

# VOICE LESSON #1

## Posture: The Basis for All Good Singing

As mentioned earlier, the goal of these lessons is to teach you how to sing with a **freely produced, rich, open** and **resonant sound** - the kind of sound that can lead and inspire a congregation to pray. Such a sound begins with good posture [See Illustration #1]. This posture allows one's body and voice to be relaxed and tension free.

Try to ensure that you are **relaxed** before you sing. Do not hunch up your shoulders, drop or raise your chin, or clench your jaw. When looking in a **mirror**, your stance should be upright with your shoulders relaxed, hands loosely by your side, eyes looking straight ahead with your chin at a normal angle. Many singers make the mistake of presuming they must be facial contortionists but this is not true - a good singer is one who looks and sounds natural.

Take a good look at the cantor stand. Make sure that it allows you to maintain good singing posture. If it is too low or high, or at the wrong angle, it can throw your entire body out of alignment. So, make whatever adjustments you can to it or hold your book (high enough to see without tilting the head, but not in front of your face).

## Exercise and Posture Drill - repeat daily until good habits are established

- Stand up as straight as possible with spine stretched tall and crown of head trying to touch the ceiling.
- Raise arms horizontal to floor with palms down. Think of putting your shoulder blades in the back pocket of your jeans!
- One foot should be slightly ahead of the other, with weight balanced forward on the balls of both feet.
- Unlock the knees and keep them flexible.
- Tuck the pelvis under and slightly forward.
- Now turn the arms over so that the palms are facing toward the ceiling.
- Notice the extra stretch that occurs in the ribs. The chest is now very wide, separated and high, with a lot of space between the bottom of the ribs and the waistline.
- Keep everything aligned and lower the arms to a normal position.
- The back of the neck is pulled back against an imaginary wall.
- Now put a smile on your face and walk around the room. Restate this good posture often.

## Common Posture Problems:

**Locking the knees:** When the knees are locked, the body is off balance. This causes body tension, which creates a tense singer. Be sure to put the weight forward on the balls of the feet and keep the tailbone tucked under to help avoid inadvertent locking of the knees.

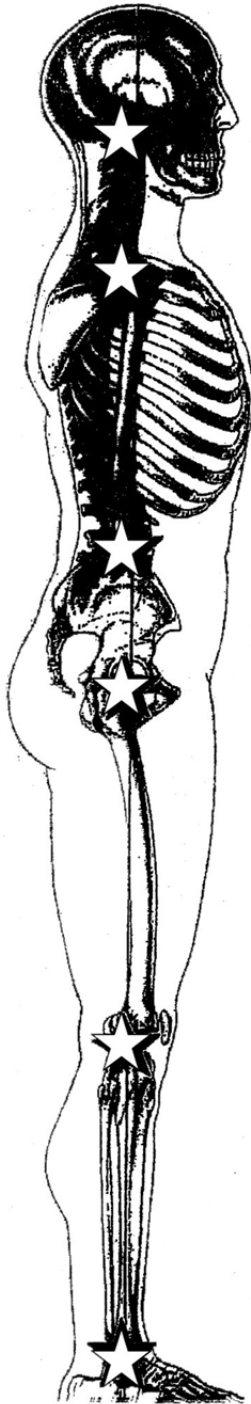
**Swayback:** Sometimes a singer tries to attain a lifted chest by pulling the shoulders back (and consequently tensing them) instead of using the muscles around the rib cage to lift the ribs out of the waistline. The intercostal muscles surrounding the rib cage are the muscles that should be used to lift the ribs and the sternum. When the shoulders are pulled back instead of lifting the sternum high, and the buttocks are not tucked under, but are instead thrust backward, swayback posture is the result. In this tense, unbalanced position, good vocal production is not possible.

**Chest droop:** As a musical phrase is sung and air is exhaled, it is easy to allow the chest to cave in and the rib cage to drop back into the waistline. At the end of the phrase, if this occurs, the singer has lost the height of the sternum. As you sing a phrase, consciously retain the height of the sternum and resist the collapse of the rib cage.

You might have other posture problems as well as these three common ones. To monitor your posture, look in a full-length mirror and compare your body alignment to Illustration # 1 below. Check each of the ten elements listed beside the illustration (feet, weight, knees, buttocks, etc.).

Practicing and attaining good posture will make a noticeable difference in the overall sound of your voice. So we challenge you to master correct singing posture. When you do, you will notice a significant improvement in the quality of your voice, and you will be prepared to begin work on the next key ingredient of vocal production: breathing.

## Voice Lesson 1, Illustration #1 *Good Posture from the Toes Up*



- Neck released, head able to move freely
- Head remains level
- Chin parallel to the floor, neither lifted nor lowered
- Shoulders relaxed
  
- Chest (sternum) lifted high and spread wide
- A feeling of the ribs being filled up out of the waistline
  
- Buttocks tucked under
  
  
- Knees relaxed and flexible
  
  
- One foot slightly in front of the other, feet comfortably apart for good balance
- Weight forward on the balls of the feet, heels on floor