

The Vocal Athlete

Application and Technique for the Hybrid Singer

Second Edition

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Marci Daniels Rosenberg, BM, MS, CCC-SLP

Wendy D. LeBorgne, PhD, CCC-SLP





5521 Ruffin Road
San Diego, CA 92123

e-mail: information@pluralpublishing.com

Web site: <http://www.pluralpublishing.com>

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Foreword

The Vocal Athlete: Application and Technique for the Hybrid Singer is the companion to the newly expanded second edition of the primary text *The Vocal Athlete* (LeBorgne & Rosenberg). This practical and accessible workbook includes a valuable collection of CCM voice exercises including over twenty new exercises to assist voice teachers in training students of all levels. The book advocates scientifically sound, medically healthy singing techniques including warm-up and cooldown exercises, as well as vocal exercises appropriate for each singing genre. Although the exercises are intended for the vocally healthy singer, many of them also are applicable to singers with voice disorders and should prove useful to singing voice specialists. The authors stress an extremely important principle, noting that “a vocal exercise is only effective if the teacher has firmly established the intent and purpose of that exercise for a given student’s vocal needs/development/growth and modifies it in the moment as needed.”

Rosenberg and LeBorgne’s excellent companion book helps teachers understand what they are trying to accomplish with various exercises, helping them concentrate more effectively on each student’s progress, rather than on just the completion of an exercise task. The book also includes numerous photos and online access to audio recordings of over fifty of the exercises, providing audible models for exercises that might be difficult to understand from written descriptions.

The Vocal Athlete: Application and Technique for the Hybrid Singer, Second Edition includes additional

contributions by an impressive and diverse collection of experts in voice pathology and singing, as well as in other fields such as physical therapy and psychology. Like the first edition, the second edition is grounded in solid science and practical experience. It will be an invaluable addition to the libraries of all singing teachers, speech-language pathologists who work with voice patients, singing voice specialists, and acting voice specialists; and its information is equally valuable for laryngology fellows and laryngologists. Like its companion textbook *The Vocal Athlete*, this workbook will continue to be a classic.

Robert T. Sataloff, MD, DMA, FACS

Professor and Chairman,
Department of Otolaryngology—
Head and Neck Surgery
Senior Associate Dean for
Clinical Academic Specialties
Drexel University College of Medicine
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Conductor,
Thomas Jefferson University
Choir Adjunct Professor,
Department of Otolaryngology—
Head and Neck Surgery
Sydney Kimmel Medical College
Thomas Jefferson University
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Preface

hy•brid sing•er(n). Refers to the vocal athlete who is highly skilled performing in multiple vocal styles possessing a solid vocal technique that is responsive, adaptable, and agile in order to meet demands of current and ever-evolving vocal music industry genres.

Voice teachers today are often expected to be skilled in teaching and cultivating multiple vocal styles encompassing classical to pop, musical theater, and more. Yet, many vocal pedagogy training programs do not fully prepare the voice pedagogue to teach multiple vocal styles despite the continued growing need for competent contemporary commercial music (CCM) voice teachers. We conceptualized this book to help bridge a gap in the vocal pedagogy world by compiling a collection of CCM voice exercises for voice teachers of all levels to use as a resource in their studios/practices. Designed to dovetail with its companion singing science, pedagogy, and vocal health textbook, *The Vocal Athlete, Second Edition* (LeBorgne & Rosenberg, 2021), this book contains over 70 CCM voice exercises from some of the most well-respected and sought-after CCM voice experts internationally. Contributors' backgrounds and experiences draw from a variety of arenas from performance psychology and physical therapy to prestigious voice teachers and speech pathologists/singing voice specialists.

How to Use This Book

The exercises presented in this book represent numerous techniques shared by the contributors. We have divided the book into two primary sections. Section I encompasses exercises for the mind and body including mental focus, breathing, alignment and jaw/tongue relaxation exercises. Section II focuses on technical vocal work including vocal warm-up and cool-down,

registration, and style-specific exercises. Readers will note that some exercises are applicable in multiple chapters. Although several of the exercises contained are similar to singing voice rehabilitation techniques, the intent of the exercises included in this book is for the *vocally healthy* singer, and none of the exercises should cause vocal strain or discomfort. Further, if a singer or teacher notes onset of new voice difficulties such as voice fatigue, change in quality, or loss of range in the absence of an obvious illness, he or she should seek laryngeal examination from a laryngologist.

In the vocal pedagogy arena, most vocal exercises stem from experiences, personal training, and input from multiple teachers, and many of the exercises are modifications and adaptations from former voice teachers or other methods. The exercises in this book come from voice teachers and speech pathologists/clinical singing voice specialists from varied backgrounds and settings. Although some exercises included in this workbook may seem similar, each contributor brings his or her own unique perspective to their exercise. As with all vocal pedagogy techniques, none of the exercises included have been rigorously scientifically studied for efficacy, but they have proven to be effective empirically through years of experience of the pedagogues who have used them. It is the present authors' belief that there are many ways to approach the same vocal problem or issue. However, a vocal exercise is only effective if the teacher has firmly established the intent and purpose of that exercise for a given student's vocal needs/development/growth and modifies in the moment as needed. It is at this level of understanding that vocal pedagogy becomes an art form in addition to a science. Several of the exercises include either photographs, or audio clips to help augment understanding of how to execute that exercise. Readers are encouraged to continue to explore these exercises beyond what is written on the page or provided as an online resource. We have taken care to relate exercises back to the textbook when applicable to provide the reader with a broader framework for reference and consideration. With a broader context and understanding, teachers are encouraged

to play, experiment, modify, and adapt exercises and techniques to suit the specific needs of their student with the physiological knowledge of intended vocal outcome. Additionally, if the exercise ultimately does not yield the intended outcome, it is incumbent upon the teacher to reassess and modify in order to suit the specific needs of the student, for it is the process that is important not a specific exercise.

This workbook comes with video and audio files accessible on a companion website. Look for the icon  throughout the book indicating there are multi-

media files available for an exercise. See inside front cover of the book for the website address and your access code.

We are endlessly grateful for the contributions of these voice pedagogues, speech pathologists/singing voice specialists, performance psychologists, physical therapists, vocal coaches, and body movement specialists to this book, for without their commitment to CCM pedagogy and willingness to share some of their techniques and methods, this book would not have become a reality.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful for each of our contributing authors for sharing their expertise and wisdom with our readers of this workbook. Your unique contributions have allowed us to compile a book providing the hybrid

singer and CCM vocal pedagogue a resource manual of exercises to consider. Thank you all!

—Marci Daniels Rosenberg & Wendy D. LeBorgne

Contributors

Thomas Arduini, BA, MS, CAS Education

Administration

Retired Choral Director Yorktown High School
Music Department Coordinator
Yorktown, New York

Chapter 8

**Tracy Bourne, PhD, Dip. Dram. Arts (Acting),
B.Mus (Voice), M.Mus (Performance)**

Singing Teacher and Performer
Ballarat, Australia

Chapter 4

Thomas Francis Burke, III, MS, CCC-SLP

Speech Pathologist
Voice Teacher
Corporate Consultant
Brooklyn, New York

Chapter 5

Joanna Cazden, MFA, MA, CCC-SLP

Voice and Speech Therapist
Cedars-Sinai Medical Center
Los Angeles, California

Chapter 1

J. Austin Collum, MA, CCC-SLP

Clinical Voice Pathologist
The Center for Voice Care and Swallowing
Disorders
The Ear, Nose, Throat, and Plastic Surgery Associates
Orlando, Florida

Chapter 5

Starr Cookman, MA, CCC-SLP

Voice and Speech Pathologist
Assistant Professor
University of Connecticut Voice and Speech Clinic
Farmington, Connecticut

Chapter 7

Marya Spring Cordes, MFA

Assistant Professor in Acting/Musical
Theater
Department of Theater Dance and Motion
Pictures
Founding Acting and Alexander Technique™
Instructor

Musical Theatre/Acting Preparatory Program
Wright State University
Dayton, Ohio

Founding Artistic Director of *The Puzzle:
A Festival of New York*

New York, New York

Chapter 2

James Curtis

Speech Language Pathologist
Voice and Swallowing Center—Otolaryngology
University of California San Francisco Medical
Center
San Francisco, California

Chapter 7

Benjamin Czarnota, BM, MM

Assistant Professor
Coordinator of Musical theatre Voice Study
University of the Arts
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Chapter 8

Marci Daniels Rosenberg, BM, MS, CCC-SLP

Speech-Language Pathologist
Voice and Singing Specialist, Vocal Health
Center

Department of Otolaryngology—Laryngology,
Rhinology, and General Otolaryngology and
Speech-Language Pathology

Michigan Medicine, University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Chapters 1, 5, and 6

Jennifer DeRosa, BFA, MS Ed

Associate Voice Teacher
Tom Burke Studio
Hicksville, New York
Chapter 8

Erin N. Donahue, BM, MA, CCC-SLP

Voice Pathologist
Singing Voice Specialist
Blaine Block Institute for Voice Analysis and
Rehabilitation
Professional Voice Center of Greater Cincinnati
Cincinnati, Ohio
Chapter 3

Emily Dunn, MS, CCC-SLP

Clinical Voice Pathology
The Center for Voice Care and Swallowing
Disorders
The Ear, Nose, Throat, and Plastic Surgery Associates
Orlando, Florida
Chapter 5

Matthew Edwards, DMA

Associate Professor of Voice and Voice Pedagogy
Coordinator of Musical Theatre and Voice
Artistic Director of The New CCM (Contemporary
Commercial Music)
Voice Pedagogy Institute
Shenandoah Conservatory
Shenandoah University
Winchester, Virginia
Chapter 8

Naz Edwards

Educator-Actor-Singer
Founder-Actthroughsong.com
Broadway Veteran
AEA/SAG/AFTRA
Ann Arbor, Michigan
Chapter 8

**Joan Ellison, BM (Voice Performance),
Masters of Music in Teaching**

Teacher of Popular Voice
Cleveland Institute of Music
Visiting Guest Artist
Cleveland Play House
Case Western Reserve University
Lecturer in Voice
Baldwin Wallace Conservatory
Cleveland, Ohio
Chapter 8

Barbara Fox DeMaio, MM, DMA

Associate Professor of Voice
University of Central Oklahoma
Executive Director, Painted Sky Opera
Edmond, Oklahoma
Chapters 3 and 8

Jeffrey Evans Ramsey, BM

Associate Professor
Berklee College of Music
Boston, Massachusetts
Chapter 8

Walt Fritz, PT

Principal, Foundations in Myofascial Release
Seminars
Foundations in Myofascial Release Seminar for
Neck, Voice, and Swallowing Disorders
Rochester, New York
Chapter 4

Marcelle Gauvin

Associate Professor of Music
Berklee College of Music
Boston, Massachusetts
Faculty
CCM Vocal Pedagogy Institute
Winchester, Virginia
Chapter 8

**Marina Gilman, MM, MA, CCC-SLP Guild
Certified Feldenkrais® Practitioner**

Emory Voice Center
 Department of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck
 Surgery Voice Movement Integration
 Emory University
 Atlanta, Georgia
Chapter 2

Billy Gollner, BA, BMus, MA, CLA

Teacher of Singing
 The Urdang Academy
 London, United Kingdom
Chapter 7

Renee O. Gottliebson, PhD, CCC-SLP

Clinical Assistant Professor
 Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology
 Miami University
 Oxford, Ohio
Chapter 5

Kathryn Green, DMA

Professor Voice and Voice Pedagogy
 Director of Voice Pedagogy Graduate Programs
 Director of CCM Vocal Pedagogy Institute
 Shenandoah University
 Winchester, Virginia
Chapter 7

David Harris, DMA

Co-Founder/Director of VoiceScience Works
 Music Director of First Congregational Church of
 Los Angeles
 Composer/Singer/Conductor
 Los Angeles, California
Chapter 7

Caroline Helton, DMA

Associate Professor of Music (Voice)
 School of Music, Theatre, and Dance
 University of Michigan
 Ann Arbor, Michigan
Chapters 2 and 5

Bari Hoffman Ruddy, PhD, CCC-SLP

Associate Professor
 Department of Communication Sciences and
 Disorders
 University of Central Florida
 Orlando, Florida
 Director, The Voice Care Center
 The Ear, Nose, Throat, and Plastic Surgery
 Associates
 Winter Park, Florida
Chapters 3, 5, and 7

Kelly M. Holst, DMA

Associate Professor of Music (Voice)
 Wanda L. Bass School of Music
 Oklahoma City University
 Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
Chapter 7

Laurel Irene

Soprano and Co-Founder/Director of
 VoiceScienceWorks
 Los Angeles, California
Chapter 7

Maria Cristina A. Jackson-Menaldi, PhD

Speaking and Singing Voice Specialist
 Co-Founder, Lakeshore Professional Voice
 Center
 Lakeshore Ear, Nose, and Throat Center, PC
 Adjunct, Full Professor, School of Medicine
 Department of Otolaryngology
 Wayne State University
 Detroit, Michigan
Chapter 4

Aaron M. Johnson, MM, PhD, CCC-SLP

New York University Voice Center
 Assistant Professor
 Department of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck
 Surgery
 New York University School of Medicine
 New York, New York
Chapter 7

Joan Lader, MA

Voice Therapist, Teacher, Singing Voice Specialist
The New Studio
New York University
NYSTA, NATS, NYSHLHA, Voice Foundation
New York, New York
Chapter 8

Jonelyn Langenstein, MM, MS, CCC-SLP

Speech-Language Pathologist Singing Voice
Specialist
Emory Voice Center, Department of Otolaryngology
Atlanta, Georgia
Chapter 6

Wendy D. LeBorgne, PhD, CCC-SLP

Voice Pathologist, Singing Voice Specialist
Director, Blaine Block Institute for Voice Analysis
and Rehabilitation
Director, The Professional Voice Center of Greater
Cincinnati
Adjunct Professor
Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music
Cincinnati, Ohio
Chapters 3 and 8

Patricia M. Linhart, BM, MM

Educator Associate Professor of Musical Theatre
Voice
College Conservatory of Music
University of Cincinnati
Cincinnati, Ohio
Chapter 8

Adam Lloyd, MM, MA, CCC-SLP

Voice Pathologist and Singing Specialist
The Voice Care Center
The Ear, Nose, Throat, and Plastic Surgery Associates
Adjunct Professor of Voice
Rollins College
Winter Park, Florida
Chapters 3 and 7

Jeannette L. LoVetri, NYSTA/NATS, AATS, SVW™

Director, The Voice Workshop
New York, New York
Artist-in-Residence, Baldwin Wallace University
Berea, Ohio
LoVetri Institute for Somatic Voicework™
Member, American Academy of Teachers of
Singing
Member, The Voice Foundation, Advisory Board
and Young Student Research Award
Past President, The New York Singing Teachers'
Association
Chapter 7

Sarah Maines, DMA

Voice Instructor
Singing Voice Specialist
The MAINESTUDIO
Portland, Oregon
Chapters 2 and 7

Robert Marks

Private Vocal Coach
New York, New York
Chapter 8

Katherine McConville, MA, CCC-SLP

Speech-Language Pathologist
Department of Speech-Language Pathology
Michigan Medicine
Chapter 6

Edrie Means Weekly, BME, MM

Co-Founder of CCM Vocal Pedagogy Institute
Associate Professor of Voice and Voice Pedagogy
Musical Theatre and CCM Styles Specialist
Advisory Board, The Voice Foundation
Advisory Board, National Musical Theatre
Competition, NATS
Shenandoah Conservatory
Winchester, Virginia
Chapter 4

Joan Melton, PhD, ADVS

Emeritus Professor, Theatre
 California State University Fullerton
 Fullerton, California
 Program Director
 Once Voice Centre for Integrative Studies
 New York, New York
Chapter 3

**Jeremy Ryan Mossman, BM, MM, Estill
 Certified Master Teacher**

Assistant Professor
 Carthage College
 Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Chapter 1

Jennifer C. Muckala, MA, CCC-SLP

Speech-Language Pathologist, Voice Specialist,
 Clinical Faculty
 Department of Otolaryngology
 Vanderbilt Voice Center
 Nashville, Tennessee
Chapter 5

Beverly A. Patton, BM, MA, DMA

Associate Professor
 Musical Theatre Singing Specialist
 Penn State University School of Theatre
 Musical Director
 Penn State University Opera Theatre, Penn State
 University School of Music
 University Park, Pennsylvania
Chapters 5 and 7

Brian E. Petty, MA, MA, CCC-SLP

Speech-Language Pathologist Singing Voice
 Specialist
 The Emory Voice Center
 Atlanta, Georgia
Chapters 6 and 7

Lisa Popeil, MFA

Voice Teacher
 Vocal Coach Voiceworks®
 Sherman Oaks, California
Chapter 7

Suzan Postel

Somatic Bodywork for Singers, Certified Pilates
 Instructor
 Founder, The Body SingsSM
 Guest Faculty, LoVetri Institute at Baldwin Wallace
 Conservatory
 Berea, Ohio
 Professional Vocalist
 Broadway Veteran singer and dancer
Chapters 2 and 3

Kari Ragan, DMA, Singing Voice Specialist (SVS)

Artist in Residence, Voice, Voice Pedagogy
 School of Music, University of Washington
 University of Washington, Department of
 Otolaryngology Affiliation, SVS
 Seattle, Washington
Chapter 5

Edward Reisert, BM, MS

Choral Director
 Fox Lane High School
 Bedford Central School District
 Bedford, New York
Chapter 8

Amelia A. Rollings, BM, BME, MM, PhD

Assistant Professor of Musical Theatre Voice
 Department of Theatre and Dance
 Western Kentucky University
 Bowling Green, Kentucky
Chapter 6

Michelle Rosen, MM

Adjunct Instructor
NYU Tisch School of Drama
New York, New York
Senior Faculty
LoVetri Institute for Somatic Voicework™
at Baldwin Wallace University
Senior Faculty
Brooklyn Youth Chorus
Private voice studio
Chapter 7

Stephanie Samaras, MM

Private Vocal Instructor
Assistant Professor
Graduate Center
City University of New York
New York, New York
Adjunct Professor
Montclair State University
Montclair, New Jersey
Chapter 6

Sheri Sanders

Voice Teacher
Vocal Coach
Brooklyn, New York
Audition cuts on <http://www.musicnotes.com>
<http://www.Rock-the-audition.com>
Chapter 8

Mary Saunders Barton, MA

Retired Professor of Voice
Former Head of Voice and Graduate Voice
Pedagogy for Musical Theatre
Penn State University
University Park, Pennsylvania
Chapters 6 and 7

Sarah L. Schneider, MS, CCC-SLP

Speech Language Pathology Director
UCSF Voice and Swallowing Center
Department of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck
Surgery
University of California San Francisco
San Francisco, California
Chapters 2 and 7

Martin L. Spencer, MA, CCC-SLP

Speech Pathologist
Singing Voice Specialist
The Voice Center at Ohio ENT
Columbus, Ohio
Chapters 1 and 7

Norman Spivey, BM, MM, DMA

Professor of Voice and Voice Pedagogy
Penn State University
State College, Pennsylvania
Chapters 5, 7, and 8

Robert C. Sussuma, MMus, GCFP

<http://www.robertsussuma.com>
New York, New York
Chapters 1 and 2

Miriam van Mersbergen, PhD, CCC-SLP

Assistant Professor
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, Illinois
Chapter 4

Jill Vonderhaar Nader, PT

Physical Therapist
Prehab Pilates & Physical Therapy, LLC
Cincinnati, Ohio
Chapter 2

Barbara J. Walker, PhD

Performance Psychologist
Center for Human Performance
Cincinnati, Ohio

Chapter 1

**Catherine A. Walker, BM, MM, Estill Certified
Master Trainer**

Associate Professor of Musical Theatre
School of Music, Theatre, and Dance
University of Michigan
Music Director, Vocal Coach, Clinician
Founder-Explore the Voice, LLC
Explorethevoice.com
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Chapter 4

Ann Evans Watson

Assistant Professor of Musical Theatre
School of Music, Theatre, and Dance
University of Michigan
AEA, MTEA, NATS, PAVA, VASTA
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Chapter 7

Chris York, BS in (Choral) MusEd

Adjunct Professor
Musical Theatre Department
Pace University
Chris York Voice Studio
New York, New York

Chapter 8

SECTION I

Preparing the Singer's Mind and Body

Introduction and Overview

Given the physical demands of many Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) styles, this section includes exercises that help provide the foundation for efficient performance. The exercises included in this section address the singer (mentally and physically) as a whole. We have included exercises to promote mental focus and centering as well as for posture, alignment, and breathing. Additionally, stretch and relaxation exercises for jaw and tongue are provided in this section.

Chapter 1: Exercises for Mental Focus

Chapter 1 begins with a variety of exercises designed to promote mental focus and centering. Dr. Barbara Walker (performance psychologist) provides a guided meditation to center the breath and clear the mind. This exercise can be useful to increase mental focus and reduce performance anxiety, allowing the performer to reduce apprehension and feel mentally prepared for performance. Robert Sussuma takes the reader through a voice scan exercise in order to increase the singer's awareness and kinesthetic feedback of his or her instrument prior to active voice use or performance. This exercise may be useful for singers who are kinesthetically "blocked" with reduced awareness of what they are sensing and experiencing when singing. He also presents a Feldenkrais-based lesson on

reorganizing the vocal tract. Joanna Cazden's exercise also promotes self-discovery of the voice, but with a unique intention. Her exercise encourages creation of a dialogue with your voice to explore feelings and emotions about your vocal history with the intention of moving past vocal negativity and frustration, allowing the singer to move toward a healthier vocal viewpoint. This type of exercise can be useful for singers who currently have or are having vocal issues or injury, as it gives the singer a method to verbalize and express fears and emotions associated with singing, while facilitating a process of reestablishing a level of trust with the vocal instrument. Jeremy Mossman's vocal exploration exercise provides an enjoyable arena for a singer to explore various qualities of vocal sounds outside of the context of singing. This exercise has usefulness from a cross-training perspective allowing for the exploration of a variety of vocal colors and nuances that can be drawn upon for performance. Martin Spencer introduces several variations of a mental focus and breathing exercise including a group mental focus exercise to connect and synchronize multiple people through movement and breath. He encourages this exercise as a means to unify and optimize the ensemble dynamic. Finally, the Scale of Vocal Effort (SoVE) rating scale described by Marci Rosenberg is designed to heighten the singer's awareness of the level of baseline perceived vocal effort expended for various vocal tasks. The intention of this exercise is to increase awareness of vocal effort and establish a consistent internal scale allowing the singer to self-monitor for subtle changes in vocal effort. Given the variety of settings and environments the vocal athlete performs

in, this is a useful tool for singers to internally gauge possible vocal issues before they become problematic over a longer period of time.

Chapter 2: Physical Stretches and Alignment

As singing is a task involving the entire body, Chapter 2 includes a collection of exercises designed to stretch, release, and align the body. This chapter begins with Sarah Schneider's exercise using body movement to draw attention away from areas of tension, creating a "constructive distraction" in order to free vocal sound. Marya Cordes has provided an Alexander-based stretch, movement, and vocalization exercise to promote fluidity throughout the body in preparation for singing. Marina Gilman's two Feldenkrais-based exercises dovetail nicely to balance the head and release the neck and shoulders while singing. Dr. Caroline Helton's "Climbing the Ladder" exercise is used to open the torso and rib cage. Physical therapist Jill Nader's exercise provides a set of stretches and myofascial release techniques for the upper body, serving to both improve posture and increase mobility and range of motion of the rib cage, chest, and upper back. Suzan Postel describes a posture and alignment exercise to neutralize posture and connect the body to the breath. Dr. Sarah Maines adds to these by providing an exercise promoting stretch and freedom in the lower back designed specifically for vocal athletes.

Chapter 3: Stretches and Exercises for Breathing

Although breathing is incorporated into several of the exercises throughout this book, Chapter 3 includes a handful of specific breathing exercises for the vocal athlete. Erin Donahue and Dr. Wendy LeBorgne provide a set of exercises designed to prepare the respiratory system through chest and abdominal stretches and contractions of the respiratory muscles. Dr. Joan

Melton describes two techniques to free the abdominal muscles and connect the voice to the body. Dr. Barbara Fox DeMaio provides a specialized exercise for building breath stamina in the ageing voice. Dr. Bari Hoffman and Adam Lloyd provide a stylized breathing exercise for vocalists who engage in vocal percussion. This exercise trains coordination and agility needed for this unique CCM skill.

Chapter 4: Stretching and Relaxation for Jaw and Tongue

Because the jaw and tongue can be problematic with various CCM vocal styles, we have included a chapter specifically addressing issues related to jaw and tongue tension release. The first two exercises are provided by Dr. Miriam van Mersbergen. The first exercise is composed of four individual exercises to stretch and relax the four primary muscles of the jaw. Her second exercise addresses the relationship between the back of the tongue and the jaw. Dr. van Mersbergen has also provided guidelines to promote a healthy jaw. Physical therapist Walt Fritz has provided a self-treatment protocol for the jaw. Dr. Christina Jackson-Menaldi provides an exercise combining phonation with base of tongue release. Finally, Tracy Bourne adds another base of tongue release exercise with vocalizations on both staccato and legato patterns.

The exercises provided in this section have relevance for numerous singing styles. They can be used as part of an initial preparation to sing, as well as, during active training, to relax muscles, realign posture, and recalibrate as needed. Singers may discover that what is needed for their body will vary from day to day and role to role. Furthermore, alignment and posture, and general musculoskeletal integrity, can be impacted by a variety of factors such as physicality of a role or even a cumbersome headpiece. The importance of tuning into one's body and psyche to determine what is needed is a vital component of the vocal training regimen, and this practice should be established early in the vocal training regimen.



Exercises for Mental Focus



Centering the Breath

Barbara J. Walker

Purpose of Exercise

- To encourage relaxation of the vocal tract
 - To create whole-body relaxation and clear the mind from performance anxiety on cue
 - To allow one to feel in control of his/her body and mind before and during performance, allowing for optimal performance
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Origin of Exercise

This exercise is based on diaphragmatic breathing, which is a well-known exercise that Zen masters and spiritual leaders have been using for centuries, and psychologists and yoga instructors for decades. Focusing on the breath allows one to be aware of and have the capacity to take control of one's mind and body. Utilizing cue words and phrases is based in cognitive psychology.

Overview of Exercise

When singers are experiencing stress or performance anxiety, it is usually as a result of negative or anxious

thoughts or images about their performance rather than an actual threat or emergency. This reaction may occur after there has been an error at a previous performance or if they have just recovered from an injury, and now they may be feeling anxious that they will not be able to perform optimally. Regardless, their body reacts from these thoughts as if a true emergency were occurring, a fight or flight response. From this reaction, which is driven from a conscious or subconscious thought or image in their mind, their breathing may naturally become shallow and rapid. A vicious cycle then begins, and the singer may also experience the physiological symptoms of an increased heart rate, sweating, muscle tension, decreased oxygen intake, dry mouth, and a sudden loss of energy or feelings of fatigue. Mentally, they may experience worry, feeling overwhelmed and out of control, as well as a loss of concentration (sometimes losing track of where they were in a song or forgetting words). Behaviorally, this may cause them to sing more quickly and/or have a disrupted/broken voice. All of these symptoms can be triggered from a single anxious thought or image.

To ward off any anxiety, in addition to being prepared, mentally and physically for their performance, singers visualizing themselves performing well is also very helpful. Implementing this simple-centered breathing technique at the right time will keep the stress symptoms at bay and will also allow one to recover quickly if any of the above anxiety symptoms develop.

Exercise

When first learning this exercise, it is best to find a quiet environment and a place where you feel comfortable closing your eyes. After the exercise is mastered, it can be accomplished in any environment.

1. You can begin learning this exercise either lying down on your back or simply sitting up in a chair. Begin by placing one hand on your upper chest and the other just below the rib cage. This will allow you to feel the diaphragm move as you breathe.
2. Breathe in slowly through the nose (if possible), so that the stomach moves out against the hand. The hand on the chest should remain as still as possible.
3. Tighten the stomach muscles, letting them fall inward as you exhale through the mouth.
4. As you feel comfortable with the rhythm of the breath, visualize your chest and heart muscles loosening and opening up and visualize your breath coming up and down your chest smoothly and easily.
5. Silently to yourself, count the number of seconds it takes you to inhale, and then make it equal with your exhale. Example: Inhale 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and then Exhale 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. If you find yourself having any thoughts other than counting going through your mind, count as loudly as you need to inside your mind, allowing any other thoughts to dissipate.
6. After you have become fluid with your breathing and counting, you will experience a specific feeling state. What words best describe how you feel: Peaceful? Calm? Relaxed? Quiet? Clear? Ready? Energized? Identify two words that you feel when you breathe and relate that to how you feel when you perform (for example: Confident and Clear; Focused and Relaxed).
7. Whenever a performance is drawing near or if you begin to experience any anxiety symptoms, I suggest repeating these cue words to yourself along with the breath or simply begin the breath along with the counting. With practice, even with just a couple of breaths, this technique will allow you to override and avert any stressful or anxious feelings you may have.

How Often Should I Practice This Exercise?

At first, practice this exercise 5 to 10 minutes about three to four times per day to master the breath. A great time to practice this exercise is at nighttime just as you are going to bed. Once the breath is mastered, implement the breath about 30 minutes prior to a performance or just before you typically begin to feel any anxiety symptoms.

The Voice Scan

Robert Sussuma

Purpose of Exercise

The purpose of this scan is to bring one's awareness to the sensations of the vocal mechanism at rest in preparation for sound and movement. By paying close attention to these sensations before and after singing, we are better able to know our instrument and track the many changes that occur along the way, allowing us to move and sing with more accuracy and clarity of intention.

Origin of Exercise

In the Feldenkrais method, almost every lesson begins with a body scan. The purpose of the scan is to notice how we sense ourselves and what we are aware of BEFORE we do a lesson (or exercise) so that when we do, and things change, we can compare the changes to what we sensed in the beginning of the lesson.

One of Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais' most famous utterances was: "When you know what you are doing,



you can do what you want!” This is a provocative statement. Do we really know what we are doing as singers, or otherwise? And, if we don’t really know what we are doing, how can we do what we want—especially with our voice?

Overview of Exercise

The Voice Scan will systematically guide you through sensing your vocal apparatus, so that you can become more and more aware of the background sensations connected to your voice. This will form the sensory foundation for all of the intricate movements associated with each sound you can and will make. As this sense grows, one can more easily move away from just listening to the sound or relying on others to know what one is doing!

Exercise

Lie on your back. Sense your contact with the floor. Notice: your heels, your legs, your pelvis, your lower and upper back, your ribs, your shoulders and arms, your neck and head. Which parts feel heavier or lighter? How is your right side different from your left?

Bring your awareness to your face. Notice the expression. How soft are your eyes, your cheeks, your lips?

Bring your awareness to your jaw. How heavy is your jaw? How big is it? How does your jaw connect to your skull?

Leave that and now, naturally, without doing anything special, begin to pay attention to your breathing: the timing, the shape, the movement as you inhale and exhale.

Now, with your mouth closed, breathe through your nose and ask yourself, how does the air get from the nostrils to the lungs?

How much of your airway can you actually sense as you inhale and exhale?

Which parts are clear to you, which parts are murky or confusing?

Which parts don’t even seem to be there at all?

(I have found that most people have a clear sense of the air passing through their nostrils and may even clearly feel the air in the back of the mouth, but cannot sense anything from the back of the tongue to the lungs.)

Using your sensory imagination, spend several minutes attending to your sensations in the following areas:

1. *The nostrils to the back of the nasal cavity:* How deep is the cavity? How wide? How quickly is the air moving? What is the temperature of the air? What do your nasal passages look and feel like?
2. *The soft palate:* Sense how the air goes over and behind the soft palate to reach the back of the mouth. What does your soft palate look like?
3. *Behind the tongue:* Sense how the air passes behind the tongue on its way to your throat. How much space is there behind your tongue? Where is the bottom of the back of your tongue?
4. *Into the throat and larynx:* As the air passes through your larynx, it passes through your vocal folds. Where are your vocal folds? What is your sense of your throat as the air passes through it? Notice how it changes shape as you inhale and exhale.
5. *Down to the lungs:* Where does the larynx end and the trachea begin? How does the air get from the single tube of the trachea to both lungs? How does the air fill your lungs? How do your ribs and diaphragm move?

When you have finished sensing the areas above, return to the original question: How does the air get from your nostrils to your lungs? What is your sense now?

Notice your contact with the floor now. How may it have changed as a result of this scanning process?

Slowly roll to your side and sit. Stand. Walk. How do you feel now? What are you most aware of? What is your sense of your breathing now?