

VOICE LESSON #8

Integration: Putting It All Together

I) Vocal Coordination - By now you're well aware that all of the essential elements of singing are interdependent.

- Breath support is dependent on good posture and muscle tone.
- Developing excellent resonating ability is significantly dependent upon good breathing technique.
- Phonation and articulation skills are effective only when resonance and tone production are good.

Be Patient with Yourself: The process of combining these singing skills into a single, coordinated vocal technique will not be completed quickly. It may take many months, or even years, before you begin to feel secure in your total singing technique. You will undoubtedly develop further if you continue to work on your vocal technique. **However**, in the meantime, you can thoroughly enjoy singing, using your voice while it continues to develop. Keeping the body in gentle motion – not huge movements, but slight, smooth adjustments continuously to PREVENT tensions/rigidities – is an ideal way to avoid tension in all parts of the body. Keep it simple! Don't try to complicate singing – be natural!

Also remember, when we take our minds off of needing to sound good and hit the notes – i.e. the result – we can experience true magic. **And not only has it been proven to be exceptionally effective – it is also fun.**

II) Vocal Interference - Always remember the basic rules:

1. Tension, in any area of the body, takes away from control and always reveals itself in your singing tone.
2. Only *you* can control muscle tension, first by being aware that it exists.
3. Removing muscular interference (tension) involves learning to disengage certain muscles, rather than simply to engage others, usually achieved through conscious relaxation.
4. The most usual areas in which muscular interference can take place include:
 - a. the tongue
 - b. the muscles of the jaw and neck
 - c. and the abdominal muscles
5. Tension you feel in your throat is due in large part to tension in the jaw and the back of the tongue.

Tongue Tension

The tongue is surprisingly large and strong. Tongue tension can negatively affect the success of singing freely, resulting in:

- inconsistency of tone color among vowels
- pitch discrepancies
- the tongue being pulled too far backward and downward, which produces a covered or dark tone and vocal fatigue.

The following exercises may help free tension and allow the necessary tongue relaxation to take place:

Keep the tip of the tongue in its “resting place” – behind the lower teeth just touching the lower gum line. All movement for forming different vowels should come from the middle of the tongue, with the tip remaining in the “resting” place. The tip only comes up to form dental and sibilant consonants (d, t, s, z); otherwise it has no reason to leave its little “bed” behind the lower teeth.

Exercises:

1. Massage the underside of your chin with your thumbs....that’s your tongue!
2. On a single note, sing the alphabet, keeping the tip of your tongue in its “resting place.”
3. Rest the tip of your tongue on your lower lip. Consciously relax your jaw and tongue. Practice singing some vocal exercises or the notes of a song in this position using the "ah" or the "oh" vowel. Be aware of the extra space at the back of your mouth. Keep the same feeling as you sing normally.

Jaw and Neck Tension

Tension of the jaw and neck muscles can cause serious disturbances to tone production and undue vocal fatigue. Since so many people tend to carry tension in their necks and shoulders, extra attention should be given to relaxation exercises for these muscles.

Exercises:

1. Consciously open, release and relax your jaw. Concentrate on the sensations you feel when these muscles are relaxed. Memorize these sensations so you can recreate them at will.
2. Sing a simple five-note descending and ascending scale with a "slack jaw."
3. Chewing technique: Practice the motions of chewing in an exaggerated manner and then gradually add random sounds, words, phrases, sentences and conversation while slowly reducing the degree of exaggeration of the mouth movement. This exercise helps to release excess tension in the vocal tract and encourages mouth opening and reduction of tensions in the jaw.

Abdominal Muscles

When you inhale, remember to relax your abdominal muscles. Tense abdominal muscles are a very common result of nervousness. What happens is a vicious cycle: the tense muscles restrict breathing, resulting in inadequate breath for singing; this causes anxiety, which results in more tension; and so on.

The most effective way to avoid tension in the abdominal muscles is to take several deep breaths before beginning to sing and to develop a habit of consciously relaxing these muscles when inhaling.

III) Extending Pitch and Dynamic Ranges

As vocal skills develop, your range and dynamic capabilities will tend to increase naturally. Efficient breath management is the most important element for developing a larger range and extending your dynamic abilities.

Extending pitch range:

Remember: breath support must remain constant at all times and in all parts of your range.

Basic concepts in extending your pitch range are:

Upper Range:

- Add more air to the highest tones to help you to reach them.
- Think of a lighter more nasally resonant voice quality when you sing up high.
- Think of the notes going higher and out in front of you, instead of down and back in your throat.
- When you sing higher, add space, air and breath “energy.”
- Think of your neck as widening in order to keep your airway open, and to prevent your larynx from jamming up in your throat. (*See Lesson 2, Illustration #1*)

Lower Range:

- Efforts to force more and more air to reach the lowest tones will not succeed.
- Think of a richer, fuller sound when you sing low.
- As you sing low, be sure to keep your chin parallel to the floor.
- Think of the low notes going “up and out” instead of “down.”

Be aware that you will not be able to hear the timbre of your own tone accurately, and a teacher with a keen ear can be of great help.

Extending Dynamic Range:

In the early stages of dynamic range extension, practice in the most comfortable part of your pitch range, not in the high or low extremes. Be sure your breathing technique is adequate.

Dynamic Language:

pp =	Very Soft	pianissimo
p =	Soft	piano
mp =	Medium Soft	mezzo piano
mf =	Medium Loud	mezzo forte

f = Loud forte
ff = Very Loud fortissimo

Exercise 8.1

This simple exercise helps to increase your dynamic capabilities for both “louds” and “softs.”

Forte (loud): As you strive for greater volume, remember to use the best possible resonance and relaxation, not just breath power, to sing loudly. Work to achieve as much space and amplification as possible in your entire vocal range. Continue to as high a note as is comfortable. Begin with the "oh" vowel, then, repeat with other vowels.



“LOUD” REMINDERS:

- Singing loudly requires a combination of well-controlled breath energy and effective use of resonance.
- Imagine and feel a great deal of space in all of your resonators; a cathedral shape in the mouth and generous space in the back of the relaxed tongue.
- Maintain strong support from the abdominal and back muscles.
- Sense an open, relaxed throat.
- Think of a free, humming sensation in the nasal cavities.
- Never drive the voice - achieve your loudest singing through generous size of the tone, not by brute force. It's not how “loud” you sing; it's how you sing “loud!”

Piano (soft): Use the same exercise, but reverse the dynamics. The highest pitch of each scale is the softest note. Continue to as high a note as comfortable, then repeat with other vowels.

Exercise 8.2

Sing controlled and soft in this exercise. Each time it is repeated, cut your volume in half.



"SOFT" REMINDERS:

- Singing softly requires consistent breath management and relaxed tongue and jaw.
- Think of keeping the ribs expanded while singing the soft tones.
- Produce your softest tones by thinking about a light quality with a bright, forward focus.
- Imagine the sensation of a "hum" in the tone.

Exercises for Improving Vocal Coordination**Exercise 8.3**

The purpose of this exercise is to help eliminate muscular interference of the tongue. The jaw should be relaxed with very little or no movement. Your tongue should move freely forward and back. Continue to as high a note as comfortable, then repeat with other vowels and gradually increase tempo.

Ya ya

Exercise 8.4

This basic exercise will help extend your higher range. Remember to think of your tone production as high, light, and forward in the mask. Use all vowels, especially "ee" and "oo." Use a slight crescendo on the highest note of each scale. Continue to as high a note as comfortable:

Ee _____ Oo _____

Exercise 8.5

Use this exercise to extend your lower range. Remember to think of a fuller and relaxed approach as you descend in pitch, but never force your voice. Repeat by lower half steps, using all the vowels, to your lowest comfortable note.

Ee _____ oo _____ ee _____ oo _____ ee _____ oo _____ ee _____
Ee _____ eh _____ ah _____ oh _____ oo _____ oh _____ oo _____

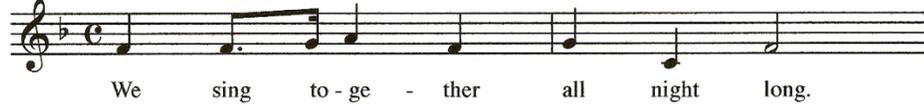
Exercise 8.6

The purpose of this exercise is to practice the smooth legato style. In spite of the intentionally awkward intervals in this exercise, make your moves from note to note accurate, smooth, graceful and connected. Continue ascending by half steps. Begin with "ee" vowel, then repeat with other vowels.

We Sing Together

(Can be sung as a round with more than one student)

PART 1



PART 2



PART 3



The Last Word - The Energized Vocal Line

Energy is an intangible quality - it's something we can sense and feel, but it is difficult to describe. The cantor must convey the words of our prayers in a way that touches hearts - no matter the type of prayer [Adoration (Worship), Petition, Intercession, Thanksgiving, and Praise], it must be conveyed with feeling and purpose (energy). A significant amount of that energy is derived from proper breath support, but a certain amount can also be attributed to a positive, confident mental attitude and to the quality of "life" imparted to the voice by a lifted facial countenance and singer's posture.

To convey the essence of the music to the listener, singers must:

1. Permit breath to be managed in such a way that the vocal line demonstrates vitality and life.
2. Put "heart" into your voice, using it artistically to convey sincere feeling for the message being conveyed. Remember, it is our task as cantor to lead the people in prayer. We must do what we can to make the theological riches of our liturgies touch the hearts of those we serve.