

VOCAL PRODUCTION #1 – BREATHING and ALIGNMENT

Voice students often want to rush their teacher to teach them the advanced techniques associated with good singing. The wise voice student is patient and works for months, sometimes years, on the basics of good posture and breathing before moving on to more advanced skills. Without properly developing the instrument, how can we expect good music to escape through the resonators? Are you an anxious or wise voice student? Hmmm??

POSTURE

- Focus on the body and mind
- Stretch to loosen muscles and joints
- Shoulder massage
- Stretch the body and stand straight and tall
- Proper body alignment
 - FEET: Shoulder-width apart
 - KNEES: Relaxed
 - THIGHS: Relaxed
 - PELVIS: Slightly Tucked
 - CHEST: High and Expanded
 - CHIN: Parallel to the floor
 - HEAD: Erect
 - EARS: Over your shoulders
 - MIND: Engaged
 - FACE: Smiling

BREATHING

- We will watch a video clip from *The Singers Voice – Breath*. This is an excellent visual example of what the breathing apparatus looks like and how it works together in the breathing process.

Note your observations from the video:

BREATHING EXERCISES

The following exercises are examples of activities that create an awareness of how the breathing apparatus works. Practicing them helps to build understanding of the process and will help strengthen breathing muscles. These exercises are from *The Perfect Blend*, by Thomas Seelig.

The Fountain of Youth:

Sing a chord on pitches in a comfortable range. Place one hand resting gently on the upturned index finger of the other hand. Mash down on the index finger as you sing and imitate that sound. Push breath through to make a breathy sound, thus pushing the hand upward and off the flow of the air. This demonstrates what steady air pacing should feel and sound like.

The Swimming Breath:

Bend forward at the waist as if swimming under water. Swim the entire length of the pool in one breath. Swim and swim and swim until you can take it no more and then, when you must, come up for air, gasping for breath, but with the lips in an “oo” shape. This helps you sense the complete depletion of the breath upon exhalation. As you come up for air, you feel the immediate intake of air.

Chattanooga Choo Choo:

This exercise gets the breath activated along with the articulators. Begin slowly as if the train were just leaving the station on a whispered sound “chooga, chooga, chooga, chooga.” Breathe when you need to as the train speeds up. End the exercise with the train whistle, which, of course, throws you into a wonderful head voice.

Thoughts to ponder . . .

There cannot be any sound where there is no movement or percussion of the air. There cannot be any percussion of the air where there is no instrument. There cannot be any instrument without a body.

Leonardo Da Vinci, Notebooks

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A singer's instrument is his entire body.

Lots of different folks

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Stand as if you were taller; sing as if you were fatter!

Timothy Seelig, The Perfect Blend

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The gas gauge of singing is the breath!

Timothy Seelig, The Perfect Blend

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Students will also receive a handout with some vocal exercises that are good for developing proper breathing while singing. These exercises will be reviewed during the class for proper understanding on how to perform and use the exercises.

Resources:

The Choral Warm-up Collection, by Sally K. Albrecht, Alfred Publishing Co., Inc. 2003.
The Complete Choral Warm-Up Book, by Russell Robinson & Jay Althouse. Alfred Publishing Co., Inc., 1995.
The Perfect Blend: Over 100 Seriously Fun Vocal Warm-ups, by Timothy Seelig. Shawnee Press, Inc., 2005.
Voice Builders for Better Choirs, by Emily Crocker. Hal Leonard Corporation, 2002.
The Singers Voice – Breath, Pst..Inc.

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