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Eclipse Choir Vocal Workshop!

Basic Vocal Technique Overview

Posture

Why is posture important?

Posture is important because it affects everything else in singing: the position of the larynx, the breathing mechanism, supporting muscles. Your body is your instrument!

- Feet flat on floor, in line with hips and shoulders, equal weight on both feet (don't sit on one hip!).
- Weight of body slightly more on the balls of your feet rather than the heels. This may feel weird to begin with, but is actually where your centre of gravity is.
- Knees not locked, thighs not tensed.
- Hands by your sides, waist long, neck long. Make sure your head isn't overly lifted and so straining the neck, but keep your chin down.
- Shoulders back and down, chest lifted. Feel like there is a beam of light coming from your chest.
- Relax! Good posture makes you feel tall, and good about yourself. At first it may uncomfortable but that is only because your muscles take time to get used to being used in this way.

Breathing:

Why is breathing so important?

Good breathing is vital to singing because it is the air which gets pushed through the vocal chords which makes the vibration (sound wave) that is your voice.

Intercostal-diaphragmatic breathing.

Breathing is a natural process which is used to a higher level of activity for singing. Breathing for singing is different to breathing normally because inspiration for singing is short and rapid whilst breathing out is prolonged and controlled.

Quiet respiration is controlled by the diaphragm moving down and out for breathing in and moving up again for expiration. Because the diaphragm is attached to the lungs, when it moves down and out, it pulls open the lungs. therefore increasing the capacity of the lungs, creating a vacuum. When the lungs are expanded i.e. the space inside the chest cavity is increased, the air pressure inside the chest is lower than the atmospheric pressure outside the body, creating a vacuum. Air rushes in to fill the vacuum and the lungs are filled.

Due to the greater level of control needed in singing, we need to use something more to work with the diaphragm. We use the intercostal muscles in between the ribs to raise and expand the ribs. Because the ribs are also attached to the lungs by a double ply bag called the *pleura*, expanding the ribs would also increase the space inside the chest cavity, creating a vacuum that needs to be filled with air.

The diaphragm works as normal in this process and requires no extra thought.

Therefore, it is more important to think about the muscular action of expanding the ribs, using the intercostal muscles, rather than thinking about taking a big breath! In fact, it is only necessary to take in a small amount of air to produce a good sound and last through a phrase when you have good technique. If you habitually take in too much air, you will eventually weaken your throat, larynx and breathing mechanism.

Abdominal support:

Why is abdominal support important?

Your abdominal muscles provide strength, volume and control to your voice and take the strain off your vocal cords.

When the ribs are fully expanded, the stomach muscles are naturally pulled up to fill the space created. Pull up the deep abdominal muscles even more to support the voice. These are the muscles around your belt - the low ones, not the ones you use for sit-ups. The main abdominal muscles we use in singing are called the *rectus abdominis* and the *transversus abdominis*. The transverse abdominal muscles go across the front of the body and round the back and help to keep the ribs open at the back.

Using the supporting muscles with the intercostals, will help you to control the sound you make, increase your range, make high notes easier and help you to sing safely. Correct use will mean that you won't have to push your voice to produce a loud sound. This takes a lot of practice though, so don't be discouraged if you can't do everything you want to at first and if you produce different sounds to normal.

Definition of Singing

The lungs supply the air acting as a bellows, the larynx acts as a reed, the resonating spaces - the head and chest - have the function of an amplifier. The shape of the inside mouth determine the vowel sound and the lips, teeth and tongue articulate consonants onto those amplified vowel sounds. The pitch is altered with the vocal cords, which loosen, tighten and change in thickness.

The sound of each individual's singing voice is determined by the size and shape of the vocal cords and that person's body. The tone and volume of voice is also determined by the shape of the mouth, position of the tongue and posture/tightness of standing muscles

Benefits of Singing (from Wikipedia)

Positive effects on people's health: increased lung capacity, improved mood, stress reduction, as well as perceived social and spiritual benefits (from a survey of students participating in choral singing). Singing may positively influence the immune system through the reduction of stress. One study found that both singing and listening to choral music reduces the level of stress hormones and increases immune function. One study found singing to babies reduces crying episodes, positively affecting the immune system because of increased energy levels.

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