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Union of Wake Association
Springfield Baptist Church

Extending vocal range

An important goal of vocal development is to learn to sing to the natural limits of one's vocal range without any obvious or distracting changes of quality or technique. Vocal pedagogists teach that a singer can only achieve this goal when all of the physical processes involved in singing (such as laryngeal action, breath support, resonance adjustment, and articulatory movement) are effectively working together.

There are three factors that significantly affect the ability to sing higher or lower:

1. The *energy* factor – "energy" has several connotations. It refers to the total response of the body to the making of sound; to a dynamic relationship between the breathing-in muscles and the breathing-out muscles known as the breath support mechanism; to the amount of breath pressure delivered to the vocal folds and their resistance to that pressure; and to the dynamic level of the sound.
2. The *space* factor – "space" refers to the size of the inside of the mouth and the position of the palate and larynx. Generally speaking, a singer's mouth should be opened wider the higher he or she sings. The internal space or position of the soft palate and larynx can be widened by relaxing the throat. Vocal pedagogists describe this as feeling like the "beginning of a yawn".
3. The *depth* factor – "depth" has two connotations. It refers to the actual physical sensations of depth in the body and vocal mechanism, and to mental concepts of depth that are related to tone quality.

These three factors can be expressed in three basic rules: (1) As you sing higher, you must use more energy; as you sing lower, you must use less. (2) As you sing higher, you must use more space; as you sing lower, you must use less. (3) As you sing higher, you must use more depth; as you sing lower, you must use less.

Posture

The singing process functions best when certain physical conditions of the body are put in place. The ability to move air in and out of the body freely and to obtain the needed quantity of air can be seriously affected by the posture of the various parts of the breathing mechanism. A sunken chest position will limit the capacity of the lungs, and a tense abdominal wall will inhibit the downward travel of the diaphragm. Good posture allows the breathing mechanism to fulfill its basic function efficiently without any undue expenditure of energy.

Habitual good posture also ultimately improves the overall health of the body by enabling better blood circulation and preventing fatigue and stress on the body.

There are eight components of the ideal singing posture:

1. Feet slightly apart
2. Legs straight but knees slightly bent
3. Hips facing straight forward
4. Spine aligned
5. Abdomen flat
6. Chest comfortably forward
7. Shoulders down and back
8. Head facing straight forward

Breathing and breath support

Natural breathing has three stages: a breathing-in period, a breathing out period, and a resting or recovery period; these stages are not usually consciously controlled. Within singing there are four stages of breathing: a breathing-in period (inhalation); a setting up controls period (suspension); a controlled exhalation period (phonation); and a recovery period.

These stages must be under conscious control by the singer until they become conditioned reflexes. Many singers abandon conscious controls before their reflexes are fully conditioned

PHYSICAL EXERCISES

Reach for the sky stretching exercise

Imagine you are reaching for something: a jar high up on a shelf; a golden ball of incredible value that keeps moving just out of reach; a magic apple. Stretch each side of your body (loosening the rib cage) by using each arm in turn.

You are now climbing hand over hand up a rope ladder. Maybe you trying to escape from the bad guys. To make sure the stretch is full and extended, hang on to the rung you're on and look down to see if the bad guys are still following, then reach up for the next rung. (this flexes the neck and releases tension)

Extend the stretch horizontally by reaching out to a partner (you're on the polar ice cap and a crack has appeared. You begin to float away from each other and try to reach out to pull them onto your piece of ice). Add a sustained "A" vowel sound across the space to your partner. The more you reach out, the longer you sustain your note.

Get those hips working!!

This hip wiggling exercises is to make a smooth, large circle with the hips. Many people feel a little self-conscious when they first do so start with a joke around this and point out that it will make them better salsa dancers.

To help people engage with their hips, start with the idea that you're in a tight huddle (football crowd) and you need to bump the people either side of you because they're getting a little too close. That deals with the side to side hip motion. Now imagine that your pelvis is a big bowl of spaghetti and if you tilt it forward (which will mean their bum will stick out) the spaghetti will all slip out onto the floor, whereas if they tilt it back up (so their belly button will push forward), they will keep it in. That will help people find the front and back positions of their pelvis.

Slowly hit all these points that we've found with your hips: right side, front, left side, back and gradually make it smoother and larger. Use imagery like stirring soup. Make sure your knees are bent. Point out that the torso

doesn't need to move. the best salsa dancers have a completely still upper body.

Add arms by spinning a record with your hand or stir soup in the opposite direction to your hips at the same time.

Add voice by adding a low "O" vowel sound as if it's coming from the bowels of the earth. Slowly raise the pitch while keeping the sound rooted in the belly. Pass the sound between pairs of people as a call and response.

Buzz those lips!

Gentle humming on a fairly low note is a common way to begin to engage the voice. Focus on trying to get your lips to buzz/vibrate/itch so that the sound is forward and not stuck in the throat. Extend this by gently sliding down to your lowest note until all your breath is gone.

Up scale, down scale

A simple vocalise on 'la'. Short, staccato on the way up, smooth legato on the way down:

