



## What Piano Skills Do Singers Need?

By: Brenda Earle Stokes

I have been fortunate to teach hundreds of singers how to play piano. So many piano lessons and courses for singers are ineffective, because they don't really pinpoint exactly what a singer needs to do at the keyboard. Instead, so much time is wasted on method books and exercises that don't really serve the needs of singers. Here is my list of the exact skills every singer needs to have at the piano.

**All singers** should be able to:

- Play voice exercises in 12 keys hands separately
- Play major and minor triads in 12 keys hands separately
- Play melodies in the right hand with decent fingerings
- Create simple accompaniments using chords ("faking").

This basic skill set will enable a singer to practice on their own, accompany themselves, teach voice lessons, work as a section leader of a chorus, direct a community chorus and lead a singalong with children or adults.

Here is a list that targets the needed piano skills of singers in different fields.

**Pop singers** should be able to:

- Play seventh chords and sus chords in 12 keys
- Create simple accompaniments that include a bass line in the left hand
- Play different rhythmic grooves in good time

**Jazz singers** should be able to:

- Play seventh chords in 12 keys
- Play from a lead sheet
- Walk a bass line in the left hand, while comping rhythms in the right hand
- Play jazz chord voicings
- Play a Bossa Nova and other Latin grooves



**Music Theatre** singers should be able to:

- Play voice exercises in 12 keys hands separately
- Play major and minor triads in 12 keys hands separately
- Play melodies in the right hand, while playing bass notes or chords in the left hand
- Fake accompaniments in a variety of styles

**Classical singers** should be able to:

- Play melodies in the right hand with correct articulation
- Do simple chord analysis of scores, jotting in chord symbols
- Play classical style accompaniments like Alberti bass and rolled adagio styles
- Play at least 2 parts at a time of SATB choral music

**Choral Conductors** should be able to:

- Play 2, 3 and 4 parts at a time of SATB choral music
- Play a wide range of accompaniments for vocal warm-ups
- Conduct from the piano, while playing excerpts of the score

**General Music Teachers** should be able to:

- Play simple accompaniments and sing at the same time
- Play accompaniments for vocal warm-ups
- Play interpretive music for movement and interpretation

**Early Childhood Music Teachers** and **Music Therapists** should be able to:

- Lead a singalong while creating simple accompaniments on the piano
- Play and sing without looking at the keyboard (looking at student's faces instead)
- Improvise different moods of music for movement and interpretation

**How are your piano skills?** If you are looking to develop your piano training, check out my online courses at [www.pianoandvoicewithbrenda.teachable.com](http://www.pianoandvoicewithbrenda.teachable.com)