

Vocal Heraldry Overview

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Vocal or voice heraldry is the art of passing information to the populace via cries, shouts and projection. Vocal heralds have many areas they can participate in. Among the vocal heraldry activities are the focuses of:

- A. Event heraldry (making general announcements)
- B. Field heraldry (calling competitors to the list field(s), announcing round match-ups, etc.)
- C. Feast heraldry (announcing courses, introducing entertainment, etc.)
- D. Court heraldry (acting as the Voice of Royalty, calling people into court, reading awards, etc.)

Getting started in Vocal Heraldry

If you are interested in getting started in voice heraldry, once you get to an event ask for the vocal herald in charge. Inform them that you are new, but interested and would like to team up with a more experienced herald to learn. They should be able to pair you up with someone to act as a "mentor" or "teacher." It is suggested that you have 3x5 cards at the ready to write down any information you might not remember. This is a necessary teaching device. Do not be embarrassed to use it. Even experienced and senior heralds will have such cards ready, just in case. Watch closely what the experienced herald does and feel free to ask questions. When it finally comes your turn to try, ask the experienced herald to stand close by and afterwards to offer advice on what you can do to improve. You'll discover that learning this aspect of heraldry is easy and fun, and that soon you'll be off on your own, providing a valuable service to the SCA.

General Advice

These tips refer to doing any kind of vocal heraldry.

1. Projection

To be a good vocal herald the primary requirement is the ability to be heard, understood, and maintain your voice over long periods of heralding. To accomplish this you need to be able to project the way actors and singers do.

A main factor in good projection is posture. By standing straight, with your stomach in and head up, you allow your diaphragm to do most of the work. The diaphragm is composed of a wall of muscles under your lungs. As with any muscle group, exercise (practice) tones the muscles. The only way to avoid abusing your larynx is by using your diaphragm to push the air from the bottom of your lungs upward. Additionally you get the advantage of creating a resonating chamber with this method, which in turn helps your voice carry. The air flow through your vocal cords (actually the vocal folds - the long, narrow, rounded flaps of tissue in your larynx is what gives vocalization to your words). It is very important for a vocal herald to master breath control.

Another factor of projection is timbre or pitch. Timbre is created by the vocal folds. The rate of vibration of the folds is what causes different sounds and pitches. Shouting causes these muscles to tighten and strain. It is important while heralding to keep your voice in its normal range, using the regulation of air to produce the volume. Varying your pitch too much can seriously damage your voice. While it is true that lower timbres have more carrying power, individuals with higher pitched voices should not strain themselves to attain the lower tones. Difficulty in maintaining your normal pitch while projecting is a sure sign your vocal folds are getting tired.

Besides yourself, there are factors that can affect your projection. Primarily these are clothing and the environment. For good projection, it is very important that you are able to expand your diaphragm and lungs. Restrictive clothing such as snug Elizabethan tunics or tight Tudor bodices may look beautiful, but the confinement that it does to your body restricts your airflow. This in turn will result in projection that carries less.

The environment can also affect your projection. If you are in a building with good acoustics, then you can project well, with little effort. On the other hand, if you are doing heraldic crying outdoors, you have to deal with wind and terrain. To help you project better, try to stand on high ground and tilt your head a little higher. This will cause your voice to carry farther around you. Usually, you should direct your announcements to the largest group of people (avoiding turning your back on the Crown). If there is wind, try to keep it to your back and use it to help carry your words.

Work on developing your projection between events, by trying several projection exercises.

Exercises for Projection

a) Take a deep breath, pulling in your stomach to lift the diaphragm. Slowly let it out until you feel you have no air left in your lungs, still keeping your stomach tight. Repeat this several times. Now, do the same thing while saying vowel sounds. Say "ah," holding it as long as you can. Repeat using "ee," and then with "ai", then with "oh", and finally "oo." If you rest your fingers just under your ribcage you can feel your diaphragm muscles working. If you don't, you're doing it wrong.

b) Have someone stand two feet from you and speak in a normal voice. Then ask that person to step ten feet from you and project the same announcement to them. Next, ask them to move back forty feet and project the announcement to them there. This teaches control and helps you develop pronunciation skills as well.

c) Lie on your back. Pull in your stomach muscles and lift your diaphragm. Place a small glass of water on your stomach. Let your breath out slowly so as not to spill the water.

2. Articulation

A very important part of projection is articulation, the ability to pronounce words with clarity, intelligibility, and distinctiveness. It doesn't do any good to hear the sounds a herald makes if the words can't be understood. There are two basic approaches to articulation in the SCA, which are generally referred to as Precision speaking and Rhythmic Chant speaking.

Rhythmic Chanting speaking is a system used to create a melodic flow of words. The herald practically sings the announcements, rolling words together for musical effect. Such heralding is a joy to hear, but frequently difficult to understand.

Precision speaking reflects normal speech patterns, emphasizing clarity of pronunciation and accenting stressed syllables. This technique requires that you speak more slowly, making it easier for your audience to understand.

3. Pronunciation

As a vocal herald you will be called upon to pronounce names from a variety of linguistic origins. It is impossible for one herald to know all the different language patterns from which the members derive their personas. So while a herald should always try to pronounce names correctly, don't get upset if you do make a mistake. Everyone makes them. Simply apologize, go on, and try to get it right next time.

But beyond concerning themselves with having to pronounce a variety of names, vocal heralds have to concern themselves with being precise in their pronunciation of normal words as well. It does no good for the populace to hear the herald slur the announcement "Amorinaspectaquartaten." What the people need to hear is the herald say, "Armor inspection at a quarter to ten." To assist in this, it is recommended that vocal heralds do a few exercises before they make announcements.

Exercises for Pronunciation

- a) Warm up your throat and face muscles by pursing your lips hard, then quickly pulling them back into a tight-lipped grimace. Repeat this several times. (You should start to feel a slight tingle in your lips.) This warming exercise will help you pronounce words more clearly and correctly
- b) Another loosening exercise is to open your mouth as wide as you can, as if you are yawning. After you do this, bring your lips together as you thrust your jaw forward. Repeat a few times. Then move your lower jaw from left to right several times. (But be careful not to move too far to one side or the other. You can strain the muscles and ligaments if you do.)
- c) Next, stand up straight, and using good posture, breathe slowly and deeply and then vocalize the vowel sounds. They are all throat sounds and will help warm up those muscles. First "ah, ah, ah," then "eee, eee, eee," then "ai, ai, ai," then "oh, oh, oh," and finally "oo, oo, oo".
- d) Finally, to prepare for those front-of-the-mouth sounds, stand up straight, and using good posture, breathe slowly and deeply and then vocalize these sounds: "da, da, da," then "fa, fa, fa," then "la, la, la," then "ma, ma, ma," then "pa, pa, pa," then, "ra, ra, ra" and finally "ta, ta, ta."

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