

Introduction

Congratulations

- You have chosen to 'sacrifice' six of your precious {DAY} evenings to join our Singing Course and we think you should be applauded for that.
- Singers are happy people, they live longer, they are healthier and they make friends easier. (Disclaimer: The evidence for these things is all anecdotal and not supported, as far as we know, by scientific research. Anyway, if any of them are not true, we think they ought to be!)
- For this week and for the next five weeks, you will warm up, learn vocal craft and sing with {CHORUS NAME} and that ought to be worth a few bob.

How it will work

- {CHORUS NAME} normally rehearse here on a {DAY} night from {TIME} to {TIME}.. For the next six weeks, though, the first hour and a half of that time will be devoted to our singing course. At {TIME}, or thereabouts, the course will finish and {CHORUS NAME} will continue until {TIME} with their normal rehearsal schedule. You are free to leave but, if you'd like to stay and listen to the chorus rehearse, you are more than welcome. We love singing to an audience.
- Over the period of the course we will be learning a song. The only people who already know this song are the four section leaders and the Musical Director. Everyone else is starting from scratch! We will use this song to put our knowledge into practice and we will sing it as part of a mini-concert, on the final evening of the course.
- On the first week, you will be given a quick voice test. This is not to see if you are any good! It is only to determine your natural range. We don't want to damage anyone's voice by putting her in the wrong place.
- Each week will follow a similar pattern as follows.
 - A physical warm up. We do this just to shed the cares of the day and to loosen up a bit.
 - A vocal warm up. Just as athletes do some exercises before getting serious, the voice needs coaxing into action.
 - A craft session. Each week we will address a different aspect of singing and do some exercises so that we can feel what happens and understand the need for it. There is a handout for each week and these are attached.
 - A section rehearsal. We split into the four voice parts and spend 15-20 minutes learning notes to a section of the new song.
 - On the risers. Everyone back together again where we put the song together and try out some of our craft.
 - Coffee and end of session.
- On the final week, you are asked and encouraged to bring friends and family along to witness the results of your hard work. We will do a slightly shortened class and then stage a mini-concert where {CHORUS NAME} will sing a few songs and then ask you to join us on the risers to perform the new song that you have learned.

And afterwards

What you do with your new found skills is, of course, up to you. We just hope that you enjoy our course and that you don't let the time you spent with us go to waste. Find somewhere to express yourself in song and don't forget where we are should you want to come back. If you like what you hear and are thinking about joining {CHORUS NAME}, just ask any chorus member what to do.

Week 1: Some Basics**What's important in singing?****Support**

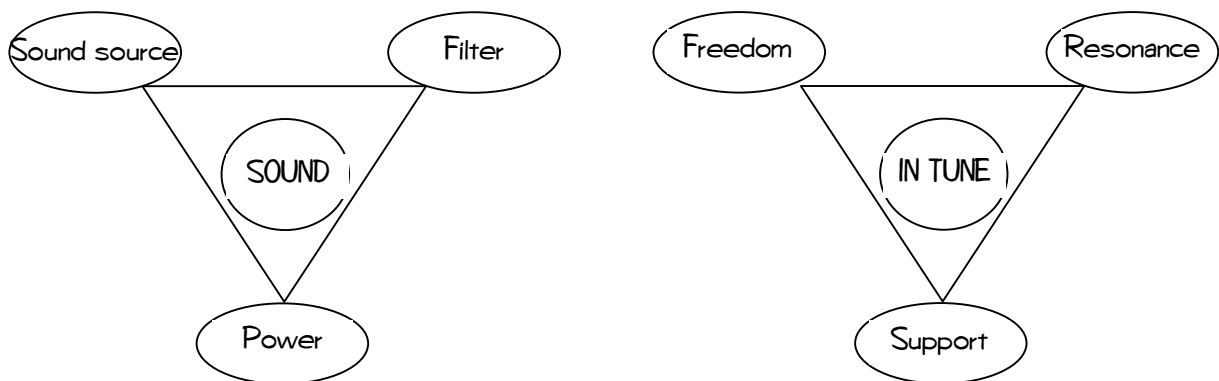
Beautiful singing requires **POWER** and this is provided by air. An inhalation fills the lungs with air and then it is up to you to make sure that this air is delivered to the vocal cords in a continuous and controlled fashion until the next inhalation. This requires good posture and muscular effort.

Freedom

Beautiful singing requires a **SOUND SOURCE**. This is the vocal folds which vibrate when air passes between them. They need the freedom to do this without interference from unnecessary tension or constriction of the passages.

Resonance

Beautiful singing requires that the sound produced by the vocal cords be **FILTERED** (modified, enhanced and magnified) by the chambers in the body, mostly in the throat, mouth and behind the eyes and nose. The size and shape of these will determine how beautiful the sound is and how well it carries to the listener.

**Find your vocal folds**

- **Uh oh** - clap hands on each sound → feel a glottal stop in the throat.
- Go to make the sound again but stop. Notice you are stopping the breath. Can you feel the stop? Where is it? In the larynx! You are holding the breath behind the vocal folds.
- Now release the stop. What do you notice? You will probably hear a little pop. This is the sound of the glottis, the space between the two vocal folds opening and letting the air out.

Finding your soft palate

This is really important because it can filter the sound, sending it out through the nose or through the mouth or both together. It plays an important role in the quality of resonance.

- Breathe in and out through the nose.
- Sing 'sing' hold the ng. What do you feel? Where is the tongue? It's probably raised at the back and touching something at the back of the mouth...that's the soft palate.
- Whilst singing the ng sound, pinch the nose. What happens? The sound stops! That indicates that the soft palate is lowered and all the air is leaving through the nose.

Week 2: Posture and Breathing

Singing is a whole-body exercise, every part of you is involved.

Singer's posture

- Feet slightly apart, knees relaxed (not locked), shoulders relaxed but back (do the shoulder lift see where they go naturally when you release them).
- Rock slightly side to side and forward and backwards. Feel the weight being transferred from foot to foot and from heel to toe. Find the central position where the weight is evenly distributed. That's the one.
- Try standing with your back against a wall: heels, bottom, shoulder blades, and head all touching the wall. Notice your posture. That's it!
- Stand proud and tall, imagine you are puppet with a string coming out the top of your head from the crown of your hair - see how the tube gets longer!
- Sing with the knees freed, then locked. Notice the tension added to the sound. Free them again, and keep it that way

Breathing in (The recoil breath)

- Put one hand over your belly button
- Without breathing in first - breathe out sharply on pshhh → use the hand to send the abdomen right back towards the back bone.
- Notice that if you wait and allow your abdominal wall to relax at the end of the sound, the abdomen will bounce outwards and you will have breathed in.
- Keep the shoulders relaxed and down.
- Make sure the throat is open to allow the air in → try to take the breath as silently as possible.

Practice breathing in

Make the following sounds. Group the sounds into twos, fours etc. and breathe between each group.

- sh - sh sh - sh- sh- sh
- f → f f- f- f- f
- s → s s-s-s-s

Get the voice involved

Repeat the exercise above but using these sounds.

- vv → vv v → v → v- v
- zz → zz zz → zz → zz - zz
- je → je je → je → je → je (soft j as in French je)

Connecting breath and voice

Produce an energetic sound on each of the following with a recoil breath between each one.

- Hey hey (breathe) Ha ha (breathe) Ho ho (breathe) Yeah yeah (repeat)

Controlling the air flow

Hands just below your rib cage, thumbs to the rear and cough. The muscles at either side push out.

One hand just below the breast bone and one just above the pubic arch. Cough again.

vv vv - hey hey → remember to keep the sensation of sending the abdomen inwards like in the first exercise. You need to do this to create air flow. The navel moves inwards, the waist band moves sideways.

Week 3: Vocal Freedom

What is it?

This one simple idea can transform your singing!

The voice will sound free if there is a clear, open space above the vocal folds.

Unfortunately the space just above the vocal folds has a tendency to close and constrict unless we actively work to keep it open. It's a natural response of the body to protect the lungs.

In singing, constriction occurs at difficult bits in the song:

- High/low notes
- fast notes
- at the end of the breath
- loud or long notes
- in performance – when we are nervous
- Most of the time, in fact!

Feeling constriction (lack of freedom)

- Try this... Place both hands under the chair and try to lift you and the chair off the ground. What do you feel? This is complete constriction.
- Now make a whispered hissing sound in the larynx. (Remember the Exorcist!) Notice what's happening? Notice the closure of your throat and the air pushing up from your abdomen.

Producing freedom - the silent laugh

- Silent laugh – think of something that makes you smile hold the feeling of the inner smile. What do you notice? (A sense of widening in the throat perhaps).
- Let this develop into a chuckle
- Silent - feel the sensation and monitor the effort you put into it
- Now breathe in and out/chew – keep the jaw relaxed/check posture/walk about/silent breathing

Singing with and without freedom

- Sing ahhh, and whilst singing, deliberately add constriction then take it away
- Still singing, use the silent laugh to remove the constriction
- Sing 3 notes of a scale up and down on ahhh, with and without the silent laugh
- Do this high and low in the range – you have to laugh harder.

How to monitor if you are breathing with constriction

- Put your fingers in or your hands over your ears to block the sound
- Breathe in and out. Do you here the sound of your breathing?
- If you do, try to open the throat more until you hear nothing.

How to monitor if you are singing with constriction?

- Monitor yourself every time you breath in the course of a song.
- If you hear noisy breathing – you are constricted.
- If you breathe with constriction, you will sing with constriction.
- At each breath-point in the song, instead of taking a breath, have a silent laugh. You will find the air has gone in anyway!

Week 4: Support

Revision

Good posture is essential.

- Feet slightly apart, knees relaxed (not locked), shoulders relaxed but back (do the shoulder lift see where they go naturally when you release them).
- Rock slightly side to side and forward and backwards. Feel the weight being transferred from foot to foot and from heel to toe. Find the central position where the weight is evenly distributed.
- Stand tall and proud.
- Unlock the knees

Anchoring - the voice body connection

A supported sound is firm, in control, and not wavering involuntarily in pitch or volume. Anchoring involves muscular effort, but must never make the voice sound forced, muscular, or effortful. We can choose to use anchoring techniques to add control to the voice during quiet passages or when we want to sing with volume and energy.

The idea is to create firm scaffolding around the vocal instrument, so you can control the voice, while the voice itself remains free.

Torso anchoring

- Imagine planting ski-poles in the ground which are then stuck. Attempting to pull them up will engage the muscles of the back.
- Stand opposite a partner holding both wrists. With arms bent at the elbow pull against each other. Don't lean back - feel the muscles of the back engaging.
- Imagine squeezing oranges under your armpits.
- Turn the arms in their sockets keeping them close to you

Internal anchoring

- Flaring nostrils – imagine the smell of something you really like
- Bite a toffee apple, your teeth stick. Pull them out of the apple with the upper jaw, while relaxing the lower jaw.

External anchoring

- Do the head pat! Push down a little with your hand on the crown of your head and push up a little with your head
- Imagine you are putting on a swimming cap!

Vitally Important Note:

Notice that every time you engage muscles to anchor the voice, there is a tendency for constriction to creep back in. You need to use the silent laugh each time to combat this, actively.

There is a constant balance to strike between the muscles which need to work to support the voice, and adding undesirable tension into the vocal quality.

If you find you can't make a free sound while using muscles in the head and neck, then just relax everything above the chest, until you master head and neck anchoring.

Week 5: Resonance

What is resonance?

It's when the tone is produced freely and easily, and has fullness, richness and carrying power.

The secret to resonance is to experiment with your own voice. Play with the sounds you can make, recognise resonance and develop it. When you sing with resonance the sound is richer and bigger with no more effort or airflow. It's not the same as singing louder by increasing the air pressure.

The soft palate

- Revisit Week 1 to remind yourself about the soft palate and how to find it.
- The idea is to create space in the back of the mouth. Think about the sound lifting up and over the roof of the mouth and hitting the front teeth! Don't worry about getting the sound out. If you create the right sound inside the mouth it will get out all by itself!
- Keep the jaw and tongue relaxed; tongue touching the lower gum ridge. Don't open the jaw too wide.
- Keeping the soft palate high, along with good posture in head and neck, is essential to establishing a resonant tone, free from nasality.

The resonant breath! (Fat Ah's)

In this exercise, you imagine the breath is going into the head, not the lungs. First, feel the cool air coating your teeth, next filling your cheek bones, then feel it flooding to the top and back of your head. Feel how the sound rings when you have all that air in you head!

- Sing first of all: ah
 - Now sing: **Ah**
 - Finally try: **AH**
- Silly... but it works.

Bite the apple

- If you imagine taking a bite of an apple, then sing, this can produce a nice bright resonant tone. Notice how the sound is aimed at the back of the front teeth and the top lip flared.

Hot potato

- Imagine a hot potato at the back of your mouth. Notice how much space this is creating. The soft palate is nice and high. The larynx is lower, which will create a darker sound.

Finding low resonances

- Sing with a deep sobbing quality
- Say holey-moley.
- Sing like Paul Robeson, i.e. with a bass operatic quality
- Cry – oh dear

Finding high resonances

- Cackle like a happy witch
- Nyah, nyah ny, nyah nyah (real meannies)
- Quack like a nasty duck, baa like a lamb
- Bubble...nnn...Have...Ah, Ee, Oh, etc (aside: use this to transfer bright ringy sound from one vowel to another)

Week 6: Vowels and Articulation

Sound and meaning

In general, vowels carry the sound. We attempt to elongate our vowels to achieve a smooth delivery. Vowels alone though are meaningless. Try singing a phrase on the vowels alone, missing out all the consonants! Difficult, yes! Meaningless, yes!

Many consonants will interrupt this smooth delivery (think about t, d, f, s and lots of others) but, nonetheless, they are essential to good diction, to the comprehension of the words but, even more important, to what the underlying meaning is.

Find the right jaw space

- Put your fingers on the hinge of the jaw – open the mouth slowly notice what happens – put your thumbs underneath the jaw notice what happens. You should feel tension as other muscles come into play. (We don't want this!)
- Reset the jaw now do it again – open the mouth just enough to let the jaw 'hang'. (This is the position we want, and no wider!)

Pure vowels

- Think tall. Keep the tongue against the lowers gum ridge and the lips off the front teeth
- Open the mouth enough to let the sound come out but not too much so as to add tension to the external muscles (Resonance is inside - you cannot push the sound out)
- The most practiced singing vowels are EE, EH, AH, AW and OO. They are larger in vocal shape, more resonant and fuller in volume than other vowels.
- We can also add in UH (as in "love"), IH (as in "this"), and AA (as in "cat"). These are not as round and resonant as the first group of vowels.

Diphthongs

Some vowels are not pure; you seem to have to change them at some point to make them work.

- Try singing i (bite), ow (foul) and o (foal).

The secret of success is to think the vowel through to the very end and make the adjustment at the very end. Do not change too soon or you will be making a different sound to everyone else

Consonants

- Some consonants can be softened like the 't' in little.
- Some consonants are singable – like m, n, ng, l. The help to connect one vowel to another and help the music to flow.
- Say, very slowly, the phrase "I'm dreaming of a White Christmas". Notice which consonants are singable (and help you join one vowel to the next) and which are not. You may need to 'chew' the phrase to get the point.
- Now, try singing the same phrase, with good vocal technique. Use the singable consonants to join the words together and try to soften the non-singable ones.

Just remember

- None of us are 'stuck' with our voice. We can all do better. We can sing beautiful or we can sing ugly. It's our choice
- Good singing is good singing, whatever style you choose to sing.
- When you do sing, do it with well-supported, freely produced and resonant sound.