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Eclipse Choir Vocal Workshop!

Intermediate Vocal Technique

Registers and the vocal cords

Registers originate in laryngeal function. They occur because the vocal folds are capable of producing several different vibratory patterns. Each of these vibratory patterns appears within a particular range of pitches and produces certain characteristic sounds.

There are three registers in the voice (excluding *falsetto* and *flute voice*): lower, middle and upper, sometimes referred to as chest, middle and head. It is necessary for singers to blend these three registers together to prevent damage to the vocal cords. In an untrained voice, it is easy to notice points where the vocal quality changes in a scale, becoming quieter and more breathy, or uncontrollably loud and brash. The lower register can be pushed further upwards in the hope of keeping the volume at the same level. In some voices, this will mean that the middle register does not develop sufficiently and any high notes the singer can reach have a completely different, lighter quality and spread sound rather than a focused sound.

Achieving a blend in the registers will, in most cases, require work on the upper register to build its strength and to bring it lower into the middle register. Work on descending scales on forward vowels, especially 'ee' and 'oo', and forward consonants e.g. m, n, p, s. In serious cases of breaks in the voice, this will take a complete re-training and can be very frustrating, especially when the singer already performs. It is best to take time out and re-learn a new vocal technique to prevent further damage. Taking the high register lower than its normal range is much safer than the strain caused by taking the lower register higher than its normal range.

When producing sounds in the **lower register**, the vocal cords vibrate in their full length and thickness. Sensations in the chest and throat area are common, hence the name *chest voice*. Low notes are the most difficult to make in a healthy way and need the most support. For an analogy, think of a double bass. Its notes take more energy and effort to make than that of a violin and are still harder to distinguish. Be careful not to force your voice when singing low. If your throat hurts when you have been singing low, you have either been producing the notes in an incorrect way, and perhaps you have a higher voice than you think you have (most people do!).

The **middle register** always needs the most work and is the best place to start when taking singing lessons. The outer part of the vocal cords cease to vibrate when singing here, while the inner edges vibrate in full length.

The inner edges of the cords only vibrate for part of their length when singing in the **upper register**, making high notes easier to support. Using the string instrument analogy again, the highest instrument of the string is the violin. Its strings are the shortest. Shortening the length of the string by placing a finger on the fingerboard produces a higher note, as does increasing the tension of the string. The top E string is much less thick than the bottom G string. If the strings on a violin were at a lower tension than they should be, producing a sound would be more difficult. The same applies to singing: cords at their thinnest and most tense, produce high notes with less effort;

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cords at their thickest and fattest make low sounds, taking the most effort. Most people find that they find high notes easier to reach when they have implemented the correct method of breathing. The **change in activity of the cords** is achieved through a gradual change in muscular activity and not a sudden action. *One must employ a sense of mental preparation to blend the registers sufficiently.*

Belting is a form of shout-singing that soul and r'n'b artists like Alicia Keys, Whitney Houston, Aretha Franklin use. It is when the singer takes his/her voice to the top of the middle register without going into the head register. Done correctly, this is a healthy way to sing, but can be tiring. Obtaining the strength in the belting registers is by lifting the cheeks to use the naso-pharynx. Concentrate on producing a sound like witches cackle - a lightly nasal sound but still keep your other resonators open.

The Three Resonating Areas are:

The Naso-Pharynx - the space behind the nose. This is where high notes are made. Lifting the cheeks will open out this space.

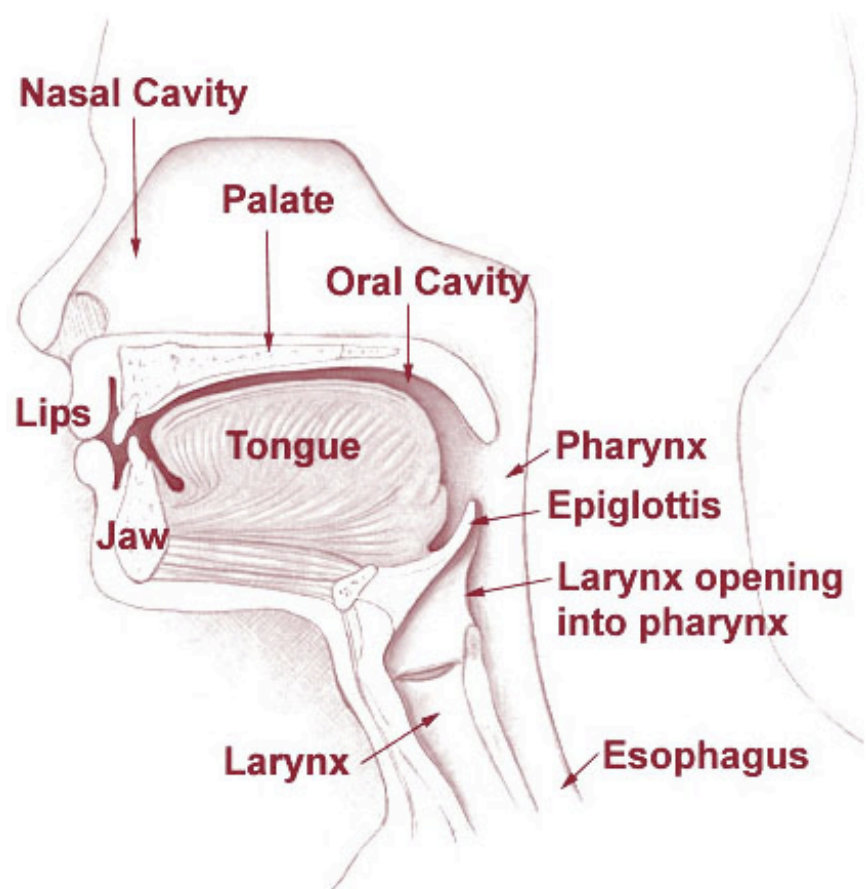
The Pharynx - the space at the back of the mouth. This is where notes in the middle register are most resonant. Think about yawning to lift the soft pallet, and (depending on the vowel) lower the tongue slightly to create more space.

The entrance of the voice box (larynx) - to sing with greater volume and a fuller sound in the low register, without pushing the voice, drop the jaw slightly and pull it slightly forward. Imagine you're a gospel singer!

Vowel Modifications

In the high register, certain vowels are harder to sing than others and all vowels need to be modified in some way for the production of a good, healthy sound. This modification also allows an easier entrance into the head voice, with head resonance i.e. a forward sound. Using Italian vowels - the purest vowel sounds that we use when exercising the voice: i (ee); e (ay/ey); a (ah); o (oh); u (oo, rounded).

- 'e' vowels at the top of the voice are modified by taking a more closed form of the vowel, e.g. a french sounding 'e' with an acute accent. It has more 'i' in it.
- 'a' vowels are easier to produce at the top when sung more like 'er'.
- 'o' vowels when sung like 'or', or a french closed 'o', help you obtain a good forward placing and head resonance.
- opening out the 'i' vowel when singing high is more comfortable.
- for 'u' vowels, put a hint of the 'o' vowel in it. Head resonance is easy to achieve with this vowel.



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