

SINGING

Tips on warming up and voice development

The central element of any good singing technique (and in fact a good technique on any instrument) is relaxation. Relaxation allows the body to operate freely without stresses and strains. The most common tensions which restrict singing are:

tension in the abdomen and chest which restrict breathing, tension in the throat which leads to soreness
tension in the tongue or jaw which leads to a strangled or distorted sound.

This relaxed and natural approach to singing is now commonly accepted practice by people from both classical and folk or popular tradition. The aim is to allow your natural voice to come through without any sense of pushing or straining. It may be necessary to go through a time of being very aware of aspects of your breathing or posture while you move away from ingrained habits which are restricting your singing, but in the long term you should be able to sing naturally without any conscious thought about breathing or posture.

All the exercises below should be taken gently, within the limits of your body. If it hurts, or feels like it's straining DON'T DO IT!

Exercise 1

Principle and purpose - natural relaxation.

What to do - stretch your arms up, while breathing in, and yawn, letting the yawn turn naturally into a sigh and letting your arms and head drop down to a totally relaxed position as the last of your breath goes out. This exercise can be extended and varied in all sorts of ways to help relaxation, such as gently rolling the shoulders, shaking legs or arms, massaging your neighbour's back or just having a good laugh. Laughter is a highly effective aid to relaxation.

Exercise 2

Principle and purpose - creating some sung notes in a relaxed way. As you develop this exercise you should find in sighing downwards, that you hit areas of your voice where you can produce a strong sound without any effort. It is worth trying out these areas and developing them.

What to do - As Exercise 1 but allow the sigh to become a long note, any note that you hit on the way down and like. When your breath runs out, finish with a sigh and slump into a totally relaxed position, checking that you don't have any shoulder tension.

Exercise 3

Principles and purpose - Breathing fully, right down into the lower part of your lungs. Lungs move outwards as they fill with air, in all directions.

What to do - Place your hands on your tummy with your fingers slightly apart and overlapping and breath in so that you can see your tummy pushing your two hands away from one another.

Exercise 4

Principle and purpose - Making sure that there is no unnecessary tension in the throat. Learning what it feels like when your throat is open and relaxed. Throat tension is the most common cause of sore throats from singing. In the long run it can cause serious damage. I have found that I can continue singing fairly well even when I have a cold, if I avoid throat tension. The same rule applies - if it hurts, it probably isn't doing any good, so stop.

What to do - Yawn, this is a natural stretching exercise for your throat. At the end of the yawn the throat should feel relaxed and open. Try sudden intake of breath as if pleasantly surprised by something. This should also create the feeling of an open and relaxed throat.

Exercise 5

Principle and purpose - Physically pushing the sound out creates tension and a forced tone. The aim of good singing should be to allow the sound out naturally with the minimum of constriction from the body. Power and volume is created largely by resonance within the body, that is allowing the sound to vibrate throughout every part of the body. Humming allows us to develop the resonance without worrying about pushing the sound out.

What to do - Breath in and hum, gently touch various parts of your body - top of the head, nose, cheeks, lips, jaw, shoulders, chest, etc., to see how much vibration the humming is creating. The more relaxed you are the freer the vibration will be. Now you can breath again - start with a hum and just gently allow your mouth to open so that the sound comes out. Don't force or push. It should be possible to create a relaxed and fairly strong sound, but allow this to develop naturally and gradually.

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