denn alles Fleisch, es ist wie Gras
For all flesh, it is like grass

Ut  ë  ç  æ  ë  ë  æʃ
und alle Herrlichkeit des Menschen
and all glory of man

vi:  ë  z  s  u:
wie des Grases Blumen.
like the grass(es) flowers

a:  I  fÆ  Ω
Das Gras ist verdorret
the grass is withered

Ut  i:  u:  p
und die Blume abgefallen.
and the flower fallen off.

Zi:  æ  zæt  u:  I  ç  i:  y:
So seid nun geduldig, liebe Brüder,
So be now patient, dear brothers,

I  æ  a  i:  tsu:  ë  ë
bis auf die Zukunft des Herrn.
unto (on) the future of (the) Lord.

Zi:  æ  k  v
Siehe, ein Ackermann wartet
Behold, a husbandman waits

a  i:  œ  lç  Ux  e:  e:
auf die köstliche Frucht der Erde
for the decicious fruit (of) the earth

Ut  I  I  ë  ç  y:
und ist geduldig darüber,
and is patient about it,
MOVEMENT II
CD TRACK 18

I e: Ɛ a: e: Ɔ e:
bis er empfah den Morgenregen
until he receives the morning rain

Und Abendregen.
and evening rain.

So seid geduldig.
So be patient.

Aber des Herrn Wort bleibt in Ewigkeit.
But the Lords word remains in eternity.

Die Erlösten des Herrn werden wieder kommen
The redeemed (of) the Lord shall again come

Freude, ewige Freude
Joy, eternal joy

Freude und Wonne werden sie ergreifen,
Joy and bliss shall them possess

Und Schmerz und Seufzen wird weg müssen.
and pain and sighing will (go) away have to.

MOVEMENT III
CD TRACK 19

Herr, lehre doch mich,
Lord, teach but me,
daß ein Ende mit mir haben muß,
that an end with me have (it) must.

Und mein Leben ein Ziel hat,
and (that) my life an aim has,

Siehe, meine Tage sind einer Handbreit vor dir.
Behold, my days are a hand-breadth before you,

Ach, wie gar nichts sind alle Menschen,
Oh, like nothing are all people,

Sie gehen daher wie ein Schemen,
They walk along like a shadow.

Und machen ihnen viel vergebliche Unruhe;
and make each other much vain disquiet;
**MOBEMENT III**

zi: z U t vl l ü ve: E i: vl t
sie sammeln und wissen nicht wer es kriegen wird.
they gather and know not who it receive will.

u: E v E z ö l ü l ü o:
Nun Herr, wess soll ich mich trösten?
Now Lord, (with) what shall I myself console?

Ich hoffe auf dich.
I hope in thee.

Der Gerechten Seelen sind in Gottes Hand
The just souls are in God’s hand

Und keine Qual rühret sie an.
and no torment touches them.

**MOBEMENT IV**

i: i:p l ü z l t a e vo: U ŋ E ts e: a/Œt
Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen, Herr Zebaath!
How lovely are your dwellings, Lord (of) Sabaath!

a e ze: Œ ŋ U t ze: zl ü
Meine Seele verlangt uns und sehnet sich
My soul desires and longs (itself)

Ich hoffe auf dich.
I hope in thee.

Der Gerechten Seelen sind in Gottes Hand
The just souls are in God’s hand

Und keine Qual rühret sie an.
and no torment touches them.

Wohl denen, die in deinem Hause wohnen,
Blessing (to) them, who in your house dwell,

Die loben dich immerdar.
they praise you forever.
MOVEMENT V
CD TRACK 21

i: p u: ao lʃ aæ
Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit;
You have now sadness;
aber ich will euch wiedersiehen
but I shall you again see.
und euer Herz soll sich freuen
and your heart shall (itself) rejoice
und eure Freude soll niemand von euch nehmen.
and your joy shall nobody from you take.

MOVEMENT VI
CD TRACK 22

ɛ vi: a: i: aæ aæ ʃ
Denn wir haben hier keine bleibende Statt,
For we have here no lasting
sondern die zukünftige suchen wir.
but the future (one) seek we.
Siehe, ich sage euch ein Geheimnis:
Behold, I tell you a secret:

We will not all die,

we will but all changed be;
und dasselbige plötzlich, in einem Augenblick,
and that suddenly, in a blinking of an eye,
zu der Zeit der letzten Posaune.
At the time (of) the last trombone.

Denn es wird die Posaune schallen,
For it will the trombone sound,
und die Toten werden auferstehen unverweslich;
and the dead will rise again imperishable;
und wir werden verwandelt werden.
And we will changed be.
MOVEMENT VI

Then will fulfilled be

Dann wird erfüllt werden

Then will be fulfilled.

Then will be fulfilled be

the word, which written stands:

das Wort, das geschrieben steht:

the word, which written stands:

Der Tod ist verschlungen in den Sieg.

(The) death is entangled in the victory.

Tod, wo ist dein Stachel?

Death, where is your sting?

Hölle, wo ist dein Sieg?

Hell, where is your victory?

Herr, du bist würdig

Lord, you are worthy

tsu: e: aës U t e: U t zu nehmen Preis und Ehre und Kraft, to receive praise and honour and power,

denn du hast alle Dinge geschaffen, for you have all things created,

und durch deinen Willen haben sie das Wesen

and through your will have they their being

und sind geschaffen.

and are created.

MOVEMENT VII

Blessed are the dead

Selig sind die Toten

Blessed are the dead

die in dem Herrn sterben,

who in the lord die.

die in dem Herrn sterben,

who in the lord die.

From now on.

Ja, der Geist spricht,

Yes, the Spirit speaks,

daß sie ruhen von ihrer Arbeit;

that they rest from their labour;

daß sie ruhen von ihrer Arbeit;

that they rest from their labour;

denn ihre Werke folgen ihnen nach.

for their works follow them (after).
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
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