

Those Who Wish To Sing Always Find a Song

When I began searching for singing syllables from around the world, I had no idea the task would prove to be so fascinating. For several months I carried on a correspondence with choral directors and linguists from around the world, who offered me singing syllables (*vocables*), guidance on pronunciation and usage, relevant books and articles, and their enthusiasm and encouragement. Some of these syllables are from very localized dialects, while others are from much wider regions. To my helpers everywhere, thank you so much! - E.A.

The pronunciations below are given in the International Phonetic Alphabet:

ɑ as in “lot” / ɛ as in “let” / I as in “lid” / i as in “leaf” / o as in “loaf” / u as in “loot”

- 1) su-de-rut-tan-tei [su-də-ru-tən-tei] (Sweden)
“tei” is pronounced as if it rhymes with the English word “day,” but with the vowel set slightly lower in the mouth, as in Australia’s “G’day mate.”
- 2) tyr-a-li, tyr-a-lo [tʲɪ-rə-li, tʲɪ-rə-lo] (Ireland)
- 3) ay dam tar-ra-dam [ɑi dɑm tɑ-rɑ-dɑm] (Russian Gypsy)
“ay” is pronounced like the English word “I”
- 4) ho-la-li, ho-la-ho [ho-lɑ-hi, ho-lɑ-ho] (Germany / Scandinavia)
- 5) fad-de-rul-lan-dei [fɑ-də-ru-lən-dei] (Norway)
“dei” is pronounced like the English word “day,” but with the vowel set slightly lower in the mouth. (See “su-de-rut-tan-tei”)
- 6) yang-a nang-a hey-o naa [yɑŋ-ə nɑŋ-ə he-ɔ nɑ] (Southwestern Native American)
“yang-a” and “nang-a” contain an “unpronounced g,” as in the English word “singer” (as opposed to the “pronounced g” in the English word “finger”)
“heyo” is pronounced as if it rhymes with the Latin word “Deo.”
- 7) la dé-ri don la [lɑ de-ri dɔ lɑ] (France)
- 8) ten-nen-ni, ten-nen-nen-ni [tɛ-nɛ-ni, tɛ-nɛ-nɛ-nɛ-ni] (Turkey)
“ten” is pronounced like the English word “ten.”
“ni” is pronounced like the English word “knee.”
- 9) tra-la-la-le-ru-la [trɑ-lɑ-lɑ-le-ru-lɑ] (Italy)