

Eric Vetro

SING LIKE THE STARS

> **Aim to be great, not to be perfect. Perfection doesn't exist, but greatness does.**

BBC MAESTRO

COURSE NOTES 1.0

The Lessons

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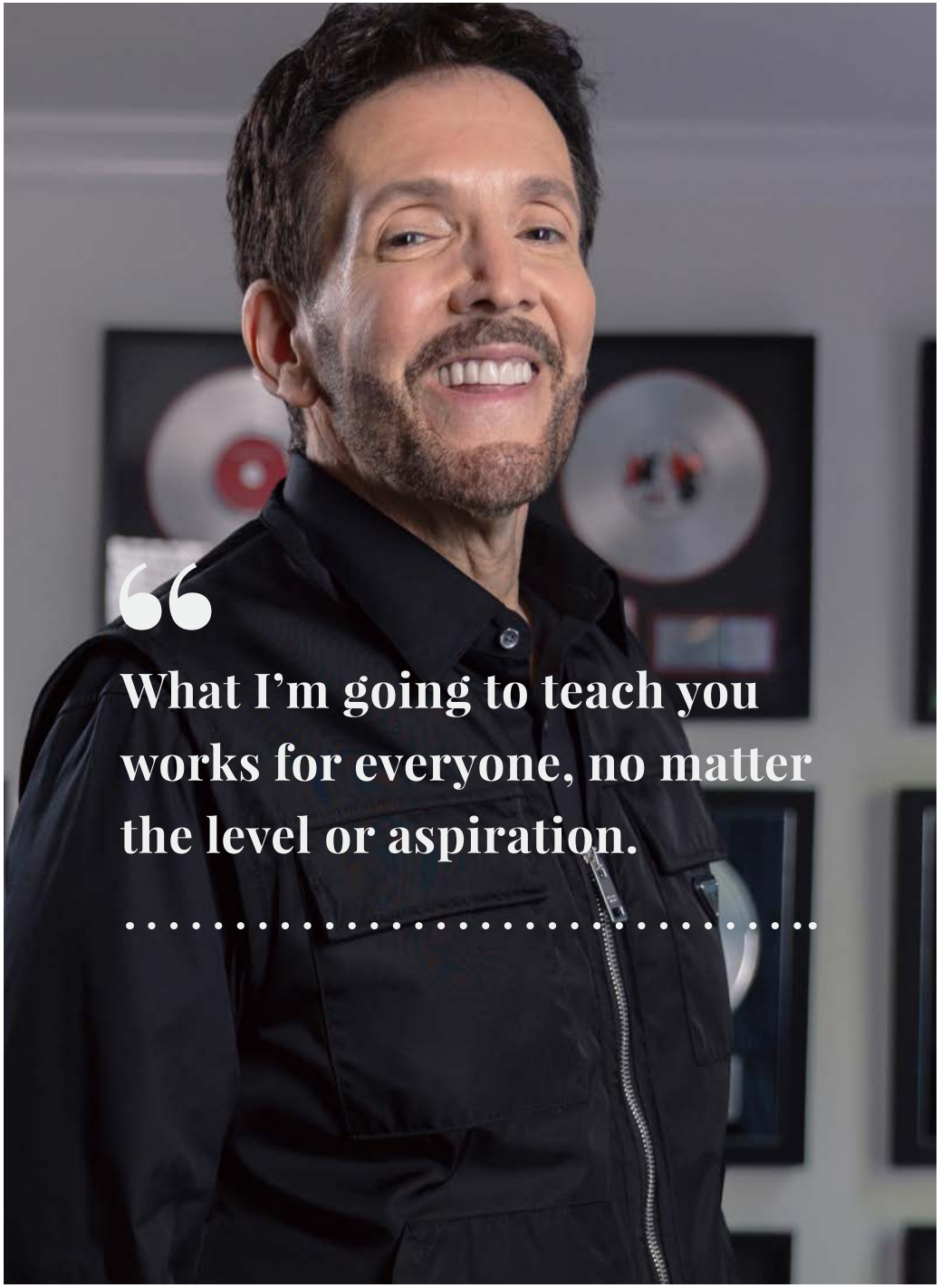
About This Course

HELLO, I'M ERIC VETRO

Welcome… This course is for everyone who likes and wants to sing. If that is you, then you will learn from it and you will improve from it. Hopefully, you will also really enjoy it. I want you to feel like you've just stepped into my voice studio for a lesson. Then after that lesson you come back for another, and together we keep levelling it up. I'm going to give you exercises you can start working on immediately and others to keep working on over the longer term. You can sing along, you can rewind the videos, you can revisit these notes. You're going to learn all the same vocal exercises and techniques that I have been sharing with my private students for years that have helped them develop their full potential and reach the heights of the entertainment business. You're going to learn to sing better.

I'm Eric Vetro and this is my **BBC Maestro** course, ***Sing Like The Stars.***

Eric Vetro



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HOW TO USE THESE COURSE NOTES

When you watch this **BBC Maestro** course, I hope you will feel that you are actively participating in the lessons, practising the vocal exercises and techniques along with the rest of us. I want you to feel you are in attendance at the workshops, receiving and responding to the feedback according to your interests and needs. The course notes are designed to both complement and enrich the lessons, supplementing them with additional information and exercises beyond the video lessons to support your overall journey. They also distil key points from the workshops into a concise text format, focusing on essential takeaways. Engaging with this material in two formats, during the video lessons and through using these notes, you will only strengthen your learning. Using both will give you the largest benefit.

A number of warm-up exercises, which are returned to throughout the workshops, are described in **Lessons 3, 4** and **5**, as I demonstrate them live on video. At the end of these notes however, you will also find a systematic summary of all key exercises, sorted by voice type, graded by level, and linked to audio samples. My wish is that this material will sustain you beyond this course, providing the kind of support you would get were you to be taking one-on-one lessons in my LA studio.

> **Whatever you choose to do in life, work your hardest and do that thing to the very best of your ability.**

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- **Your voice, ears and breath**
- **A notebook and a simple recording device**
- **A basic electronic keyboard**
- **Patience and attention to detail**
- **Commitment in both the short and the long term**
- **A willingness to experiment**
- **Determination**

Part 1
01. Introduction

I've been a vocal coach all my life. That's right: all my life. I know it sounds ridiculous. You're probably thinking: *'Really? Even in pre-school?'* Well, near enough!

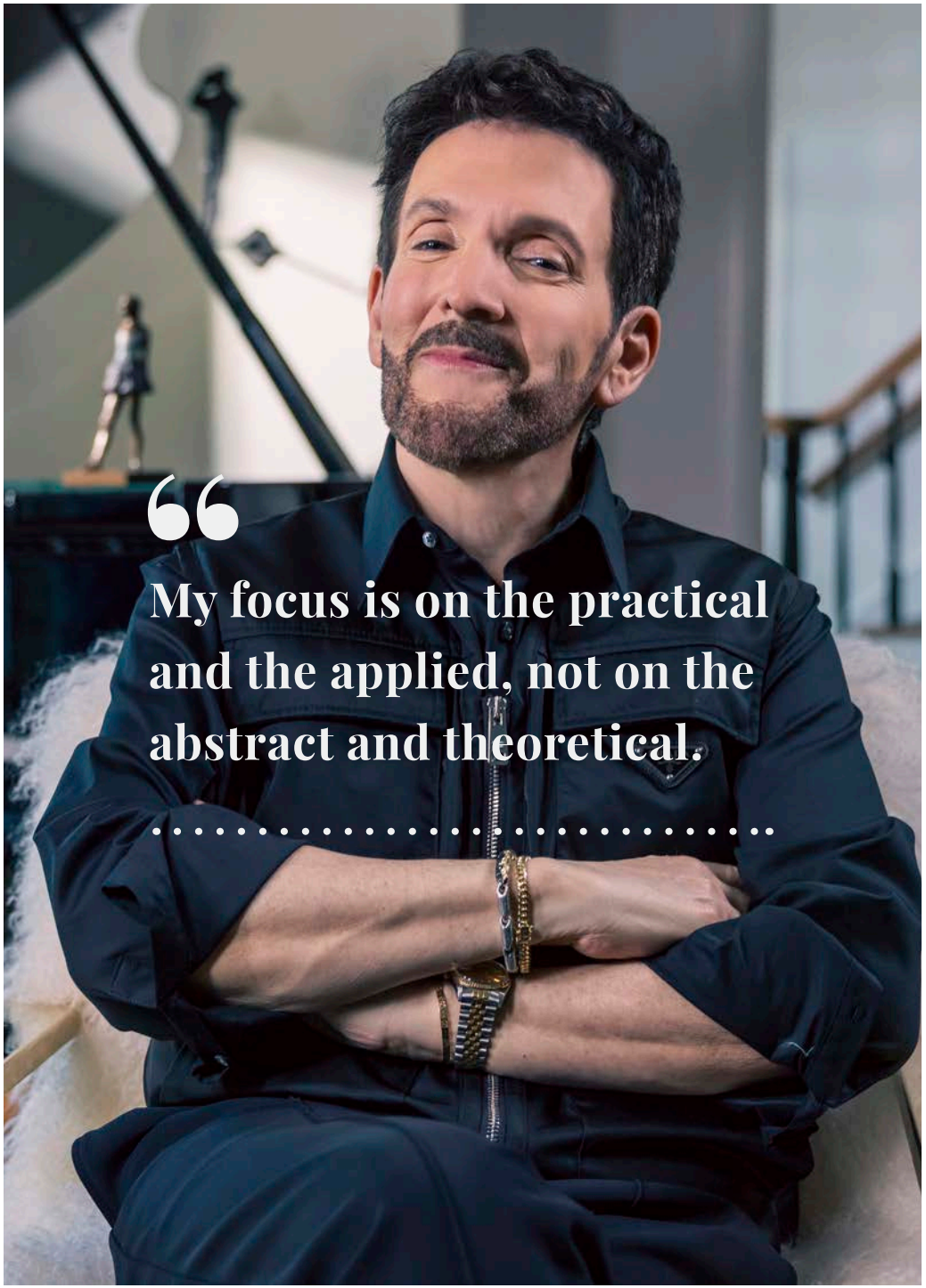
I'm still excited every time I get to coach someone for the Super Bowl or the Grammys or the Oscars. It's gratifying to see my students being cheered on by thousands at Coachella or the Hollywood Bowl; it's thrilling to see them top the charts and scoop up the awards and dazzle the nation on *Saturday Night Live*.

But I'm just as excited when I get to coach first-timers too. Each time, I rediscover that delight in knowing that I can help them get a step nearer their dreams. Or, to be less grandiose about it, I can simply help them do better, whether that's singing in their local church or at a karaoke night or a wedding. Maybe you just want to serenade your sweetheart – this course is for you. What I'm going to teach you works for everyone, no matter the level or aspiration.

I've kept things simple. I don't spend much time on technical terms or delving deep into anatomy, because after all, you can't see the inside of your own body, unless you're undergoing a medical procedure. My focus is on the practical and the applied, not on the abstract and theoretical. I will explain everything clearly and easily. Sometimes even experienced professionals have confessed that I've been able to simplify things they had never been quite able to grasp before. In singing, small changes can make a big difference.

I've filled the course notes with exclusive content that goes beyond what's covered in the course alone. I have put a lot of time and love into creating these notes to ensure they align beautifully with the course, enhancing the learning experience. They're packed with additional key learnings, valuable takeaways, and practical tips to support your journey and deepen your understanding.

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02. Origin Story

I started playing the piano when I was about five years old. I still remember my first lesson. I was in heaven! I went on to play for all my high school musical performances and also played in the stage band. To me it was magical. But then I took my first voice lesson… and the world would never be the same again. I was so lucky that my parents gave me voice lessons at such an early age. It was thanks to them that I was able to take that exciting new knowledge and pass it on to anyone who was interested. As soon as I could play songs, I started teaching them to my cousin. Then in school I would teach them to my peers.

By the time I was ten, my classmates started asking me: 'Hey, can you teach me this song? I want to audition for the school musical!' And of course, I would teach it to them. Once, the most popular boy in the class wanted to audition to play the prince in ***Cinderella***. So I brought him home with me, taught him the song, then the next day he went in and sang it and got the part. That boy and I had little in common. He was into sports and I was into musical theatre; we didn't spend much time together, but from that moment onward we shared a special bond. I felt good that I had something to offer.

That feeling has continued to motivate me throughout my working life. I always feel very bonded to the people I teach.

Eventually I became a voice major at NYU (New York University) and like always, I started coaching my classmates there. One time a boy wanted help with a difficult **aria***. He said: 'I can't feed you but I'll give you money.' I was briefly baffled, until he explained that a mutual friend had told him how I would go to her apartment to help with her music and then her grandmother would make me dinner. I never realised they saw it as payment!

That was when I started making money doing the thing I loved most. I would take everything I was learning from my voice teachers and teach it to others. Beyond that, I would also play the piano for other people's lessons with their teachers, which meant that I was learning from everyone else's voice teacher too. I was constantly taking note of every single thing that every single teacher was doing.

That was also when I first learned that not every technique works for every person, because not every student has the same aptitudes and strengths. Not every student has the same vocal cords. Thus, if I ever hear a teacher swear by any particular method, I am immediately sceptical. My approach is personalised, tailored. I listen to each individual and try to figure out exactly what they need: a bit more of this, a bit less of that.

I've been teaching for many years now, and I can honestly say that I enjoy it now more than ever. So when BBC Maestro asked me to put together this course, I couldn't believe my luck. I'm not very entrepreneurial. Nor am I much good with technology. But I've always wanted to share my experience and expertise as widely as possible – the more students the merrier! So this has been a thrilling experience for me. Thank you for inviting me into your homes. I hope I answer all your vocal questions.

One question you may have is whether there is any difference between a voice teacher and a vocal coach. The simple answer is yes, though the distinction has become increasingly blurred and the terms are now used more or less interchangeably. Traditionally, a voice teacher would work on the physical qualities of your voice – breathing, technique, range, agility – whereas a vocal coach would be more focused on performance – diction, key, arrangement, interpretation.

If I were to offer one overriding piece of advice right at the outset, it is this: whatever you choose to do in life, work your hardest and do that thing to the very best of your ability. Not least because if you work really hard, the work actually becomes easier. But you also feel good about yourself, which means that however tired you may be at the end of the working day, you also feel energised.

I worked hard teaching my cousin and schoolmates. I worked hard learning from all those teachers and passing on all that I learned. Which is how, in due course, I was able to turn professional. Friends would recommend me to friends, and then to other friends, until I was recommended to someone singing in the chorus of a Broadway show. Then that chorus member mentioned my name to the star of the show, who mentioned it to their manager, who mentioned it to their agent, and so it went on, in an ever-increasing spiral of recommendations. I've been fortunate enough to work with some of the biggest superstars on the planet, and I don't take any of it for granted. I still work as hard now as I did as a starstruck kid.

> **Traditionally, a voice teacher would work on the physical qualities of your voice – breathing, technique, range, agility – whereas a vocal coach would be more focused on performance.**

TAKEAWAYS

- **The sharing of music creates a special bond.**
- **Different techniques are suited to different people with different voices.**
- **Hard work is energising.**

GLOSSARY*

aria

noun

A long, accompanied song for solo voice, typically in an opera or oratorio

Part 2 ~ Vocal Warm-Ups & Cool-Downs
03. Why Warm Up

Warming up is essential to the singer, whether professional or amateur. Most obviously, you need to be warmed up to sound your best, to deliver your peak performance. Equally important, however, is that warming up helps to protect your voice. It's no exaggeration to say it effectively saves your voice.

If you sing without warming up, your voice will soon tire and you are more likely to feel hoarse. You may also be more prone to injury.

Having said that, we don't all need to warm up for the same amount of time. Some people can warm up quickly; for others it takes longer. Finding out what works for you requires experimentation. Most people tell me that around twenty-five to thirty minutes is the sweet spot, but there is always variation on either side.

It helps to see singers on a continuum with dancers. What do you imagine dancers are doing before a show? Sitting back on a couch nibbling snacks and sipping wine? No. They're warming up. They're stretching. They're getting their muscles primed for performance. It's the same for all athletes. That's why I love watching the Olympics, because you get to see the athletes warming up in front of you, getting everything flexible and limber. Why wouldn't we singers warm up our all-important vocal cords in just the same way?

The more warmed-up you are, the better the tone quality of your voice, and the better you will sing in tune, because your voice will be able to achieve what your brain and ear want it to do. Warm-ups are as good for the mind as the body and vital for mental preparation too. Just like those elite athletes, we need to access our full potential – in range and dynamics, in effortless flow and expression – and we need to be in the zone mentally too.

> **Warm-ups are as good for the mind as the body and vital for mental preparation too.**

I'm going to teach you a whole series of different warm-ups. If you take them seriously and do them regularly, not only will your voice sound better in performance but it will also develop, improve, and grow. In short, warming up is about much more than just warming up.

TAKEAWAYS

- **Singers are like dancers, and both are like athletes. All have a lot to learn from each other.**
- **You wouldn't run a race or play sport without warming up.**
- **Warm-ups are good for both body and mind.**

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04. Warming Up Your Voice

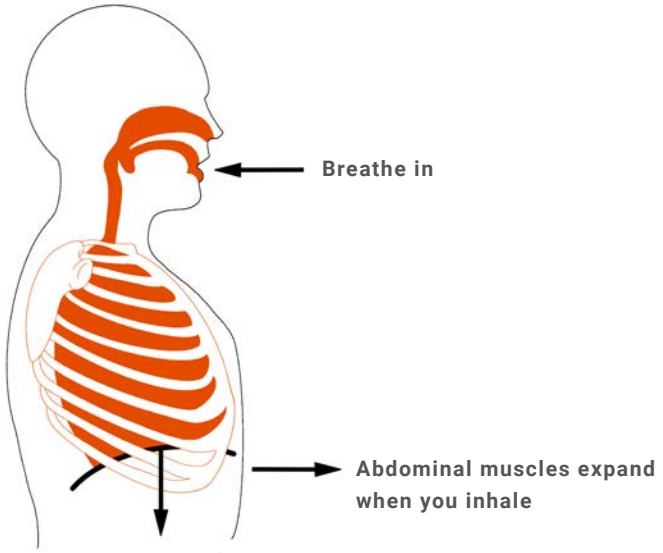
This lesson consists of a demonstration warm up with Heidi Webster and David Burnham, who first started singing together around ten years ago in Las Vegas, in Steve Wynn's ***ShowStoppers****. They sang on that show together for two and a half years.*

A comprehensive summary of all exercises, sorted and graded, with audio links, can be found at the end of these notes. Treat them like gold dust.

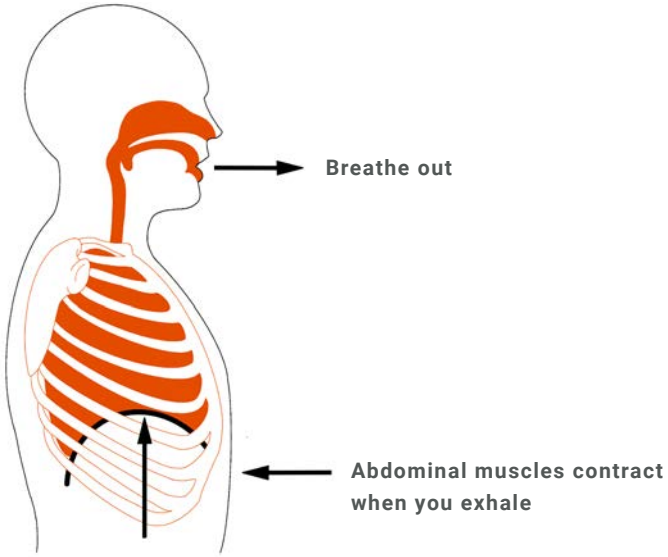
BREATHE...

Proper breathing is essential to good vocal production. The diaphragm is the main muscle we use to help us breathe. Probably the most famous and overused phrase in singing lessons is 'sing from your diaphragm'! However, have you ever seen your own diaphragm? No! So when someone says 'use your diaphragm', it's about as useful as saying 'use your small intestine' or 'use your liver'. You can, however, see and feel your abdominal muscles and if you connect with them and move them correctly you will help your diaphragm do its important job.

When we *inhale* our dome-shaped diaphragm muscle descends and flattens out in a downward motion which *increases* the size of the thoracic (chest) cavity. This creates a vacuum which draws the air in to fill our lungs. When we *exhale*, the diaphragm moves back upward into its dome shape thus *decreasing* the size of the chest cavity which creates a pressure that pushes the breath out of our lungs. This process happens thousands of times automatically every day, but a singer needs to become conscious of these movements and learn to control them so that they can hold long notes and sing long lines without having to take a breath.



Diaphragm flattens and descends



Diaphragm rises back up into dome shape

I'm going to describe the breathing technique that I have found works best for singers. When you inhale, keep your spine straight and your chest up. Allow your abdominal muscles (and entire waist area) to expand as you breathe *in* – filling your lungs with air. When you breathe *out*, pull your abdominal muscles inward (think of pulling your belly button towards your spine). Your abdominal muscles will then push your inner organs up against your diaphragm, helping it to return to its dome shape in a controlled way while keeping your breath flowing out – which will support your voice. Supporting your voice with your breath will keep it healthy and give you more vocal control. You will also be able to sing for much longer periods of time without getting tired.

A good way to practise this first time round is to lie on the ground. You can either keep your knees bent or lie your legs flat – whatever feels best on your lower back. Put your hands on your abdomen and take in a large deep breath. You will feel your abdominal muscles *expand* against your hand as you fill up with air. Next, exhale making a hissing sound so all the air doesn't rush out at once. As you hiss you will feel your abdominal muscles *contract* as the air leaves your body. Try this several times, so that you memorise the feeling of your abdominal muscles expanding as you inhale and contracting as you exhale. Then try it standing up, putting one hand on your chest (to remind you to keep it up and expanded) and the other on your abdominal muscles over your belly button. Take a deep breath in allowing your lower abdominal muscles and waist to slightly expand. As you exhale, contract your abdominal muscles, pulling them in as you send the air out and hiss out for as long as you can, counting in your head.

As you continue to practise this exercise over a period of weeks, aim to increase the length of that hissing exhale by taking in deeper and deeper breaths. Remember that when you are breathing *in* your abdominal muscles must be relaxed so that your diaphragm can descend without resistance. Some people like to practise blowing the air out as if they were blowing out the candles on a birthday cake, pursing the lips to focus the air forward. You will have to focus consciously on these movements in the beginning, but very quickly your body will develop a muscle memory and automatically work those muscles without you having to think about them.

Work to expand your lung capacity by fully filling up your lungs when you are practising these exercises. Singing does not take a lot of breath, so you usually do not have to use a lot of force, but it's important to have those muscles actively and optimally engaged.

There are different schools of thought about whether you should be breathing in through your mouth or your nose. Current scientific evidence seems to suggest that consistently breathing in through your nose can be beneficial; but, a singer will need to do both. For example, getting a deep full breath through the nose can often take longer than through the mouth, so if you are singing a fast up-tempo song you may not have time to breathe in through your nose. Breathing in through the mouth only dries out the throat if you do so with a gasping sound, so I have my students practise breathing in silently through their mouth. In addition to breathing through your nose being slower for taking a deep breath in, common allergies and sinus trouble can also make nose-breathing noisy, and if this is picked up by the microphone it can ruin a quiet ballad.

However, I would definitely urge you to breathe in through the nose if you are exposed in any way to potentially irritating fumes: when having hair and make-up done, for example, or your nails painted. Avoid the use of aerosols other than in a well-ventilated space; ideally, these should never be used in your dressing room, because the particles will linger in the air.

RELAX THE BODY

- **Bend the knees slightly to take the pressure off your lower back.**
- **Bend from the waist, letting your body flop forward like a rag doll, arms hanging freely.**
- **Take a deep silent breath in then out – you may feel your back expand a little when you inhale.**
- **Repeat, but this time hiss as you blow the air out and roll slowly up to a standing position.**
- **Repeat several times to release tightness and tension from the body.**
- **Next, take a deep breath in and then let out a big sigh.**

Sighing is something we tend to do naturally when we complete an important task. It signals that we're finished and we're done. So letting out that big sigh can trigger the muscle memory of relaxing there and then on the spot. This is a very simple but very beneficial thing to do in the dressing room, or even in the wings, before stepping out on stage.

LOOSEN THE FACIAL MUSCLES

- **Tilt your head slightly forward. Then quickly shake your face side to side.**
- **Make a shivering sound, as though you were cold: *brrr.***
- **Repeat, while shaking your arms and legs freely as well as your head.**
- **Then repeat again, but sliding the pitch up and down to begin stretching your range.**

CHECK YOUR POSTURE

Poor postures affects your ability to sing well, and in particular to hit the high notes. The most common mistakes are jutting your chin forward and upward, slouching, and collapsing your chest and ribs. It's worth focusing on posture consciously at the start of each session, before handing over to your subconscious for the rest of the day.

- **Clasp your hands behind your back.**
- **Stand on your toes and look up.**
- **Take a deep silent breath in, feeling your ribs expand, then blow out.**
- **Repeat, this time hissing as you blow out, contracting your abdominal muscles.**
- **As you hiss, slowly unclasp your hands and bring them forward into position as though you were holding a tray, palms up.**
- **At the same time, slowly tilt your head back down to face straight forward.**
- **Elongate the back of your neck, without sticking out your chin.**
- **Focus for a moment on that sense of expansion and elongation.**

By this point, your shoulders should be well down. The shoulders should never be up around the ears – that simply tenses your neck – but that is what often happens when people breathe in without focusing on what the body is doing.

Instead of the shoulders, the chest should be up and the ribs expanded so your lungs have room to expand when you breathe in.

WORK YOUR ABDOMINALS

Beginning with a recap of the foundational breathing exercise described at the start of this lesson…

- **Place one hand on your chest. Keep your chest up and your ribs expanded.**
- **Place the other hand over your belly button. Feel your abdominal muscles expand as you breathe in. Keep your mouth and jaw relaxed.**
- **Then pull your lower abdominal muscles in and up as you breathe out.**
- **Repeat: a deep silent breath in, then a long steady hiss out.**
- **As you hiss out, count silently in your head, aiming to steadily increase that count over time.**

You might feel that expansion all the way round the waist. That's fine, but the focus should be on the expanding abdominals creating room for the dome-shaped diaphragm to descend. This creates a greater vacuum in the upper chest cavity that helps suck more air into your lungs. Counting in your head will encourage you to take in more air and let it out more slowly, ensuring that gradually, you are able to sustain longer and longer notes and lines.

The idea is to have more lung capacity than you need, to help mitigate the nerves and tension of performance. Nerves on the night can cause you to lose as much as half your breath.

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> **The abdominals are the power plant, doing the work of pushing the air out of your body while your head and neck and vocal cords remain relaxed.**

Another form of this breathing exercise is to add rhythmic accents to the hiss, pulling those muscles *in, in, in,* rather than exhaling in one fluid movement, all the while maintaining good body posture and neck alignment (see the video of David and Heidi doing vocal exercises for an example.)

As you hiss out, roll your head side to side keeping it loose and relaxed. Do this with and without accentuation.

Not only does this exercise help develop your breathing support muscles, it also focuses your mind on them consciously, putting you in touch with that controlled flow of breath from your mouth that is fundamental to all singing. The abdominals are the power plant, doing the work of pushing the air out of your body while your head and neck and vocal cords remain relaxed. The aim is for this combination of freedom and strength to be delegated to your muscle memory – to become second nature.

STRETCH YOUR VOCAL CORDS

- **Sing one long note – *heee* – on the roof of the mouth.**
- **No vibrato. Keep the note steady, feeling the vibrations against the hard palate, the roof of your mouth.**
- **Hold the note for as long as you can, focusing on the breathing support from your abdominals.**

This simple starter exercise does three important things: we're literally warming the voice by making sound; we're consciously connecting that sound to our breathing; and we're locating the correct **placement*** right up front at the roof of the mouth.

Try this exercise again on *hoo*, then on *hoe*; then on *hee, hah, hay* – try it on all the vowel sounds.

- **Repeat (on all vowels), with vibrato* (from the Italian for 'vibrate').**

Different music requires different levels of vibrato, but controlling those levels depends on keeping the mouth relaxed. Starting out, it can help to clasp your hands together and move them quickly back & forth to shake your body to trigger your vibrato to begin.

- **Repeat, but sliding from a lower to a higher pitch and back again, up and down, nice and loose.**
- **After a few slides, add vibrato to the final, lowest note.**
- **Repeat, while rolling the head side to side to keep the neck muscles relaxed.**
- **Next roll the shoulders.**
- **Then swing the arms.**
- **Keep everything loose and easy.**

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> Singers need to stretch their vocal cords just as dancers stretch their leg muscles.

- **Lengthen the slides to higher and lower notes, still running through all those vowel sounds.**
- **No need for vibrato, but keep rolling first the head, then the shoulders.**
- **Replace the vowel sounds with a hum – *hmmm*.**
- **Try it again, now with your tongue out.**

Longer slides help develop consistent forward placement of the voice, which makes it easier to hit the high notes and to transition between lower and upper voices (see next exercise). Humming ensures that the vibrations are placed high in the front of your face, the area referred to as the **mask***. Singing with the tongue out helps develop a muscle memory of not pulling the tongue backwards which is a bad habit many singers have.

- **Repeat, on the letter 'n' – *ennn* – feeling the buzz up high at the front of your face.**
- **Repeat on the word 'rung', which encourages your jaw to drop open and keeps the tip of your tongue down below your lower front teeth – *ruunnngg*.**
- **Watch yourself in the mirror and drop your jaw open as far as you comfortably can, relaxing it fully.**

TONGUE ROLLING

Some teachers refer to this exercise as 'tongue rolling' and others as 'tongue trilling', but they both mean the same thing which is to keep your tongue moving so it doesn't tighten or tense up or pull backwards. Not everyone can roll their tongue, but don't worry, it won't make or break your career either way! An alternative to rolling your tongue would be to sing on *zzz*.

LIP BUBBLING

- **Repeat, on *brr.* See Exercise 3 for further support.**
- **Repeat, moving your head, rolling your shoulders.**

I call this lip bubbling, because to me it sounds like bubbling water, but it's often referred to as the motorboat, because to others it sounds like a motorboat engine in the water. It helps keep your lips relaxed so that you can sing up and down your entire range without tensing up. This exercise helps develop a muscle memory of keeping your lips and facial muscles relaxed throughout your entire range.

HEAD, FALSETTO, MIXED & CHEST VOICE EXPLAINED!

Your 'head voice' is your higher voice range that is actually connected to your 'chest voice'. The middle area that transitions between these is often called the 'mixed voice' (where you're singing when 'in the mix') since it is a mix of both voices together. It is also known as the **passagio***, the Italian for passage, the area between the head and chest voices. The **falsetto*** voice has a distinctly different sound, it's high, breathy and light and is disconnected from the chest voice. Depending on the style of the music, sometimes we want a smooth, seamless transition between the two where we use the mix, but at other times we want a sudden, dramatic switch.

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SLIDING ON HEE

- **Start at the low point of your slide, very quietly, right up front on the roof of your mouth – *heee.***
- **Keep it light and easy as you move into your upper voice and right up to the high point – *heee-ee.***
- **Maintain the same ease and volume all through the slide, keeping the knees soft and relaxed, jaw and tongue loose.**

Try it on *rrr,* if you can, or on *zzz,* which has much the same effect on the tongue.

If you have trouble getting the feel of this, try to sing it even quieter, maybe even a little breathy. Think of the slide as a muted, sleepy yawn. Try bending forward as you go up in pitch, picturing the sound being pulled right out of the top of your head. Bending forward is associated with release and can help the brain associate high notes with ease and relaxation; the sense of falling counters the strain of reaching for the high notes.

If you are short of time, you can even do this in the shower, with the hot steam as an assist.

Another trick is, with clean hands, to sing *heee* while using two fingers to hold your two rows of teeth apart (without touching any part of your mouth or tongue). This can sometimes help make the slide smoother.

FALSETTO EXERCISES

After the slides, I like to work the upper voice.

First, a quick loosener.

- **Tilt your head down slightly.**
- **Roll it from side to side on *hoo-oo-oo-oo-oo.***
- **Keep your jaw dropped open vertically, but relaxed, using two fingers to separate the teeth if you want.**
- **Roll your shoulders. Swing your arms.**
- **As you get higher, yawn a little. Wiggle the jaw to keep things loose and comfortable.**

This exercise, as **demonstrated in the video**, moves in intervals – up down, up down, up down – rising steadily in pitch. It's a little longer, so takes a little more breath, and develops flexibility. Remember, you don't want to pull the tongue back in the mouth or tense it up; for the best tone quality, keep the tip of the tongue down behind your lower front teeth and arch it slightly upward in the middle. The more relaxed and loose you are, the more you free your voice, the more that vibrato will start to happen naturally as you sustain the final note. Pay attention to this when it happens; be mindful; and when it does, try to hold the note a little longer still to embrace the vibrato.

Only sing as high and low as you can without straining. Never let your voice fall to the back of your throat, where it will get muffled; keep it forward on the roof of your mouth. Aim a little higher each time you practise, but be patient. The underlying principle is never to force the voice, but to strengthen it – stretch it, let it go, liberate, release it.

EXERCISE

SINGING THROUGH A STRAW

This exercise uses a bottle and a straw. It can be done without the bottle, simply singing through the straw, but I prefer singing through the straw into water, which provides a slight resistance to the breath. Different size straws will provide useful variations. Long narrow straws (3mm) create more resistance, so it's best to start with a wider straw, then experiment with different sizes and different amounts of water in the bottle to see what feels most comfortable. It should never feel like you are working too hard to push the air through the straw.

- **Take a deep breath and blow bubbles through the straw into the water.**
- **Keep the facial muscles relaxed. Let the abdominal muscles do the work of supporting your breath, countering resistance from the water. This helps build muscle memory of keeping air continually flowing forward, because if you don't, the bubbles will simply stop.**
- **Next, simply hum through the straw into the water continuing to blow bubbles.**

This should feel soothing and often vocal therapists like to use it, or variations on the theme, to rehabilitate the voice in times of need.

- **Now add a melodic pattern* to the hum.**

When you are singing a low note on your way up to a higher note, make sure that your voice is already in a high placement so that you are ready for the high note when it comes and don't have to take any drastic action. This exercise does that work for you, but will be of even greater benefit if you keep that principle firmly in mind.

HOW MUCH BREATH TO USE

Some people need more breath support when they're singing higher notes; others need less. I found this apparent contradiction confusing as a young student, because it wasn't properly explained, but the simple truth is that it varies from person to person – we are all built differently, with different lung capacities – and sometimes even from song to song. This means you have to experiment to figure out what works best for you. It's like the gas or accelerator pedal on a car. No one can tell you how far to push that pedal down, because it depends on the strength of your ankle and the size of your engine. You simply have to feel your way and hone your skills through experience.

The key to singing high notes freely is to relax your outer neck muscles so they don't tighten around your larynx. Sometimes, when people push too much air through, it causes the outer neck muscles to become tense. However, the opposite can also be true, with other people needing extra breath support in order to relax the neck muscles. Remember to pay attention to how the different levels of breath support feel as well as how they sound when you are practising, in order to understand what levels work best for you.

THE SQUEAKY DOOR EXERCISE

There are many poetic names for my all-time favourite exercise for blending lower and upper voices: *the rusty hinge, the creaky door, the haunted house.* I call this vocalisation 'the squeaky door'. Interestingly – and given the sound, perhaps ironically – some people also find it soothing when the voice is hoarse.

- **Try it on *hmmm* and imagine that you are creating the sound right in the centre of your head.**
- **Aim for a high placement on the low note so you'll be in place and ready for the high note when you get to it.**
- **As you approach the upper voice, think thinner and narrower to help you sing through the transition – with a big, belting* sound the voice can become shouty, too heavy and crack into a falsetto.**

Things you can experiment with to help…

- **Add in a little cry, like you're pouting.**
- **Roll your head from side to side and relax the neck.**
- **Raise your arms in the air and drop them when singing high notes like you're sighing and letting go.**
- **Bump the back of your wrists up over your head, to keep your head forward while feeling that everything else is being lifted on the high notes.**
- **Relax your facial muscles.**
- **Keep thinking narrower and narrower as you get higher and higher.**
- **Pull in your abdominal muscles to give your breath more support.**
- **Clasp your hands together and move them back and forth to shake your whole body loose.**
- **Bend forward on the high note and come right back up again, hanging on to that feeling of falling forward.**
- **Add in a little yawn or sigh.**
- **Take the pressure off by singing with less volume.**

HALF SQUEAKY/HALF NORMAL EXERCISE

When you feel comfortable with the squeaky door, and are confident that you have learned how to place your voice right up front in your face, then you can move on to the next variation, which is half-squeaky, half-normal. The idea is to retain the benefit of the squeaky door sound while singing with a normal sound.

Build variation into your routine to ensure that your voice doesn't get into a rut. When something feels so easy that you no longer need to think about it, it's time to switch it up.

By now you should be familiar with the essential principles. Even as you work to extend the range and power and control of your voice, you should be feeling relaxed and having fun. That way you will not only sing better, but be ready for the movement required in performance by choreography and direction.

TAKEAWAYS

- **Singing takes effort, but performance must appear effortless.**
- **Vocal exercises develop strength, but also promote the relaxation in which that strength is grounded.**
- **Vocal exercises help develop the stamina that allows you to move expressively while singing.**





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POSTURE CHECKLIST

- **Your knees should be relaxed and soft, not locked tight.**
- **Your pelvis should curve slightly forward and the abdominal wall curve slightly inward (except when inhaling when you then need to let the abdominal wall slightly expand).**
- **Your chest should stay up and expanded, never collapsed.**
- **Your shoulders should hang comfortably and your back feel expanded with space between your shoulder blades.**
- **Your chin should be level, not pushed forward or upward or downward.**
- **The crown of your head should be the highest part of your body.**
- **Your body should be balanced on both heels and soles.**

GLOSSARY*

placement

noun

In singing, vibration or buzzing in different parts of the chest, throat and skull, produced by the vibration of the voice

vibrato

noun

An expressive musical effect consisting of a regular, pulsating variation in pitch

mask

noun

In singing, the front of the face, where the voice typically resonates in singing high notes

passaggio

noun

The transition area between chest (lower) and head (upper) voices

falsetto

noun

Singing in a higher than usual register relative to the natural voice

melodic pattern

noun

A sequence of musical notes or pitches that form a distinct and recognisable motif or phrase

belting

noun

Singing with a strong chest voice or strong chest/head mixed voice

05. How To Cool Down

A singer, just like any other athlete, needs to cool down after a big session. But the good news is that cool-downs can be very short. Essentially they are about checking in on placement and, where necessary, reestablishing good placement after the stress of performance. In other words, it's about rescuing the voice from the back of the throat and restoring it to the front of the face.

It's simple.

- **Say *um-hum*, like you're agreeing with my wise words.**
- **Now *um-hum me-me.***
- **Feel the vibrations right up front on the roof of your mouth.**
- **Try *may-yay-yay-yay-yay.***
- **Move your tongue but not your jaw.**

You can do this cool-down exercise on each vowel sound, but *mee* and *may* are the best to start with, as they are the easiest to bring forward. Do it full voice, as though speaking normally, but not too loud. Keep the range narrow – this is not about extension; it's about making sure that as you shift from singing to speaking, your voice stays in a healthy place. As always, roll your shoulders, move your head, keep it loose.

- **Say *blah-blah-blah-blah-blah.***
- **Keep it nasal, head forward and facial muscles relaxed.**

Whether you're speaking to friends and family after a show or greeting fans, you want to support your speaking voice just as you support your singing voice.

To demonstrate finding the right placement in the simplest possible way, say...

- ***Um-hum, hello.***
  Um-hum, please, come in.
  Um-hum, thanks for coming to the show.

It may feel a little silly or awkward at first, but focusing on this for twenty to thirty minutes after every performance, making sure you are speaking up front, will make a big difference to the overall health and resilience of your voice.

- ***Um-hum, thanks for coming.***
  Um-hum, that was a great lesson.
  Um-hum, this is a great course.

Never dismiss the cool-down. The cool-down is short and sweet. It's valuable and vital.

- ***Um-hum, see you later…***

TAKEAWAYS

- **We cool down after physical exercise. Singing is physical exercise. Therefore, we should cool down after singing.**
- **Cool-downs are about restoring good placement after the stresses and strains of performance. Stay hydrated!**
- **The amount and way we speak after singing will affect the health of our voice**.

Part 3 ~ Singing Techniques
06. Workshop

My focus for the workshop is simple. I want anyone who participates to enjoy it. But I also want you to come away with some useful information: practical vocal techniques that you can get started on right away with both immediate and long-term results.

Sometimes the smallest adjustment can have a big impact. It can really propel your performance forward.

We're all at different stages and on different levels. Some of us have never sung live to an audience; some of us have done so many times. That doesn't matter. What matters is that we all share a love of singing and we all want to improve. That's what inspires me as a voice teacher.

I've spent my whole life trying to help people reach their performance goals. And it's fair – though perhaps a little immodest – to say that I have had a lot of success, taking students from step one right through to the Grammy awards and beyond.

So who knows… If you take my advice, and if you practise and work hard, then you too may one day have a chance to shoot for the stars… But hey, if karaoke's your thing and you're happy with that, then that's all good with me.





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07. Bringing Lyrics To Life

For her workshop session, Brook Lord chooses **Still Hurting** *from* **The Last Five Years**. *She likes the story and character arc it describes, and feels it gives her scope for expression both vocally and dramatically.*

Eric coaches Brook to tell the story of the song through changes in tempo and dynamics. During the climax, he notices her mouth is tight, so suggests an exercise to help relax her mouth and improve her tone, allowing her to give strength to the emotional peak of the song.

You have a beautiful voice. You start with a slight smile, which is great, because the listener isn't necessarily familiar with the melancholy of the song and it gives you room to switch the mood as the story unfolds. You could perhaps let a little more agitation come through as your irritation with Jamie increases.

Because that is their relationship, right? Jamie is just fine – but you are not fine at all. I want to feel that. The audience wants to feel that. We want to feel what you are feeling. We want the vicarious pleasure of relating that emotion back to times in our own lives when we haven't felt fine either.

Your mouth seems a little closed. Try opening it a little more. Keep it casual at the start, almost conversational, to go with that smile. Jamie is over and Jamie is gone, but we don't yet experience the full emotion of that. This works to build the drama when you sing the song as a solo piece, divorced from the show itself, which would of course provide context.





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Brook goes again from the beginning.

Now the song has come alive, but I feel the second half of the verse could be stronger, perhaps from the words 'Jamie arrived at the end of the line'. Open your voice up a little and pick up the tempo – not to the point of being climactic, but to start building in that direction.

Then comes the question – 'What about you?' – and the slight reproach of 'swore to be true'. You're going softer here, which in many ways makes sense musically, but keep it strong and passionate, to set up a dramatic shift to the quiet pain of 'I'm still hurting' – so what about me? The contrast ramps up the emotion.

None of us like Jamie at this point, with all his secrets he doesn't confide, and we want to feel that bitterness and sense of betrayal coming through.

You use plenty of body language, which is great. But be careful when you lean forward not to tilt your head up, because this tenses your neck and compromises your voice. You can do it briefly, but otherwise – face forward. You want to stand up straight and strong as you finally speak your truth. You've kept that truth contained for a long time, not least because Jamie is the type who thinks only of himself, but here, at last, you're compelling him – and us – to listen.

When you get it right, it gives me the chills.

Here's an exercise you can use to vary your practise. Try singing the whole song on *mah mah mah* or *wah wah wah* to help relax your jaw and keep it more open. Try it on the melody to 'Give me a day, Jamie', dropping your jaw exaggeratedly, more than you think you should, so that when you return to normal there's more looseness there, which will help with the tone. You need to give your voice more room to shine.

In general, you want to open up your body in an explosive release of emotion. Not only will that enhance your communication with the audience, it will mean that you yourself have more energy and feel less tired.

In short, keep your head straight, rather than tilting it upward, and open your mouth!

TAKEAWAYS

- **Small changes can make big differences.**
- **Contrast helps to create emotion. Audiences want to experience emotion vicariously.**
- **Always keep the neck, mouth and jaw relaxed and open.**

08. Making Riffs Meaningful

Antonio Fernandez, who sings in many voices, chooses **Ev'rybody Wants To Be A Cat** *from* **The Aristocrats**, *'because for me jazz is home'. Antonio did vocal jazz in college and sang this song with the band DCappella for Disney Records.*

Eric coaches Antonio to add emotion and storytelling to his riffs.

Your connection to the song comes across. I feel it could be even looser, perhaps through your body language, and there could be some bigger dynamics towards the end. I want it to build more. It's jazz, so the dynamic changes won't be as great as in musical theatre, but I'd like a few more ups and downs – the soft a little softer and the loud a little louder. You know what cats are like: one second they're racing around and the next they're all stillness and stealth. Or maybe they're sleeping.

Antonio goes again.

We're going to try something different. That little melodic **lick*** or run or **riff*** before the song even starts – I want you to play with it. I want to know what that riff means. I want it to tell me something, even without any words. You can imagine some words if you like, but I want to feel what you're trying to say without even hearing them. Are you flirtatious? If so, I want to feel that twinkle in your eye and hear it in your voice.

Keep playing with it. Add in little snatches to surprise us here and there, especially towards the end. It adds spontaneity, like you were singing in a club, interacting with the audience, and can really heighten the song and bring it to life.

This should come to you quite naturally because of your background in jazz, where very often you're using your voice instrumentally, **scatting***, and you really do have to tell a story or communicate a feeling with no words.

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TAKEAWAYS

- **Riffs restore the element of surprise and discovery to familiar, popular tunes.**
- **You can tell a story even without words.**
- **Adding imaginary words to riffs can help develop your ability to tell a story through music alone.**

GLOSSARY*

lick

noun

A short, repeated motif or phrase in the melody or accompaniment of a musical composition

riff

noun

A short, repeated motif or phrase in the melody or accompaniment of a musical composition

scatting

noun

In jazz, vocal improvisation with wordless syllables

09. Articulation & Diction

Mason and Julez are brothers, a young duo from Australia. They choose to play a song they have written together, called **Ice Cold Thing**.

Eric gives them exercises to help with their articulation and diction, so that people listening to the song for the first time can follow the story.

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I feel you could give it more oomph from the start, especially when you go from the verse to the chorus. When I asked you to describe the song, you said it's about a relationship with a girl who's afraid to fully open up to you; that the verse tells the story of past disappointments and the chorus promises that you'll be there for her no matter what. That means the chorus should be strong, to make the girl feel safe and give her belief. It needs more breath support and more volume.

The second verse follows much the same pattern, trying to convince her that she can count on you, so again it needs to be that bit more assertive, with maybe a more aggressive emphasis on the rhythm.

Mason and Jules run the song again.

Much better, but you're still letting the ends of lines drift off, which means we sometimes lose the lyric, which is a shame, because you – and we – are invested in it. So when you decrescendo that's fine, but don't overdo it; don't waste the words by simply throwing them away. You both need to open your mouth more.

I suggest you try this particular exercise. Take a word with several syllables and strong consonants: it could be 'wiggly' or 'giggily' or 'jiggily'. Sing on that word, articulating it with exaggerated clarity, with real punch. Keep the mouth and jaw relaxed while maximising breath support to your voice. When you feel comfortable, increase the speed. Then increase it again.

This should help get your lips going and bring more energy to your delivery of the song. You can build that energy even more by walking briskly as you sing.

It's especially important to bring crisp articulation to a song your audience hasn't heard before. It doesn't matter so much with a song we all know, that has been streamed thousands and thousands of times or played and replayed over decades. With a new song, the words need to draw us in, and for that to happen, we have to be able to hear them. If the listener can't quite capture the words, or at least the majority of them, there's a higher risk of them tuning out.

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TAKEAWAYS

- **Don't waste the words of your song – make sure the listener can hear them.**
- **New or unfamiliar songs require special attention to clarity.**
- **Consonants matter – they keep things crisp.**

10. Connecting With Your Emotions

It's great to have a beautiful voice that people will want to listen to. It's also great to have terrific technique, so that people thrill to the amazing things you can do with that beautiful voice. But what matters most of all is how your voice makes people feel.

It's emotion that captures the audience and lingers longest in the memory. Sincerity and authenticity matter. The listener must be convinced that what you are singing is important to you and is what you are feeling in the moment.

WRITE AN ESSAY

Consider by way of example a song that you didn't write, which for most of us is probably most songs. You've chosen to sing it. You love it and you relate to it, but you didn't write it. I suggest that you sit down and write an entire essay on why you wrote that song, even though, in fact, you didn't. It doesn't matter if no one ever reads that essay; it really helps to think through and spell out what it means to you and how it connects to your own lived experience.

I wrote this song because my partner left me or my dog died, and I was devastated. I had to work through that devastation. I had to externalise it. It was cathartic for me to write those lyrics and sing them from my heart.

Don't be afraid of 'owning' particular words and phrases and explaining why you 'wrote' them.

This doesn't contradict the principle of authenticity. Because in singing someone else's words you are not merely interpreting but recreating them, which means effectively rewriting them and making them your own. Without you, those words would not be heard in that precise and particular way.

Most songs deal in universal emotions with a personal twist (hence the common phrase 'a universal chord'). You want to tap into those, so that the audience can tap into them too, and experience or relive them vicariously.

Even if you are the original writer of the song it can help to explore your feelings about it in writing: how you felt when you wrote it and how you feel about those same things now.

> **What matters most of all is how your voice makes people feel.**

CREATE AN ACTING PARTNER

Another useful approach is to double-space the lyrics on the page and imagine a silent acting partner asking questions between the lines that you then go on to answer. It doesn't work with all songs, but when it does it really pays off, because the audience can somehow sense that dynamic, responsive interaction that comes through in your performance. That imaginary dialogue could be tender, supportive, challenging or combative; regardless, it helps you to be more present in the song, to live and breathe it with greater energy and immediacy. It animates the song, and that animation will be visible – as well as audible – to the listener.

ASK QUESTIONS

A third strategy is to list a series of questions, whether about the origins of the song or its performance.

- ***WHY & WHEN DID YOU WRITE THIS SONG?***
- ***WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS SONG TO SING?***
- ***WHO ARE YOU WHEN YOU ARE SINGING THIS SONG – YOURSELF OR A CHARACTER?***
- ***ARE YOU SINGING ABOUT SOMEONE YOU KNOW OR THAT YOU USED TO KNOW WELL?***
- ***WHY HAVE YOU CHOSEN TO SING ABOUT THESE THOUGHTS NOW?***
- ***HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN YOU ARE SINGING THIS SONG AND IS IT CATHARTIC FOR YOU?***
- ***WHAT IS THE BACK STORY TO THE SONG?***
- ***WHAT LEAD UP TO THIS MOMENT?***
- ***WHAT WAS YOUR EMOTIONAL STATE WHEN YOU WROTE IT (OR CHOSE IT)?***

The more questions you ask and answer will help you connect with your songs in a deeper way.

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KEEPING IT FRESH

This works well for a new song, to help you dig deep into its meaning. But it works equally well for an old song, to refresh your relationship to it, lest familiarity should breed contempt.

A few years ago I went to see a singer I had loved for many years. I hadn't worked with her and I didn't know her personally; I just loved her songs. One love song in particular was my very favourite. I couldn't wait for her to sing it. I was right up front, a few feet from her on stage. But when the moment finally came, her performance was entirely devoid of emotion – she sang it like a robot! I realised later that having sung the song for years and years she had lost touch with it, and had neglected to find a way of rekindling her passion and bringing it alive in the present.

You must nurture your relationship with a beloved song, just as you must nurture your relationships with family and friends.

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TAKEAWAYS

- **Audiences may forget the title or words of a song – they won't forget how a song made them feel.**
- **Audiences will only feel something if the singer does too.**
- **Sometimes you need to work at your relationship with a song to sustain it over many performances.**

11. Strengthen Your Lower Register

Anna Dubac chooses to sing **Plot Twist**, *a song she has written herself. Broadway fan Zephen Peter sings* **Home** *from* **The Wiz**, *because he grew up listening to it and credits it for his love of musical theatre.*

Eric leads Anna and Zephen through a series of vocal exercises to help strength their lower registers.

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ANNA

Right from the start there are parts that go very low, and what you really need are some exercises that will help strengthen your voice on those notes.

First, you should attend to placement. Try singing the opening on *wee-wee-wee* or *may-may-may* to get it up front in your mouth, right on the roof. A microphone will pick that up very effectively. Try adding in more breath support from the abdominals. I want you to be able to project without a microphone too.

Then go back to the words, keeping the good placement. Articulate the consonants clearly.

Next try it on *wah-wah-wah*, dropping your jaw and really opening up your voice. Keep the breath support strong.

Then back to the words again, maintaining all that openness and strength.

The song has a big range, so I suggest working specifically on singing in the mix – that point at which you transition from lower to upper voice and back again. The squeaky door exercise is perfect or this, singing on *mmm* in steps – always aiming high, even on the lower note, but thinning out the voice the higher you go. You could start on A-flat then work up in half-steps to a high C, feeling it up in the front of your face, as though it's being pulled straight up out of your head.

Then go back to practising the song itself – half squeaky door, half normal.

You have a slight tendency to tense up your mouth. So I would also suggest trying exercises that keep your mouth vertical, like singing *mum-mum-mum*, again moving up and down in half steps. That should gradually train you not to spread or tighten your mouth.

Given the improvement in such a short session, imagine the progress that can be made by practising these things every day!

Microphone technique is easy to learn but like all things, takes practice. The most important principle is that when you are singing high or loud notes you should push the microphone a little further from your mouth, and when you are singing low or quiet notes you should bring the microphone a little closer to your mouth. The rule of thumb is to have it between one and two inches from your lips. Too close, and you'll get plosive pops from the consonants or a strong burst of air; too far away, and it won't pick up your voice as it should. Tilt the microphone towards your mouth so that your voice projects into it and not over it. Try not to tap or cover the grill with your hand because those things will distort the sound.

There are many kinds of microphones and it takes experimentation to figure out which type works best with your voice. Some are omnidirectional, which means they capture sounds from all directions; others are unidirectional, which means they only capture the sound that is right in front of the microphone. The latter are often preferred by singers because they are better at isolating a specific sound; they are ideal for live performances or any type of performance or recording where you want the voice to be the main focus.

You need to be able to hear your own voice when you are singing with a band, orchestra or backing track. If you can't, you run the risk of pushing your voice too hard in order to hear yourself, which can wreak havoc on your vocal cords (and your tuning). Finding the right balance is therefore essential. I advise all my singers to devise some hand gestures that allow them to discreetly signal the sound crew if they need to tweak the mix in the middle of a show. Some mics have a button you can push to speak directly to the people at the sound board (without the audience hearing) but have the hand gestures ready in case you need to let the crew know that you need something different in your in-ear monitors while you're in the middle of a song.

ZEPHEN

I know you were deliberately singing soft on the low notes, but – just as with Anna – I feel that with better voice placement you could get those parts clearer and stronger. At the moment your placement is a little far back, which is muffling your voice.

I'd like you to practise singing on *mee-mee-mee*. Then, as if you were agreeing with me, take a deep breath and go: *um-hm. Um-hum mee-mee.*

Immediately, that brings your voice further forward. If you do that placement exercise every day, that part of your range will soon get stronger. You can still sing quietly, but with a richer, fuller sound. The lower part of your voice will be more on a level with the upper.

It would also be worth trying the same thing on *may-may-may*. Keep your head relaxed by rolling it slightly from side to side. Keep the sound nasal, right at the roof of your mouth. Take two fingers and hold your teeth open, then try singing *hee* – it's tricky, but will really develop those lower notes. Start with *mee* if that's easier.

Whatever the range, remember to reach slightly beyond it. If you can vocalise both higher and lower than you need to for the song you plan to sing, that will give you confidence, and a buffer, going into performance. If you're sick, or just plain tired, you can still tell yourself: *I can do this, because it's not my lowest note and it's not my highest.*

We've already encountered these basic principles and techniques in our foundational lesson on warming up, and you can see how we keep returning to them and how integral they are to every aspect of practice.

At first, when you swap out the lyrics for vowel sounds, it can be difficult to sustain the melody. But trust me: when you go back to the real thing, the words will fall far more easily and clearly into place.

When you get to the bigger, dramatic section – 'Tell us should we try and stay or should we run away?' – I want you to really go for it. Drop your jaw, open up your mouth, expand your lungs. Make room for the big song that this is for you. Make room for all that meaning. Bring all the history of when you first heard it, and when you first saw the show, and when you first realised you wanted to do musical theatre. Bring all that into the song with you.

It's God you're addressing at this point, with a whole string of desperate, yearning questions. Do you know the answer to them? No. You don't. Not yet. Maybe you never will. I want to hear that in your voice: that the entreaty is real and the questions are genuine. The audience wants to hear that too; they want to empathise. They are searching just as you are, and they too are confused, bewildered, uncertain.

Try adding in a few surprise riffs, because this is a very familiar song, and exploit the contrasts. For example, double down on the driving, *bam-bam-bam* rhythm of 'I have learned' and then, in the following lines, revel in the smooth, soaring notes that speak of love and home.

Don't be afraid to move. You're a natural at it. Take up as much space as you want. It's your stage, no one else's. It's yours to command.





TAKEAWAYS

- **Never forget the importance of healthy placement.**
- **Always go back to the warm-ups.**
- **Aim to vocalise beyond your range, at both lower and upper extremes. Always gently, never straining.**

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12. Connect Your Head & Chest Voice

Ashley Dietrich chooses **Meadowlark** *from* **The Baker's Wife**, *because she likes the emotional journey the character goes on in the song.*

Eric coaches Ashley through multiple vocal exercises to help her transition between her chest and head voices, including his favourite – the squeaky door.

I love this song too, and we could spend days working on it. At the moment I feel there is a bit of a gap between your head and your chest voices that could do with smoothing out. In fact, it might be worth bringing the song down a whole tone, to take it more out of the soprano range. Let's try it in the key of D.

If you're auditioning for something, you need to go in with a song that really shows off your voice. And you need to decide which voice that is. If there is too much back and forth between the upper and lower voices, which is a risk with a song like this, that could cause confusion as to where you fit in. If you want to sing *Meadowlark*, I suggest you transpose it. If you want to sing soprano, then I'd suggest a different song – you could maybe start by browsing a dedicated anthology. I wouldn't pick a song that's between voices.

Meantime, I'd focus on developing your range. At age eighteen your voice is still so flexible. I suspect you have more range and versatility to your voice than you think you have, but like so many of us, you're a little lacking in self-belief.

So, as I've already counselled in earlier lessons, it's about prioritising exercises that prevent you from spreading your mouth and retrain you to keep it vertical: with your head and neck relaxed. Exercises on *mah* and *mum* and *yum*, and the squeaky door, with the hinge that needs oiling, will teach you to focus your voice right in the centre of your head and will help you get comfortable singing in your mixed voice. Start quiet – you can work on the volume later.

> **If you're auditioning for something, you need to go in with a song that really shows off your voice.**

It's a matter of degrees. Sometimes you want more head in the mix, sometimes more chest. But you want to be able to choose either with confidence. You don't want to limit yourself, especially when you're blessed with a beautiful voice. Right now the song sounds a little disjointed. If you can develop a strong mixed voice, that is a blend of the two you have now, it could open up a whole new world. And you won't even have to change your chosen key!

Remember that you can also practise correct placement in normal speech. I notice in conversation that you have a tendency to lapse into **vocal fry*** and speak from the back of your throat. If you bring your speaking voice up to the front of your face, and make that a habit, it will reinforce your vocal training and eventually become second nature in singing too. The '*um-hm, hello, come in*' exercise we learned as a way of cooling down the voice is perfect for this **(see Lesson 5)**.

It might seem counter-intuitive, but controlling the placement of your voice is the best means of setting it free.

TAKEAWAYS

- **If your range is limited, while you work on extending it, it can help to consider a change of key.**
- **Healthy placement can be practised in normal speech.**
- **Dedicated anthologies can be a good source of repertoire songs.**

GLOSSARY*

vocal fry

noun phrase

A way of speaking that is low in pitch and has a rough, hoarse sound, often regarded as a mannerism

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13. Strengthen Your Upper Register

Eydie Alyson is an experienced singer. She has sung in **Les Misérables** *and* **The Little Shop of Horrors**, *each for runs of several years. Eric chooses her song,* **Almost Like Being in Love**, *by way of demonstrating the high soprano register.*

Eric helps Eydie with keeping her high notes open and in a good placement.

You sing it so well, but there are moments when I feel you could give it more breath support and make it more pingy up front. 'Pingy' being a technical term in singing.

To be honest, 'ping' is just another way of talking about the right forward placement. If you can secure this even in the low notes, like we did in our warm-up slides earlier, then your voice won't crack as it transitions from the chest to the head. If you get to that pingy place – that *ping-ing-ing* right up front – then you can go all the way up to the top of your range without making any noticeable changes at all. But it's got to be nice and forward – you can't ping at the back of your throat.

Ping cuts through. The bass drum may be the big boy of the marching band, but what really cuts through is the piccolo. It's the same in singing: a bass baritone might make the room shake, and you might feel that through the soles of your feet, but it's the soprano voice that draws your attention.

In short, 'ping' is a good word to remind you of good, forward, healthy placement. It applies as much to the low notes as the high.

When people tell me they're having trouble with a particular point in a song, I always make them start at the beginning, because how you sing the first note is going to make a difference to the note in the middle and the one at the end. Each note follows on from the last, which means starting correctly in a good placement is the fundamental secret to success.

Almost Like Being in Love is from ***Brigadoon***, a musical by Lerner and Loewe. Nowadays it's rare for a Broadway song to be made famous by a pop star, but this song has been reinterpreted by so many different people over the years because the lyrics are so relatable. It's still a great song to choose for an audition today.

Find your ping by working those vocal exercises on *he-eee* and *wo-ooo* and *wee-ooo* and *aaa-waa*, as demonstrated in **Lesson 4**. You'll need some big breaths and plenty of air!

TAKEAWAYS

- **Make sure your soprano voice pings, even on the lowest notes.**
- **Everything flows from the first note – it's crucial to get that note pinging.**
- **If you start in the right placement, you can transition from chest to head voice without any cracks.**

14. Freeing Your High Notes

Rachel Kellum chooses to sing **Don't Talk Me Down** *because she grew up listening to JoJo. She explains how R&B has helped her transition from classical music to musical theatre and pop.*

Eric notices her tight jaw and neck muscles are affecting her tone and pitch so gives her guidance to help release her tension, improve her tuning and enable her to soar over the high notes!

It sounds great. But I'm concerned that you're doing certain things that you can get away with now, but that as time goes on are going to make singing harder for you. So that's what we're going to work on.

It's not as though you have to strain to reach those high notes. In fact, if you release the tension from your neck and relax your jaw, you will reach them more easily. Specifically, I feel there is too much tension in your neck. A simple way of reducing it is to keep your head facing more forward. If you can reduce that tension, it will help you a lot in the future.

There are a couple of notes that aren't quite in tune. Again, I think that's related to tension. As you go up in pitch, focus on keeping your mouth open and your tongue relaxed. Let's try it both with the piano and **a cappella*** (from the Italian for 'in the style of a chapel choir').

Some of the tension I'm noticing is probably related to nerves, and simply wanting to do well and give your best. But if you can relax the neck and face muscles, and let the breath support do its work, then you should feel confident that you are on solid ground.

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> Let the breath support do its work, then you should feel confident that you are on solid ground.

If you can do all that, you're golden – the emotion just flows through you and out through your voice.

Quite often I see singers singing with their mouths spread open wide. Not only is this likely to produce a constricted tone, it will also tense the neck. A subtle version of smiling is sometimes encouraged by vocal producers when a singer is sounding a little flat in the recording studio as a quick fix for the pitch; no problem, so long as it doesn't become a habit – because that habit can be hard to break. However as I explained before, we are all different and not everyone will be affected by a wide mouth, but the majority of singers are.

Spreading the mouth wide on the highest notes can make them more difficult to sing, especially as time goes by. If done persistently, it can even cause the throat to close. When singing high notes, try to keep your mouth in a loose, relaxed, vertical oval, easy and comfortable. It can be helpful to think subtly in terms of yawning, as if you were just getting sleepy; this opens up the back of your throat to allow free passage to the sound.

TAKEAWAYS

- **Trying too hard can be counterproductive – you have to relax!**
- **Keeping the head facing forward naturally reduces tension in the neck.**
- **Dropping the jaw open (vertically, not horizontally) reduces tension in the mouth and tongue.**





GLOSSARY*

a cappella

adjective

Singing unaccompanied by a musical instrument

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15. Singing Large Intervals

Todd Eagan chooses **Can't Blame Me For Trying**. *He likes the way it begins with everyday experiences that everyone can relate to and then shifts into speaking about bigger, timeless themes, allowing for dramatic development and contrast. He talks about how it might fit between up-tempo numbers in a show, creating space for emotional engagement with the audience.*

Eric coaches Todd through the importance of breath support when preparing for a high note that seem to jump out of nowhere, while teaching an exercise to help psychologically prepare for large interval jumps.

I would tone it down at the beginning so it has more room to grow. If you start out relaxed and conversational on the verse, soft and **legato*** (from the Italian for 'linked' or 'tied together'), then you have scope for a bigger dynamic change in the chorus.

Then after that chorus you should bring it back down again and then build it back up. What you want is ebb and flow, rather than one-note, steady-state intensity and emotion.

There are a couple of irregular rhythms in there, due to the added **measure*** (bar) right before the chorus, and this could throw you off rhythmically if you're not careful.

Open your mouth more. Your mouth is a little closed. You've got to take deep breaths, give the song support with your whole body, release it.

> **The thing to focus on is keeping your mouth and jaw relaxed.**

Bring it full circle at the end. Drop down an octave for *'Can't change how a river flows'*; make it really soft, then build again, opening up your body on the **bridge***, build to a really big **crescendo*** (from the Italian for 'growing') for the climax. Maybe you can build in a little run or riff on the way. The key thing is to think the dynamic shifts through from beginning to end so you know exactly what you want to do.

There's a very high note that you have to sing a few times almost out of nowhere. You want to hit that high G without tensing up, which I can tell for you means you have to give it extra support. My advice is to practise this exercise daily: put one hand on your abdominal muscles and the other hand on your chest, take a deep breath and go *ss-ss-ss-ss-ss-ss-ss*. That will help you get used to pulling the abdomen in a little harder, which in turn will help push that note out.

The other thing to focus on is keeping your mouth and jaw relaxed. Try raising your arms in the air and dropping them again on the high note – the association with sighing will let the air to flow more freely.

TAKEAWAYS

- **Make room for ebb and flow, loud and soft, to create dramatic contrast.**
- **Sudden jumps in pitch require additional breath support.**
- **Simulated sighing triggers the muscle memory of relaxation!**

GLOSSARY*

legato

noun

In music, to play or sing smoothly, without breaks between notes

measure (US) / bar (UK)

noun

In musical notation, a segment of music bounded by vertical lines known as bar lines

bridge

noun

In popular Western music, a contrasting section that prepares for an emotive return to original material

crescendo

noun

In music, an increase, usually graduated, in volume and intensity

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16. Improving Your Pitch

Audiences are surprisingly sensitive to pitch. You can get away with being a little hoarse or a little tired; you can be a little off rhythm or make a mistake with the lyrics, but singing out of tune? Nobody wants to hear that. It just doesn't fly.

Many things can affect a singer's pitch.

Singing flat (a little below pitch) can be caused by inadequate breath support, but also by incorrect vocal placement.

> Experiment with various placements, recording yourself and then listening back. You will not only feel, but begin to hear the difference.

Try this experiment to see what I mean: sing *hee* on a note in the middle of your range, but at the back of your throat. Then sing it again, bringing it forward, so that you feel the vibrations against the roof of your mouth. Experiment with various placements, recording yourself, and listening back. You will not only feel but begin to hear the difference.

Singing sharp (a little above pitch) can be caused by excess tension in the vocal cords, as described in Lesson 14, but also by excessive breath support. Either way the solution is to relax your throat to find the balance that your voice needs.

Here are some other ways to work on improving your pitch.

SLOW DOWN

The first is to slow things down, whether a single line that you continually have trouble with, or the whole song. This can be especially useful with a fast song. Break it down and really get to know it intimately, note by note. Get a **metronome***, or a metronome app, set it to a slow click, sing along with that and then speed it up incrementally, one notch at a time. By the time you get back to normal tempo you may find you've ironed out the issues with your pitch.

Once you've mastered that practice, you can also use the metronome to sing the song slightly faster than you plan to. Once you slow it back down you'll find it's easier to sing the notes in tune and your riffs & runs will be easier to execute.

SING WITH A KEYBOARD/RECORD YOURSELF

Another thing you can do is to practise with a keyboard, preferably electronic, because acoustic pianos are temperamental and go out of tune so easily. You don't need to be a pianist; you just have to be able to pick out the melody (even better if you have a friend or fellow band member to play it for you). Play slowly, singing along, matching each pitch as closely as you can to the keyboard. Record yourself – on your smart phone is fine – and then listen back. Keep doing it until you are confident of improvement.

If you are in fact a pianist, then sing as you play the melody of the entire song, once again recording yourself and listening back.

Annotate the sheet music, to remind you which spots need special care and attention, and to alert you ahead of time.

There is software that will literally match your voice to a digital read-out to show you exactly where you are going sharp or flat. Not all such software is expensive. Use it, if digital is your thing; watch the waves, listen hard and keep practising. In this way, seeing can help with hearing.

At a more advanced level, you can also use a **loop machine*** to record a line of melody and then sing harmony over it – maybe several different harmonies, layered one on top of the other. This can sharpen up your ears.

> Annotate the sheet music, to remind you which spots need special care and attention, and to alert you ahead of time.

HOW TO MAKE HIGH AND LOW NOTES FEEL EASIER

Replacing the lyrics with vowel sounds is a great way to free your voice We've done a lot of this already, singing on *wee-wee-wee* or *woo-woo-woo* for correct placement, and on *wah-wah-wah* or *woe-woe-woe* to promote openness and relaxation. *Wee* and *woo* are especially good for practising verses, which tend to be lower; if you take them down a half step so they are lower still, and work on bringing the sound forward to the front of your mouth for strength, it's going to feel great when you revert to the normal pitch. Conversely, if you can get comfortable singing the chorus after transposing it up a half step higher, then when you bring it back down to the normal key it will feel so much easier than before.

Singing on vowels is an efficient way to develop your voice and improve your range and helps you to really learn a melody. It also helps with tuning, because zooming in on a single, repeated vowel sound takes all the distraction out of the song – the meaning of the words, the jumble of different letters and sounds, the emotional connection – and may help you hear your pitch more clearly and fine-tune it more precisely.

TAKEAWAYS

- **Singing in tune is a non-negotiable.**
- **Break the song down and strip it back to its bare essentials, so you can focus purely on pitch.**
- **There are mechanical and electronic aids you can use to work independently on improving your tuning.**

GLOSSARY*

metronome

noun

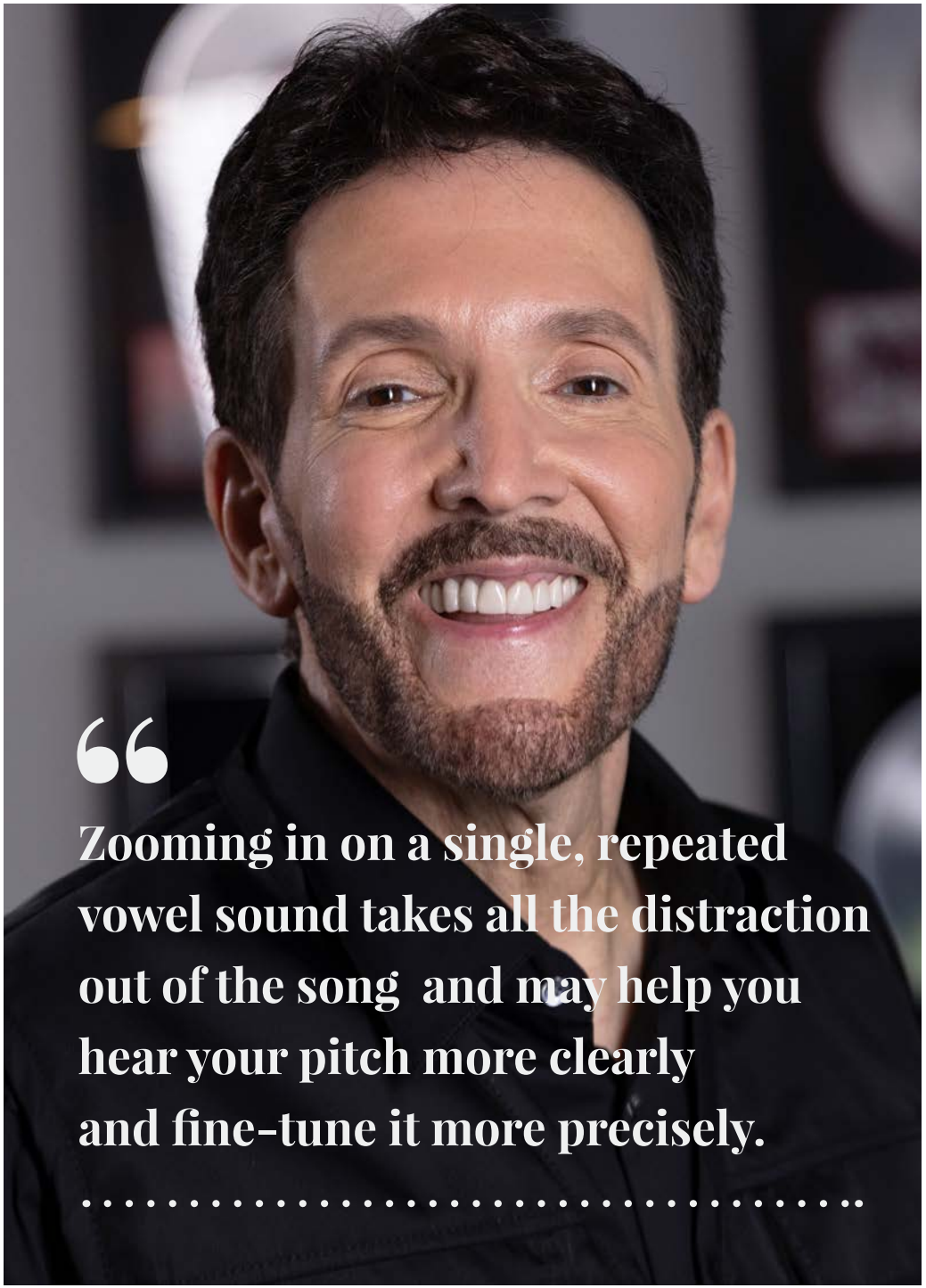
A mechanical or electronic device used by musicians to mark time and keep the beat at a selected rate by producing a regular tick

loop machine

compound noun

An electronic device that enables you to record and then repeat a segment of music, long or short, indefinitely

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17. Breath Support

Faust chooses to sing **Remind Me**, *which he has written himself. This is Faust's first public performance… ever!*

Eric notices that Faust is taking very shallow breaths. He coaches him through how to engage his breath support to help the audience hear the words.

I know you've sung a little on Instagram and TikTok, but otherwise only for your family – and we all know family can sometimes be the hardest to impress. I'm certainly impressed – there was no sign at all of you crumbling and falling through the floor!

You need to give your voice more support. Take in deeper breaths. Open your mouth more. Some of the time you're almost mumbling, which is frustrating, because we really want to hear the words. This is important whatever the song, but as I told Mason and Jules, it's especially important with a song we don't know. The lyrics are a vital point of connection between singer and audience. How can the audience invest in something they can't even hear? That places massive pressure on the emotive power of the music alone.

Over the longer term, you need to work on developing the strength of your voice, starting with correct placement at the front of your mouth, right up on the roof of your mouth which is called your hard palate. Consistently practicing your vocal exercises witll develp your voice so work them into your daily schedule!

You're at the age where boys' voices change. People tend to assume that this happens all at once, in one big change where the voice drops down an octave, but it usually goes on for a while, as testosterone production increases. Some young men's voices don't settle until they hit their early twenties.

> **The lyrics are a vital point of connection between singer and audience.**

PUBERTY

When a boy goes through puberty the larynx grows larger and the vocal cords lengthen and thicken, which creates a deeper tone quality and lower range. The voice will often crack as the vocal chords adjust to their new size, and range may be temporarily limited (sometimes the falsetto voice disappears completely for a while). Throughout this challenging period, a boy should have a voice teacher who is familiar with this process and vigilant in tailoring vocal exercises accordingly, and everyone involved (teachers, coaches, parents, managers, directors) must be willing to exercise patience, creativity and empathy.

Female voices are also developing through those teenage years, though the changes are less dramatic, and so require similar care and sensitivity.

I once worked with a well-known singer whose voice, every few months, would suddenly feel weaker. He was really confused. I was FaceTiming him on tour, and each time this happened I would ask: 'Did you grow more?' He just kept on growing, and each time he had a growth spurt his vocal cords changed. Then his voice would suddenly feel different to him, like someone else's voice, and he felt like he didn't know what he was doing any more. But, with constant practice and good technique, he got through it beautifully.

It's not all plain sailing once your voice begins to change – it's likely to keep on changing for quite some time. The only way to mitigate this is to focus on finding the right placement and building strength and flexibility through regular vocalising.

TAKEAWAYS

- **Breathe deep, not shallow.**
- **Invest in the words and meaning of your song. That way your audience will too.**
- **Guard against hormonal change by strengthening the overall fitness and flexibility of your voice.**

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18. Beware Of Self-Criticism

Fred Tallaksen is a choreographer. He's been choreographing shows for stars like Madonna for the past twenty-five years, with four Emmy nominations to his name. But he started out as a singer in Broadway musicals, performing in ***Cats, Jesus Christ Superstar*** *and* ***Starlight Express****. Now Fred wants to get back to his roots. He chooses* ***Open Arms*** *by Journey, which is a love song, but for him represents the mantra of staying open to new possibilities.*

Eric coaches Fred in avoiding self-criticism as he performs, and ways he can practise without losing confidence.

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Years ago my good friend Diane Warren wrote a song called ***Because You Loved Me***, which was performed by Celine Dion. Everyone assumed it was a love song but in fact she wrote it for her father – so a love song of a different kind. Which just goes to prove the point that you can put your own interpretation on a song. What matters is what it means to you, and that you somehow make it your own.

I know you've been singing it in the shower, but that's not the same as vocalising… You need to get back into the routine of doing daily vocal exercises. Let's face it, you wouldn't be happy if your dancers just messed around with their dance moves in the shower. You want them to do their stretching at home, then arrive thirty minutes early, warm-up and be ready to go. I want exactly the same thing from you.

So rule number one for returning singers, as indeed for all singers: start warming up and keep warming up! Warm-up every day. Make it a habit. You won't regret it. You're a little rusty. You need to blow away the cobwebs. In singing, as in life, that can soon be fixed.

Your mouth was a little tight, which is understandable because you're out of practice and you were worrying about forgetting the words. Right now, the words are not a priority. What you want is to keep the sound flowing, which means opening your mouth more, relaxing your tongue, and taking deeper breaths to support your voice.

Something we can all take from this session is what I could read in your eyes. I could see that you weren't very happy with how you were doing – your eyes were giving me a running commentary on your performance the whole time you were singing.

This reminds me of a story Stephen Schwartz (who wrote ***Meadowlark***) told us in class way back when. He said that over many years of writing many musicals and even more songs, he had never once experienced writer's block. Then one day, out of the blue, suddenly he did. He consulted a writer friend for advice, and his friend said: 'Oh, I can fix that. The problem is that you've become a critic too soon – you're critiquing yourself as you write. You absolutely cannot critique yourself as you write.'

Nor can you afford to critique yourself as you sing. Afterwards yes, when you listen back to a recording – but not while you are actually singing.

> Audiences are affected not only by the music and lyrics, but by personality, posture, clothes, charisma, attitude.

What you need to do is focus on your technique but also, what the song means to you. In other words, you need to stay in the moment. Otherwise you risk compromising your performance further – at best you're looking back instead of aiming forward; at worst, you become paralysed with anxiety.

None of that is going to help your singing. In fact, it makes it worse, and the whole thing can very easily spiral out of control.

So… Loose mouth, relax your jaw, breathe deep… Let it flow. Allow the song to transport you someplace else, away from this room with all these people in it. Let yourself get in the zone.

The more you get in the zone, and can practise in the zone, the better you're going to sing.

It's important to practise performing in front of people if you want to feel comfortable being watched by an audience of strangers – it's easy to be brave and fearless in your bedroom singing into a hairbrush or shampoo-bottle microphone. Start small, with family or friends, and build up gradually. Then jump in a little deeper by doing a couple of songs at an open mic night. Audiences are affected not only by the music and lyrics, but by personality, posture, clothes, charisma, attitude, and what works for one singer may not work for another. It takes time to forge your own compelling onstage persona, and it starts by observing how audiences respond to you.

Open Arms is a great song to work on. Unusually for a pop song, it has plenty of long notes, which are more characteristic of Broadway or at the extreme end, opera. It goes from low to high, and the high notes have to be held for a long time. So it's the perfect song to develop flow and freedom and big breath support.

It's a difficult one to jump straight into after a long break!

TAKEAWAYS

- **Be a singer or a critic, but don't try and be both simultaneously!**
- **Invest fully in the performance. You're on stage, not sitting in the audience.**
- **Singing in the shower has its place, but it's no substitute for a serious warm-up.**

Part 4 ~ Performance Advice From The Stars
19. Performance Preparation *with John Legend*

I've worked with many students over the years. But every now and then there's one who is truly special. In this case he was already a legend: John Legend. I had already admired his work. It was the frosting on the cake to discover that he is also a terrific guy.

John joins us to talk about his career, and above all about singing. He's also here to answer our questions. I'd like to start by thanking him for giving so generously of his time.

ERIC: You're one of the busiest people I know. You perform all the time. You have a big family – at last count an amazing wife, four kids, four dogs and two hairless cats. How do you do it?

JOHN: *Well, I love being an artist. I love being a singer, I love performing, and I love writing songs. It's truly energising to do something you love so much.*

ERIC: How do you stay so calm? Most people get jitters and stage fright before they perform. You don't.

JOHN: *I'm naturally calm! But basically, it all comes down to preparation, which is by far the best tool to fight nervousness. Preparation means you're doing the right warm-ups and you've been exercising your voice consistently for weeks before the show. When you practise the ins and outs of a particular song and performance, and know when you want to do this and when you want to do that, it makes you feel more comfortable when you hit the stage, because you've rehearsed so many times in your mind.*

My slogan is: Prepare your way through nervousness.

ERIC: When you were at the Hollywood Bowl, I came and we did a warm-up. When I walked in, you were at the piano practising. You're a brilliant pianist. You can play all day long, and so easily. You don't really need to practise. And yet there you were: practising. Because you wanted to be at your highest level of performance.

JOHN: *I love to practise. I love to warm up with you, or your recordings. That time we were doing some songs I hadn't done live before, so I was making sure I had my piano parts down for that. Even though I'm naturally calm, I still want to be ready and prepared.*

ERIC: When you're on tour, do you follow any particular rituals?

JOHN: *I pay attention to everything that goes into my body. I don't drink alcohol. I drink a lot of water and tea, so I'm staying very hydrated.*

I try to sleep well, for seven hours a night. But I'll also take a nap for an hour or two in the afternoon before heading to the venue for the show. Not everyone likes or benefits from a nap, but I do.

I warm up at the venue. I like to eat before I go on stage (again, not everyone does), which is usually at about eight or nine o'clock, to absorb some of the water I'm constantly drinking. I have the same meal every time: rotisserie chicken, sautéed spinach and broccoli.

ERIC: A lot of people eat roast chicken. They like the way it lubricates the voice box. Olive oil too.

JOHN: *I also drink throat-coat tea every night.*

ERIC: Artists often say they have trouble getting to sleep after a show because they're high on emotional energy.

JOHN: *I'm usually pretty amped up and it takes me a while to come down again. If I get off stage at 10:30 I won't fall asleep for a couple of hours. I also like to cool down my voice, so as not to feel raspy the next morning, and that helps me begin to relax.*

ERIC: You were already a global superstar when I met you. Why did you want voice lessons?

JOHN: *Let me rewind. Growing up, I sang in church. I sang in a big voice but I had no vocal training so I wasn't properly using my diaphragm. There were all kinds of things I wasn't doing correctly. It didn't really matter that much back then, but once you start touring, you begin to understand the kind of wear and tear that not singing properly will cause on your voice. I pretty quickly realised that what I was doing was unsustainable. So I started taking lessons in New York.*

Then I moved to Los Angeles and needed a new coach. I went to see Ariana Grande – we're all big fans – and was so impressed by the way she sang. I thought straight away that I had to meet her coach, which happened to be you, and we were introduced that night after the show.

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ERIC: You came to me for voice lessons but I learned so much from you too, by observing your work ethic and calmness. The way you refuse to be thrown off when things don't go exactly as you would like them to – you just take it all in your stride. I think that's so important. You really understand how to stay focused.

JOHN: *You have to trust your preparation. I keep saying that, but I genuinely believe it. If you trust your process, then you can rise above the noise.*

ERIC: You often speak of finding urgency in music.

JOHN: *'Urgency' is a common industry term. People will say, 'it's not urgent enough'. The idea is that your performance needs to make people feel something – with a sense of urgency, or irresistible compulsion. It's not really that different from the more familiar ideas of moving or exciting them.*

You have to shape the performance so that it builds in the right way and then crucially, ends in the right way. I always talk about sticking the landing. To me this means that when you end the song, everybody needs to know that this is the end and this is the time to clap.

It's fatal to simply fade out or tail off. You've really got to make that ending stick. Think of Simone Biles: when she ends that record-breaking floor routine, or comes hurtling off that vault, does she stick the landing? She surely does. As a gymnast, it's one of the key things you're judged on.

It's the same for singers. I want every performance to stick the landing, ten out of ten, no points dropped.

ERIC: Often people say they don't want to plan those things out, they just want to feel it on the night – and often it falls apart.

JOHN: *It's fine in certain instances. In jazz, the whole point is improvisation. You let the music lead you different places. But in popular music, people want more structure. Particularly if you only have two or three minutes to perform. You have to make the most of every second and plot out every move. You need to know exactly when you're going to go big and when you're going to do a run that deviates from the melody.*

Mostly, I want a performance to start by establishing the melody as it was written. Then, as the song develops, you can add the details of personal interpretation so that you take both song and audience on a journey from the familiar to the unexpected.

ERIC: It's vital to plan your performance out ahead.

JOHN: *Especially in those moments when you really have to make an impact. You need to consider the role of every note in telling the story and connecting with the audience. You need to know how that connects with your physical performance too, especially if you're a dancer working with other dancers – then the whole ensemble needs to be minutely choreographed.*

A QUESTION FOR JOHN:

What advice do you have for people starting out in the industry on how to grow as an artist?

JOHN: *My advice always starts from those basics: preparation, and learning from others. You need to come to the industry with an understanding of what you love about music and have some thoughts about who you are, or who you want to be, as an artist.*

Quincy Jones always said 'steal from the best'. You can learn so much from other artists, and by definition most of them are older artists who have come before you. I was inspired by Donny Hathaway and Marvin Gaye and Nat King Cole, by Stevie Wonder and Nina Simone and Aretha Franklin – all of them just made me love singing. Then there were the newer R&B artists I grew up listening to in the Nineties, like Jodeci, Boyz II Men, Whitney Houston, Luther Vandross and Anita Baker.

All of them helped me formulate what I thought great singing was, and often, when I do things vocally, I'm referencing that library of music.

I'm stealing from the best all this time. What effectively happens is that your own personal style becomes an amalgamation of all these different influences and your own experiences, your own story, your own life.

Otherwise, it's important to seek out ways to collaborate and perform, whether it's at open mics or in a band with your friends or singing in choir at church or in the school musical. Get used to being on stage. Get over any fear or nervousness or reluctance you might feel. Get out there and do it. All that investment when not many people are watching is going to help prepare you for the big stage.

If you haven't put in the time developing your craft through live performance it's going to be difficult to make that transition to doing big shows and tours. Those skills need to be acquired over time. So too those connections and collaborations with real people who can help you and open doors for you – relationships are key.

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TAKEAWAYS

- **Prepare your way through nervousness! If you are fully prepared there is no room left for nerves.**
- **Choose your song, and craft your performance in such a way that the listener feels compelled to listen and respond.**
- **Stick the landing!**

20. Performance Anxiety

VISUALISE YOUR PERFORMANCE

I first read about visualisation years ago and thought it fascinating then. But what really sold me on it was when I had the opportunity of working with an Olympic gold medal winner. He told me that he spent a third of all his practise time with his coach doing visualisation work.

He was a gymnast and described two approaches. In one, he would close his eyes and imagine that he was looking out to the audience, to the mat, everything, and focus minutely on the feeling of his body going through each motion. In the other, he would leave his body and go out into the audience, watch himself tumbling and doing the high bar and start self-correcting.

He said both worked brilliantly. Leaving his body, he could diagnose his own weaknesses and take responsibility for his own improvement. Looking out through closed eyes, he could feel what was happening intimately, and then when he went out and performed, it felt like déjà vu, because he had rehearsed it so often in his head.

I always advise my students to try both those techniques.

VISUALISATION 1

Find a quiet place, where you can relax. Spend a few minutes meditating, if you are so inclined. Close your eyes. Imagine that you are leaving your body. Drift out into the auditorium and look back at the stage. Watch yourself enter on stage, because whether you do so meekly, or with arrogance, or with confidence and enthusiasm, this sets the tone for the audience. Often people don't realise this – that they are announcing who they are by the way they walk out – until they visualise it from the audience's point of view.

Go through every line of the song. Hear the introduction. Watch your entire performance from beginning to end. If you want to, pause it, almost as though you were pressing pause on a tape or video. If you want to, do the bit you weren't happy with again. You were standing stiff as a board when you meant to be moving. Your mouth was tight and strained. You'll see these things for yourself, and it will be so much more impactful than being told them by someone else.

Take mental notes to advise yourself later, as you would if you were directing someone else.

To visualise a whole show in this way takes time, but can prove invaluable.

VISUALISATION 2

This time, instead of looking in from the outside, you're going to look out from the inside.

Visualise yourself standing onstage looking out towards the audience.

You're now seeing part of the stage, but from a more limited, close-up point of view. You might see band members or backing dancers. You might also see the audience.

You might see the lights blinding you. You might see someone in the audience that's going to really make you nervous. That's all good. You want to get used to all that. Now go through the songs, hearing them in your head exactly how you want your voice to sound.

If you want the performance to be light and floaty and effortless, hear your voice light and floaty and effortless. If you can't, then do it again. Ask yourself how to make your voice light and floaty and effortless. Tell yourself that you have to take in a deep breath and relax your mouth.

Go through all the things you've been taught and do it again and again until you really hear it in your head the way you really want to sound, be that light, floaty and effortless, or full, belty and bold. Do it until you like what you hear, from start to finish.

It will make a huge difference. **When you step on stage you won't feel nervous**, because you will have done it so many times in your head, without the distraction of a live audience, and with full, immersive concentration.

PREPARATION

Visualisation comes under the broader heading of preparation, and as John has just emphasised, preparation is key, even for an artist of his immense experience. If you want to perform your best, you must be prepared. If you want to feel calm, you must be prepared. And how can you possibly be prepared if you don't know the music backwards and forwards, if you haven't practised enough, if you've never worn those shoes before?

Preparation takes in every aspect of performance. Prep all your kit the night before. **Don't leave anything to the last minute**. If you do, and something goes wrong, or you simply forget something, you'll be at risk of jeopardising weeks and months of hard work.

On the morning of a performance, get up a little early. Don't leave that until the last minute either. Allow a margin for error, for everyday mishaps to occur and be accommodated without stress.

> **Focus on your intention. You have to know why you're singing that particular song.**

STAGE FRIGHT

Remember, preparation is the best antidote to stage fright.

Another thing that can help is to delve deep into what the song is about and what you want to achieve with it. Recite the lyrics. Map out the dynamic changes. Plot your journey to the big climax. With all that in your head, what room could possibly be left for nerves? There's way too much to think about to have energy to spare for stage fright.

Focus on your intention. You have to know why you're singing that particular song. You have to know why you wrote it, and if you didn't write it, you have to pretend that you did. Find a way of connecting with the emotion of the song and if necessary, after many performances, reconnecting with it.

Think about the intention for yourself too. Maybe you've chosen the song just because you really love singing it. Maybe you just want to go out there and have fun, which is more than halfway to ensuring that your audience is going to have fun too. Maybe, if they know the song, they'll start singing along with you, or singing it back to you, and then the energy will be off the scale and you'll be coasting. Stage fright? What even is that?

> Your goal should be to learn from imperfections, not live in fear of them.

PERFECTIONISM

Many of us struggle with perfectionism, whatever our walk of life. But notoriously, perfectionism is one of those qualities that has the vices of its virtues.

I remember reading an article on the subject by a man who wrote that if he had not conquered his perfectionism, then he would never have written an article on perfectionism, because he could never have written even one sentence, let alone a whole paragraph, that was perfect enough. Unsurprisingly, he didn't write anything for years.

Which brings us back to the advice I shared earlier with Fred: not to critique yourself as you are rehearsing or performing. Save the critical assessment for later.

You have to recognise when it is helpful and productive to turn the critical spotlight back on yourself and when, in contrast, it is likely simply to paralyse you – which is not helpful at all.

The first step in liberating yourself from perfectionism is to practise accepting imperfection. Mistakes and imperfections are normal. They are human, they are fine, they are often endearing; sometimes they are even the source of poetry and beauty. Your goal should be to learn from them, not live in fear of them. Treat yourself with kindness when you feel that you fall short.

MY ADVICE IS THIS:

- ***DON'T STRIVE FOR PERFECTION; STRIVE FOR GREATNESS. PERFECTION IS IMPOSSIBLE – GREATNESS ISN'T.***
- ***IF YOU CAN DO THAT, IT WILL SET YOU FREE.***

TAKEAWAYS

- **Visualise your performance from within and without. Mental rehearsal and physical rehearsal are equally valid.**
- **Just as you vocalise beyond your range so that your voice is ready for anything, so too you should prepare every aspect of your performance one hundred and ten per cent.**
- **Fill your head with all the interesting things you are trying to do, so there is no room left for fear.**
- **Go for greatness (achievable), not perfection (unachievable).**

21. Vocal Stamina *with Marissa Jaret Winokur*

Our next guest, Marissa Jaret Winokur, was awarded a Tony for the highest excellence on Broadway. She won it for the musical ***Hairspray***.

We met through Rob Marshall, who was first slated to direct ***Hairspray*** and did the first couple of readings. He's a genius who has directed a lot of great movies. One day he called me and said, 'We've found a girl that we think is perfect for Tracy Turnblad. There's only one problem. When she sings through it, when we do a rehearsal, she loses her voice. And we need her to be able to do eight shows a week.'

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MARISSA: *This is back when people didn't have understudies that went on twice a week.*

ERIC: So we did a couple of lessons a week for a couple of months and your voice kept getting stronger and stronger. You went to New York. You did a workshop. Your voice sounded great. You got the role, went on Broadway, and won a Tony.

MARISSA: *Even back in high school I would make it to the second last show and lose my voice.*

ERIC: Then later you did *Hairspray* at the Hollywood Bowl and Carnegie Hall.

MARISSA: *It's the gift that keeps on giving.*

ERIC: How did you maintain your voice for so many shows a week? Tracy has a lot of songs and they're all belted.

MARISSA: *There's one called* **You Can't Stop The Beat** *and we used to sing 'you can't stop to breathe' instead.*

The answer is, we found a voice for Tracy that is not my Marissa voice. My speaking voice is much lower. I put Tracy up really high so she could last forever.

ERIC: It worked for the character, who was young, but it also worked to save your voice.

MARISSA: *Yes. It placed the voice in my mask, in the most healthy place for me to sing. We also had a really good warm-up and a really good cool-down. I would get to the theatre at 6:30. There was no talking. I had my eye on the prize. I was one hundred per cent committed.*

I'd warm up from 6:30 to 7:30. I wouldn't talk even when they were doing my hair and makeup. I would just sit quietly until the show. Then I'd do my show, go home, sleep, and do it all again. Rinse and repeat.

ERIC: Hence the Tony Award.

MARISSA:*I still do the same thing now before a concert. I take a week and say: no socialising. It's a way of setting myself up for success, and not being nervous.*

ERIC: You had to sing for a big benefit hosted by Catherine Zeta-Jones and Hugh Jackman, in a very high key. You just went back into your old routine so as to be totally prepared. It's the only way to perform to your highest level.

MARISSA: *I went into* **Hairspray** *as an actress who sings, rather than a singer who acts, so I needed all that discipline to pull it off. You would never dream of running a marathon without building up mile by mile. Well, your voice is essentially a muscle and singing is essentially a sport – I learned that from you. I hadn't realised it prior, because by nature I'm loud-mouthed and a cheerleader. It was only when I met you that I started properly training my voice.*

ERIC: I came to New York for the final performance of *Hairspray* and it still felt very fresh. How did you manage that?

MARISSA: *I'm not an improv actress. I like to know exactly where everything goes. Then, if everything is set, I have nothing to worry about. I know where I'm walking; I know what I'm doing. So then I'm just breathing the character. I'm being Tracy. The show starts; I'm one hundred per cent in, and then the show's over – beyond that, I can't explain it. Perhaps it was just that total immersion every time.*

When I did **Dancing With The Stars**, *things were changing all the time – costumes, shoes, music – and I was so stressed. On Broadway I could do the show a thousand times and never have to think about it. I think that's what keeps it fresh. I'm in the words and the words are in me. I'm in the moment and the moment is in me. It's part of who I am.*





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ERIC: We were talking earlier about how to know what to do with your hands while you're singing.

MARISSA: *That's much easier when you're being a character than when you're being yourself. I can figure out what a character would do. When I'm putting on a one-woman show, I have no idea what Marissa would do with her hands. So I've learned to think of myself as not-quite Marissa. In other words, Marissa at work is not the same as Marissa at home. Work Marissa has big hair and will wear a big dress. Work Marissa will play the part of Marissa. It's true for all of us to an extent, but especially in acting. After all, I didn't go into this business to be myself. I went into it literally to be someone else.*

I think I got that from Bette Midler and **The Divine Miss M**, *which was her stage persona. It calms the nerves to step outside yourself and perform.*

QUESTIONS FOR MARISSA:

What's your favourite warm-up?

MARISSA: *I have two. One is to get into Tracy. I get it all up there in my Tracy voice, high and healthy, and say: 'Nyea, I can't stand it. Nyeeea. I caaan't staaand it. Gees, mmm, nyea.' The other is the* ***yum-yum-yum*** *one, which I'm able to get really high, not in my belt but in my mix. I only ever use it for vocal warm-ups. Like Eric would say, it keeps my mouth vertical and stops me tensing my neck.*

Sometimes I listen to music in the car and sing along with it on ***wee-wee-wee.*** *Or* ***blblblblbl****. I'll just sing the whole song on one sound. I've done* **Good Morning Baltimore** *on* ***blblblblbl*** *countless times, and it's great, because it keeps me breathing. I often do it with Ariana Grande's songs too, just to get my voice warmed up.*

You're so expressive. How do you keep your voice relaxed while not losing that expressiveness?

MARISSA: *It's about balance – finding your moments to make sense as an actress, who smiles if that's in character, and to make sense as a singer, who doesn't smile when she has to sing* 'Baltimore and meee', *because if she did she couldn't sing it. You have to figure out a way to make it all work together. Also, there are times when you can sing and smile at the same time. A perfect example is* **I Can Hear the Bells**, *which I can keep dreamy and light without losing the placement. The smile is dreamy and light too, not a hard Marissa Winokur grin! So it depends on the song. No matter how much hard work I put in, I could never smile on that last note of* **Good Morning Baltimore**.

ERIC: If you do the vocal exercises every day, then your vocal cords develop in such a way that you can handle singing and smiling at the same time – at least for short periods.

TAKEAWAYS

- **It isn't possible to over-prepare.**
- **It can be liberating to adopt a persona, even when you are performing as yourself.**

22. Building Your Vocal Strength

Every singer has to think about strength and stamina, whether they want to score points at karaoke or do a world tour.

Part of it is about staying physically and mentally healthy, which will be the focus of later lessons on taking a holistic approach.

But the first and most fundamental step in building strength and stamina is to be singing every day. Rest is important, in alternation with exercise. Daily vocal exercises will stretch your vocal cords and help keep them limber and flexible.

Without daily exercise, the voice quickly atrophies. When that happens, singing cold all of a sudden, without preparation, comes as a shock – for your voice, a trauma.

Let's say you have to perform a month from now. Ideally you are already vocalising every day. If for some reason you are not, then start with around twenty minutes twice a day, working up to thirty or thirty-five by increments each day. Make sure you're exercising in the right placement, connecting to your breath support and stretching higher and lower in pitch, just a little beyond your normal singing range.

Then add entire songs to your practise. No more than three songs the first day, then maybe four or five the next. By the time the big occasion comes round you should have rehearsed the whole show, ideally three or four days in a row. That's when your voice is ready to perform. That's when your voice says: *no problem, we've been doing this for days – it's nothing out of the ordinary, nothing to stress out about.*

> **Every singer has to think about strength and stamina, whether they want to score points at karaoke or do a world tour.**

That's how you build strength and stamina. But beware: you have to do it correctly. It's not reducible to how long you spend on it – what matters is doing it right. Almost every vocal exercise is beneficial if it's done the right way. It has to be in the right placement. It has to be supported. If not, it can sometimes do more harm than good. Proper execution is essential.

If you were a tennis player, you wouldn't go two weeks without stepping on court before a big tournament. If you were a footballer, you wouldn't be going cold onto the field of play. That way injury lies, not to mention bitter disappointment.

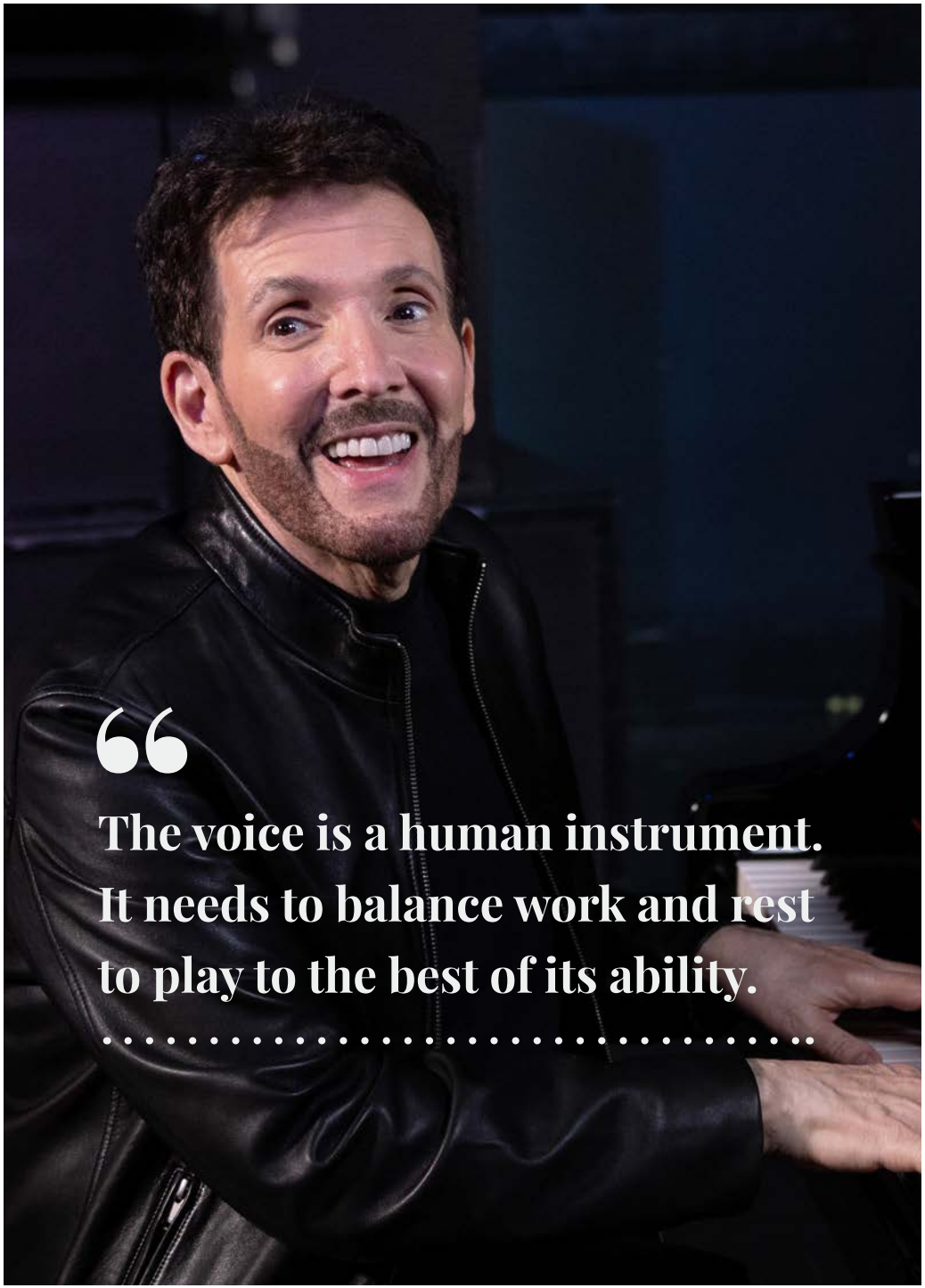
Sometimes people like to describe the voice as an instrument. Which it is, but a human instrument, which is quite different from a piano or a violin or a flute. The piano doesn't need to rest, and it doesn't need to be made stronger; it needs your fingers to become more nimble. The piano has no ability of its own; instead, it relies on yours. But the voice is a human instrument. It needs to balance work and rest to play to the best of its ability, and to balance them in a regular way.

There's no shock to the piano if it is played after a week or two of neglect. It's you that won't play as well, just as you won't sing as well if you neglect your human voice.

TAKEAWAYS

- **The voice is an instrument, but it's also part of your body, and needs to be exercised regularly.**
- **Sing every day.**
- **Rest is important, but works best when paired with exercise!**

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23. Pre-Show Exercises *with Sabrina Carpenter*

I have a unique relationship with each of my students. However, every once in a while there comes along one who becomes like family. In this case, I feel like the proud uncle to the wonderful Sabrina Carpenter.

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SABRINA: *We met when I was twelve.*

ERIC: You were so young, and tiny, and you styled your hair so I couldn't see your face. But you were already so articulate! How did that happen?

SABRINA: *I want to say books, but I don't even read that much. They rejected me from the gifted programme at elementary school, so everything after that has been like revenge. I started working on sets when I was really young and when you're talking to adults a lot I think you naturally slip into the role. 'Fake it till you make it' has been a consistent thing in my life, but not in a negative way. How I see it, you have to believe you can do a thing to be able to do it. Plus my parents were very encouraging and I've learned a lot from you!*

ERIC: You were born talented, but you never just coasted on that. You've really put in the work.

SABRINA: *I think it's inherited. I learned from my parents that working hard is the only option: showing up on time, or even early, and giving everything you've got. You have to put in the care if you want to receive it in return. That's really important to me.*

ERIC: When you were at Coachella one of the reviews remarked that you had accomplished more by 7PM than any other major act. Which didn't surprise me in the least. I think they weren't ready for you to come with such a great show, singing live, despite the wind.

SABRINA: *Despite the wind and the dust.*

ERIC: And your hair in your mouth.

SABRINA: *When I go to festivals, I want an artist to give me everything they have. I wasn't headlining at Coachella. So naturally I thought that if I ever want to headline, I have to make this show truly memorable. I have to do as much as I can with the time and space that I have. It was sunset, and the sun was hitting me directly, so I felt like I was about to pass out, but I knew I had to stay composed. You've taught me a lot about finding little techniques to re-centre and stay present in the moment.*

I like a big crowd. Personally, I find small, intimate audiences more intimidating. But either way, your knowledge has guided me throughout.

ERIC: I remember years ago sitting with your grandmother at one of your shows. Afterwards I walked through the parking garage and it was full of people waiting to watch you get on the tour bus. They were so excited. Do you feel that love from your fans?

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SABRINA: *I'm constantly amazed, but so grateful. I know I work hard, but that doesn't automatically equate to people giving you that kind of return. I never take it for granted. But I can relate. I had so many posters on my bedroom walls as a young girl – of Ariana (Grande), Miley (Cyrus) and Taylor (Swift), not forgetting Rihanna and Beyoncé – and I would have fainted to meet them. I would have liked to watch them move up close. You learn so much from people who have paved the way before you.*

ERIC: Those people just wanted to express their love.

SABRINA: *There's the human side too. Sometimes it helps fans realise that artists are people. Never think that because an artist is on stage and all dolled up that everything is sunshine and rainbows. I'm not always popping champagne and celebrating. Often I'm super hard on myself, thinking of all the things I did wrong. Even after that first weekend at Coachella I was thinking: my keyboard didn't work, or I didn't hit that note the way I wanted to, or I forgot this step. Most of that goes unnoticed. So I really appreciate when people sense that you might be tired, maybe even a little down, and just want to give you some love.*

ERIC: Do you have a favourite vocal exercise?

SABRINA: *Before I go on stage, it's all just* ***blblblblblblblblbl*** *– because for me, that's what brings everything forward to the mask. If I'm able to do slides right before I go on stage it feels like I'm opening my range and it makes me less nervous. Lion's Pose really works too. There are so many tricks we have – I love them all. Like yawning to open up your throat, and hissing with accents. Those things really help when I get nervous and feel short of breath.*

ERIC: Lip bubbling is actually helping with that, without you realising it, because it naturally requires you to take in deeper breaths.

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QUESTIONS FOR SABRINA:

Where is your favourite place or country that you've ever performed?

SABRINA: *Probably Hyde Park. I got to perform there with Blackpink and it was one of the biggest crowds I've seen in my life. It felt like a sea. I love London, and playing there was awesome.*

How do you navigate vocally the huge range of songs that you sing?

SABRINA: *Like from* **Espresso** *to* **Hopelessly Devoted To You***? Most people assume the latter is harder to sing, melodically, but if I'm trying to dance as well, like in* **Espresso***, that's actually harder for me because there's not much room to take a breath. Also, I have a natural vibrato to my voice, which suits* **Hopelessly Devoted...** *– with its more elongated notes – much more than* **Espresso***, where the notes are more precise.* **Espresso** *is much easier to sing in the studio than on stage!*

I'm excited to showcase my range in a show, but it does mean that you absolutely have to take care of your voice in preparation. All that vocalising from low to high means I take forever to warm up.

Even so you have to pay attention to your voice and how it feels day to day. You don't have to hit the highest note in every session – some days your voice just isn't there, and you don't want to injure it merely to satisfy your ego.

How do you vary your technique according to the space? Maybe you're in a room with a piano player or a studio with a microphone or a giant arena with massive speakers. How do you deal with that?

SABRINA: *My brand is an extension of myself. That's not always the case. Sometimes artists will adopt a character and their brand is a departure from who they are. I feel fortunate to be at this place in my life where the songs that I'm writing and the clothes that I'm wearing are simply the songs and clothes I want to write and wear. It's all somehow fallen into place.*

I do retain creative control. I have oversight of the colours and fonts and all those little details that tie things together.

When did you know you wanted to do music?

SABRINA: *Maybe when I was around two years old? I was six when I did my first school talent show – I sang* **I Enjoy Being A Girl***. Then I watched the first pilot of Hannah Montana and thought: I want to do that.*

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TAKEAWAYS

- **Follow your instincts and stay true to yourself.**
- **Singers are human. Find ways to re-centre yourself and stay in the moment, regardless of the ups and downs of life and the highs and lows of performance.**
- **No experiment in songwriting is wasted – you never know what creative paths might open up.**

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24. Finding Your Voice

There are self-proclaimed experts in every field, but nowhere is this more true than in the entertainment business. There are people on every street corner who claim to know all the answers, all the secrets that can make you a star. At least in Los Angeles.

Some are well-meaning. Some know what they're doing and some don't. Some once knew, but the music industry moves fast, so what worked yesterday may not work today and is even less likely to work tomorrow.

Listen to what the experts have to say. Some of it may resonate with you – hold on to that. Some of it may make sense to you – hold on to that as well. But if it doesn't, let it go.

The most important thing is to follow your instincts. That's what is going to help you the most. No one can really tell you who you are or what you want to do. You've got to find that deep inside yourself.

What is it I want to say? What kind of artist do I want to be? What do I want to make people feel? When people come to my concert, what kind of experience do I want them to have?

No one knows the answers better than you, and no one can create that experience better than you, because ultimately, it's going to be you on that stage.

There are two mistakes people commonly make when they are first starting out: they try to be perfect right out of the box, or they copy a singer they really like. Neither thing really works. You have to have patience. It takes a long time to become an artist.

> **Be patient with yourself.**
> **Give yourself time to try again.**

Copying someone as an exercise is fine. If you love Elvis Presley, then it's fine to sing a song in the manner of Elvis Presley, but not at the expense of developing your own style. Even if you sound a little like Elvis, because that's who you are, you still want it to be your own interpretation of the song. We already have Elvis, and no one is going to do Elvis better than him.

The only way to develop is to try different things. **I've known singers make more than a hundred demos before they find the right sound**. Sometimes they don't even know where it's leading, but they'll be trying this and trying that, going to this producer and then to this other producer, collaborating with one person and then a second and a third, then all of a sudden they'll make that one demo and everyone goes: 'That's it! That's the magic one!' Or they'll say it themselves: 'That's it! That's exactly what I want to do. Now I know what it is!' And finally they know the road that they're on.

Be patient with yourself. Give yourself time to try again.

To quote, or possibly paraphrase, the great Miles Davis: ‘Man, sometimes it takes a long time to sound like yourself.’

Not only that, but you are going to keep evolving. Don’t imagine that the music you’re making at sixteen is the same as the music you’ll be making at eighteen or twenty or forty. It’s going to keep growing and changing, just as you will.

So don’t get too precious about what you’re doing right now. Be open. Be willing to try new things. Experiment. That’s the best advice I can give you. Experiment – to find yourself.

TAKEAWAYS

- **Learn from others. Be inspired by others. But don’t copy others.**
- **Be yourself. Everyone else is already taken.**
- **Be patient. Stay open. Experiment. Believe.**



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Part 5 ~ A Holistic Approach To Singing
25. Acid Reflux Diet

Everything we do affects our body – and therefore our voice – as does everything we put into it. This starts with everything we eat and drink.

FOOD & DRINK

My number one recommendation for any singer is to follow a diet that minimises, if not eliminates, acid reflux, which occurs when acid in the stomach travels up to the throat and mouth. The extent to which this matters varies from person to person, but everyone will benefit from observing the basic principles. The acid reflux diet favours plainer foods like grilled fish or broiled chicken, but if you choose to eat and drink more acidic substances, then be selective and do so in moderation. Don't put lashings of hot sauce on everything you eat. Don't overdo the alcohol or the caffeine or the carbonated drinks. And whatever you do, don't combine three or four of the acid causing foods at the same sitting.

If you wake up in the morning and feel a little scratchy or hoarse – and you're not sick, but you just don't feel quite right – chances are it's acid reflux. People who don't use their voice for their career might not even notice. But if you're a singer, then everything matters.

Eating small, frequent meals is better than fewer, larger meals. A very full stomach can cause the valve between your stomach and oesophagus to relax, pushing stomach acids back up into the throat. Don't eat that last meal too late at night. Try to eat 2 to 2 ½ hours before going to sleep.

Avoid singing on a full stomach too. There are lots of reasons for this, many of them obvious – you don't want your moment in the spotlight to be ruined by a rude belch or burp, nor do you want to feel bloated. Less obviously, digestion takes energy, which is why we often feel sluggish after a meal. But most importantly, a full stomach can restrict the movement of the diaphragm, thus reducing lung capacity and making it more difficult to support your voice. The ideal is to eat a light meal one and a half to two hours before singing.

SLEEP

A practical suggestion for mitigating acid reflux is to elevate the head of your bed. You'll barely notice the difference lying down, but the acids will stay in your abdomen while you sleep rather than drifting upward (extra pillows will simply give you a stiff neck). It's common knowledge that sleeping on a full stomach is bad for us, but some medics even discourage drinking water before bed, lest your body be tricked into producing excess acid as an aid to digestion.

Complementary checklists of dos and don'ts are in **Appendix A** at the end of these notes.

If you need an aid to the imagination, think of acid reflux as effectively burning your throat. You wouldn't drop acid straight down your throat onto your vocal cords – why would you want to let it come up the other way?

Finally, try to avoid tight clothing, which – like excess belly fat – can push against your stomach and force acid into the oesophagus. If you have heartburn, it's best to skip belts, waistbands, hosiery, and body-shaping undergarments of any kind.

One singer I know loves to drink vanilla ice blended coffees: bad idea, because the cold constricts your throat and the dairy creates mucus. For some reason she is unaffected, which is great news for her. What it means for the rest of us is that it's fine to experiment with blacklisted foods and beverages, but only well in advance of performance. You don't want to test your tolerance to anything on the day you are headlining the Grammys.

TAKEAWAYS

- **What you eat affects your voice. What you eat affects your performance.**
- **What you eat matters – but the details vary from person to person.**
- **Avoid (an excess of) acidic foods.**

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26. Hydration

Many of us like the pick-me-up of a morning coffee, which is fine so long as you take it with a little food to absorb the acid. Don't drink coffee on an empty stomach or throughout the day. If you are the type of person who relies on a caffeine injection before you hit the gym or step out on stage, then you are likely to pay the price in acid reflux – and to be dehydrated as well. Alcohol likewise dehydrates, thus the same general arguments apply to that glass of wine many of us like to enjoy in the evening.

We should all pay attention to hydration, but for singers it's 101. The vocal cords – which consist of several layers of tissue including muscle and an elastic layer known as the mucosa – need to be properly lubricated in order to vibrate smoothly. When dehydrated, the moist protective lining that covers them becomes stiff instead of pliable. Proper hydration also lubricates the throat and mouth, which helps with articulation. A dry tongue and dry lips don't work as efficiently, and as a result, it's more challenging for the audience to capture the lyrics.

I learned a valuable lesson working with a young student before the Grammys. A backstage Ear, Nose and Throat specialist examined his throat and announced that his vocal cords were dehydrated. 'How can you tell?' the boy asked, to which the ENT replied: 'I can tell by looking at them.' Turned out the boy had had virtually nothing to drink all day – he'd just had too much on his mind and forgotten to drink any water that morning! We administered a dose of Gatorade (for energy) and Pedialyte (for the electrolytes) followed by plenty of water, and he was totally fine. But far better to plan ahead than take remedial action. If you have a big performance on your schedule, start hydrating from the minute you get up.

There are teas you can buy that are soothing to the throat and all sorts of over-the-counter products that alleviate dryness, which can help when you are nervous. The more fundamental thing, however, is temperature. Just as a drink that is too cold will cause your vocal cords to contract, a drink that is too hot may irritate, or even damage, the delicate tissues in the mouth and throat. The lesson is simple: room temperature is best.

DIRECT HYDRATION

A personal steamer provides direct hydration as well as relieving phlegm; some are rechargeable and can easily be used on the move.

There was a time in New York when the Dr. Gould Gargle was quite popular, named for the celebrity ENT who came up with it. It was a simple enough formula: equal parts salt (an exfoliant), baking soda (anti-bacterial) and corn syrup (soothing) mixed with warm water. Some people still swear by variations on that theme, often to be followed by steaming, to remove exess phlegm and mucus from the vocal cords, as that can make it difficult to sing with a clear tone.

Steaming, ideally followed by a brief period of vocal rest, can be very calming. Regular steaming for five to ten minutes is sufficient, and if you don't have a personal steamer, then the old-fashioned method of hot water in a bowl with a towel over your head works almost as well – so long as you don't add irritants such as menthol eucalyptus. Alternatively, you can visit a steam room or simply take a hot shower. You can even do your vocal slides while you're in there!

> If you are the type of person who relies on a caffeine injection before you step out on stage, then you are likely to pay the price in acid reflux.

TAKEAWAYS

- Avoid (an excess of) acidic drinks.
- Avoid drinking even water (other than small sips) for at least two hours before bed.
- Try sleeping with a humidifier.





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27. Vocal Rest

People tend to forget that the vocal cords they sing with are the same vocal cords they're talking and yelling with in the normal course of everyday life. We use our voices all day long. Sometimes for much of the night too. Public spaces can be especially noisy and taxing for our vocal health.

This particularly affects us as singers. You can't afford to sing along at a concert or cheer at a game – you can clap, you can wave your arms, you can fist-bump, but please don't be screaming and shouting. Not even on the fairground roller coaster.

Once your vocal cords become irritated it takes time for them to recover.

SLEEP

This brings us to the subject of sleep. When we are sleeping, our bodies release certain hormones that help with muscle repair and cell regeneration – that is the primary function of sleep and why, in order to sing well, it's also important to rest well. Sleep deprivation can also lead to dehydration.

One of the best things about sleeping is that you are not talking. You are on complete vocal rest. Thus the more sleep you get, the better. This is true for all ages, but especially as we get older. It's rare at the best of times for us to get a good eight to ten hours sleep, but sometimes for recovery we need even more than that. Clearly the ideal is to avoid, insofar as possible, getting to that point in the first place.

This means living healthily and not abusing your voice.

Sometimes there is no option but to take a complete vocal rest in waking hours too. How long should this be? Unsurprisingly, it depends on the person and circumstances. Sometimes staying totally quiet for a single evening is enough, especially if followed by a good night's sleep. Other times it might take an entire day, especially if you've been on tour, or flying a lot, or have simply been overdoing it.

Professional singing is not just a ninety-minute performance at night, which is already demanding. You may have to get up at five AM to travel to a TV studio, get your hair and makeup done, do a sound test and a walk-through before a performance; there may be interviews or a meet-and-greet with sponsors or fans or an after-party. You need and want to do these things, which means thinking ahead, learning to balance the demands on your time and voice.

Be on the alert for opportunities to protect and preserve your vocal cords whenever you can. Consider declining some social invitations or choose a movie over a concert. Even in a movie theatre air conditioning is not your friend. Air conditioning dries out the throat, as does any dry heat; in these circumstances you should take care to breathe through your nose (mouth tape is popular with some as a means of preventing mouth-breathing at night). Never sleep with a fan blasting right in your face; in fact, fans are best avoided altogether. If you are sleeping in an air-conditioned or heated room, or live in a hot, dry climate, then put a humidifier on low in the bedroom to increase the moisture in the air. It's a good idea to use a steamer first thing on waking and get some direct hydration going before you start speaking. After all, you don't want to compromise the all-important recovery time that sleep provides on a nightly basis.

You may also wish to avoid fragrant flowers and strong perfumes, including scented candles.

Much of this comes down to common sense and being mindful. Don't commit to a big recording session or rehearsal on the same day as a concert, or the morning after a big show and after-party. Give yourself a break. If you find that you absolutely must rehearse the next day, make sure it's scheduled for the afternoon and spend the morning on vocal rest.

Communicate with your team. Your manager and agent will be squeezing promotional events into every spare hour of the day – sometimes they need to be reminded that enough is enough, that you need to eat lunch or simply take time out.

STRESS

Stress is known to exacerbate acid reflux. Thus all singers need to become expert in stress management. Simple meditation techniques can help, such as counting back from fifty or one hundred to zero; likewise simple breathing techniques, such as box-breathing, so called because you breathe in through the nose for four counts, hold your breath for four counts, breathe out for four counts and hold your breath again for four counts, as though measuring the four sides of a box. If these become habitual strategies, your body and mind will begin to recognise them as a signal to calm down and will increasingly anticipate that response through muscle memory.

Some people like to take a walk in the fresh air or focus on visualisation. Basically, anything that helps you de-stress is going to help keep the dreaded reflux at bay. Believe me, it's worth it.

In case it isn't obvious, now is the time to give up smoking if you haven't already… Caffeine, nicotine, alcohol: they all have the potential to ruin a singing career. It's a case of setting your priorities. You won't regret it. Rather, you will celebrate the rewards of feeling – and singing – better.

The same principles apply no matter your fame or lack of it. Nearly all singers operate as part of a creative community. And all, professional or amateur, want to give their best. In fact, amateur singers are likely to face their own set of challenges. A teacher, for example, who also does musical theatre, may be talking all day; it may be impossible to take a proper vocal rest and is thus all the more important to warm the voice up properly **(see Lesson 4)** before even entering the classroom. The aim is always to keep your voice in a healthy place from the outset.

TAKEAWAYS

- **Rest your voice at every opportunity that you are not exercising it.**
- **Take action to mitigate hot, dry air.**
- **Warm-ups are good for protecting the voice in the general workplace, as well as in preparation for performance.**

28. Health

Along with nutrition, exercise is fundamental to optimal health. For the singer, however, it's both vital and nuanced. Two common things to avoid, for example, are inverted poses in yoga and excessive grunting in strength work: the first can cause acid reflux; both are liable to irritate your vocal cords.

I encourage all my students to up their cardio game. Often I'll start by asking for their favourite form of cardiovascular exercise: treadmill, cross-trainer, climbing, hiking? Then, whatever it is, I add something on top.

Let's say you like to walk on the treadmill. Next time, do what you normally do. Get your heart pumping a little faster; breathe in and out a little deeper. Then try this:

- **Breathe in through your nose for four counts.**
- **Hold your breath for four counts.**
- **Breathe out through your mouth, hissing for as long as you can (at least four counts).**

It sounds simple, but be aware that you will soon get lightheaded – everybody does. When this moment comes, you should revert immediately to a normal, easy pace, in both walking and breathing. Take a few minutes, and then when you are no longer light headed, try it again..

You'll be surprised at the improvement in lung capacity after just a couple of weeks. And the bigger your lung capacity, the more effortlessly you can sustain those long end notes and deliver those long lines of lyrics or those virtuosic operatic arias. The last thing you want is to be gasping for air mid-note or mid-line.

Swimming is excellent cardiovascular exercise, but keep your head out of chlorinated water.

Yoga is great for breath-work. It relaxes us, reduces inflammation, and helps us feel calm and limber on stage. Just remember to steer clear of those acid reflux-inducing inverted poses! Round it all off with Pilates for core strength, spinal mobility, and alignment – all of which are crucial to breath control and support, training the abdominal muscles to keep the air flowing out of your body for as long as you can.

Choreography is often a big part of performance and you don't want to be huffing and puffing because you're out of breath. A great way of preparing for this is to practise singing on the treadmill, which simulates the physical demands of dancing on stage. Alternatively, you can simply sing as you walk briskly back and forth across the room. The aim is to do this without it affecting your voice, so that someone listening, but not seeing, wouldn't be able to tell you were expending all that extra energy in moving around.

Learn to sing on the treadmill or elliptical machine or exercise bike effortlessly. You don't want to hear or even sense the swing and bounce of your limbs. You want to feel like your shoulders and head are floating above your body, unaffected by all that movement below. Your body is working incredibly hard, but everything from the chest up is smooth and serene.

You can do the same outside – sing while you're hiking or jogging or climbing – but be careful in cold or dry air to breathe through your nose to protect your throat. No singing and surfing – too much salt water in the air and the waves are usually too loud to sing over without wearing out your voice.

Exercise solo, or at least in companionable silence. You don't want to be shouting over the waves of the ocean. You don't want to be shouting to your mate on the neighbouring treadmill, above the buzz of other people talking and all that clinking and clanking and whirring and humming of machinery. That's a surefire way not of exercising your voice but wearing it out. Far safer to put on your headphones.

HORMONES & MEDICATION

Sometimes, when health is less than optimal, medication comes into play. All medications have their own side effects.

One thing to take note of is whether the medication you are using is also a blood thinner. This can be the case with some common anti-inflammatories you may take to ease puffiness or discomfort in the throat. Blood thinners increase your vulnerability to vocal haemorrhage, which is likely to have worse consequences than any temporary ailment you are treating.

You may have serious medical need to take a blood thinner if you suffer from atrial fibrillation or some other heart condition. This is by no means incompatible with a career in singing. It simply means that you must take scrupulous care of your vocal cords, avoiding any kind of overuse or stress or strain. Don't scream at a concert; don't belt out your songs for any prolonged length of time. Take frequent breaks in recording sessions and set things up on stage so that the microphone and speakers do more of the work.

I remember a student who never had any problems with his voice. Then out of the blue he went hoarse. I asked what he was doing differently. He said nothing. I went through the dietary checklist. He ticked all the boxes. And yes, he was sleeping well, and yes, he was using a humidifier at night. He was following all the rules.

It turned out that a few weeks before he had started taking an anti-depressant. A common side effect of some anti-depressants is a dry mouth, and lower down the list, hoarseness. In short, the particular medication he was taking was known to affect the voice. Which meant that all he had to do to solve that hoarseness and restore his beautiful voice was go back to his doctor for an alternative prescription.

The lesson learned is to research any medication you choose to take: inform yourself, preferably through consultation with a medical professional. Speak to your doctor. Tell them you're a singer. Tell them that you can't afford to take anything that will adversely affect your voice.

This is frequently relevant when it comes to changes in hormones. Menstruation and menopause can affect the voice, so too pregnancy, but in all cases your doctor or an ENT should be able to provide support that is appropriate to your needs as a singer. Late-stage pregnancy may affect lung capacity in particular – I've had several students report that they feel like they're singing with half a lung as the baby takes up more room inside of them.

Thyroid issues can also affect your voice in pronounced but mysterious ways, so it's worth having your thyroid levels checked if your voice changes inexplicably – perhaps sounding cloudy or sluggish – or tires more quickly than usual.

Don't suffer in silence. Ask for help. Your problems are unlikely to be unique and there will be tried-and-tested ways of addressing them. Changes in the body affect us in multiple ways and the voice is a delicate instrument, highly susceptible to fine-tuning.

Sometimes you have to sit things out. There are specific medications for acne that are prescribed for months at a time and can make the voice thinner, breathier, hoarser. All you can do is hydrate as much as possible in the knowledge that your voice will come back once the course of treatment is done. This is a time to be patient, to develop your skills in other ways; it's not the time to schedule any big auditions or shows or recordings.

TAKEAWAYS

- **Build your cardiovascular capacity.**
- **Check the fine print on your medications.**
- **If you need a course of medication that affects your voice, focus on developing your skills in other ways during that time period.**





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Part 6 ~ Conclusion
29. Curtain Call

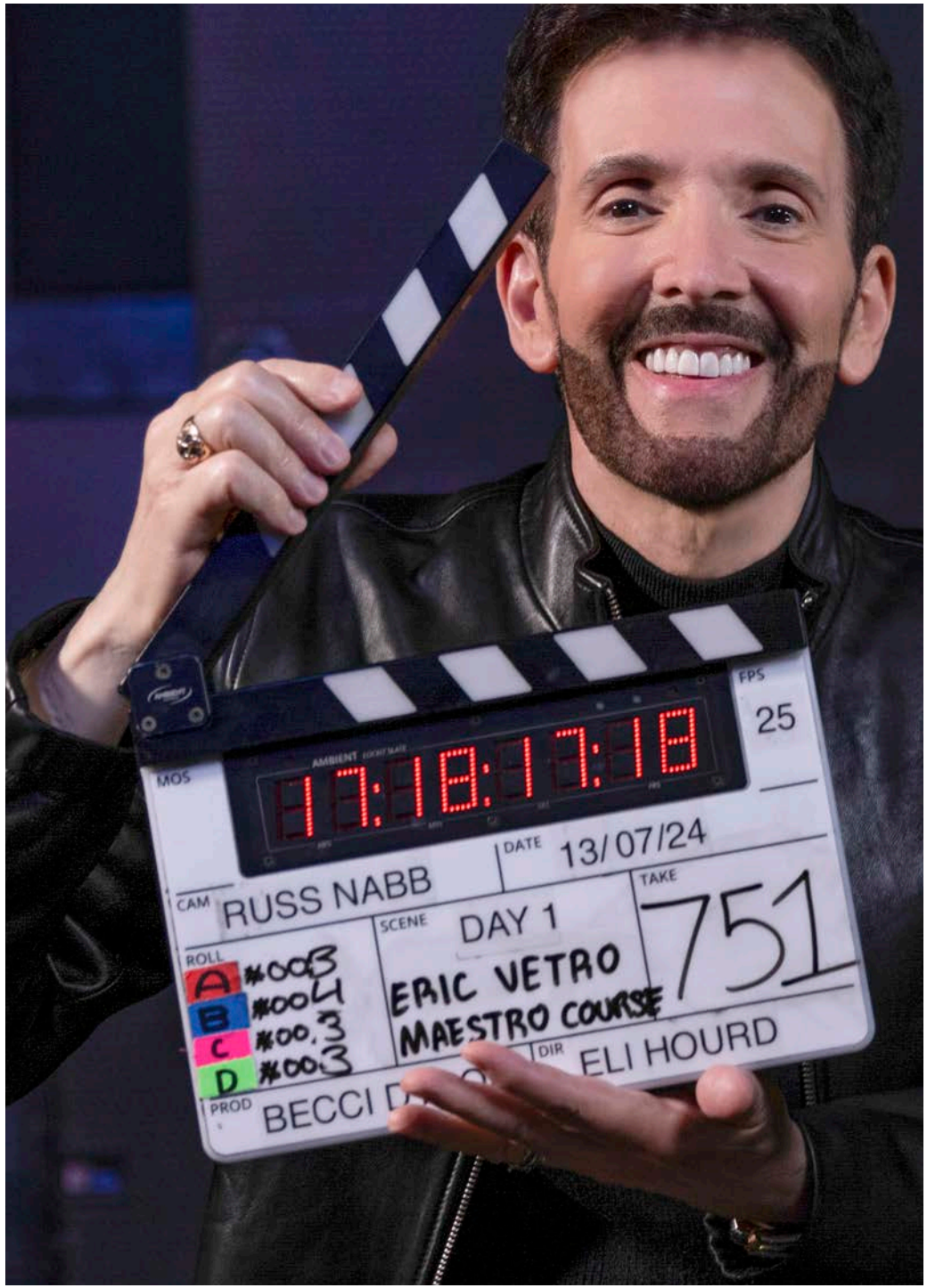
We've come to the end of our journey. But really it's just the beginning. There's so much more for you to learn and so much more to discover. I hope you feel inspired.

Work hard. Delve deep into these notes. Sing along to the audio clips. Take full advantage of this wealth of material.

You will develop your strength and stamina. You will expand your range and versatility. Your voice will get bigger and better.

There are few things in life more joyous than singing, alone or with others. Singing is one of the most ancient art forms. It's also one of the purest forms of expression. Whether happy or sad, you can release that emotion through song, and those who hear you singing will find expression for their emotions too. Whether you sing for a crowd or a lover or a child, there are few connections more intimate and powerful.

I'm Eric Vetro and this has been my BBC Maestro course, ***Sing Like The Stars.***



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Appendix A

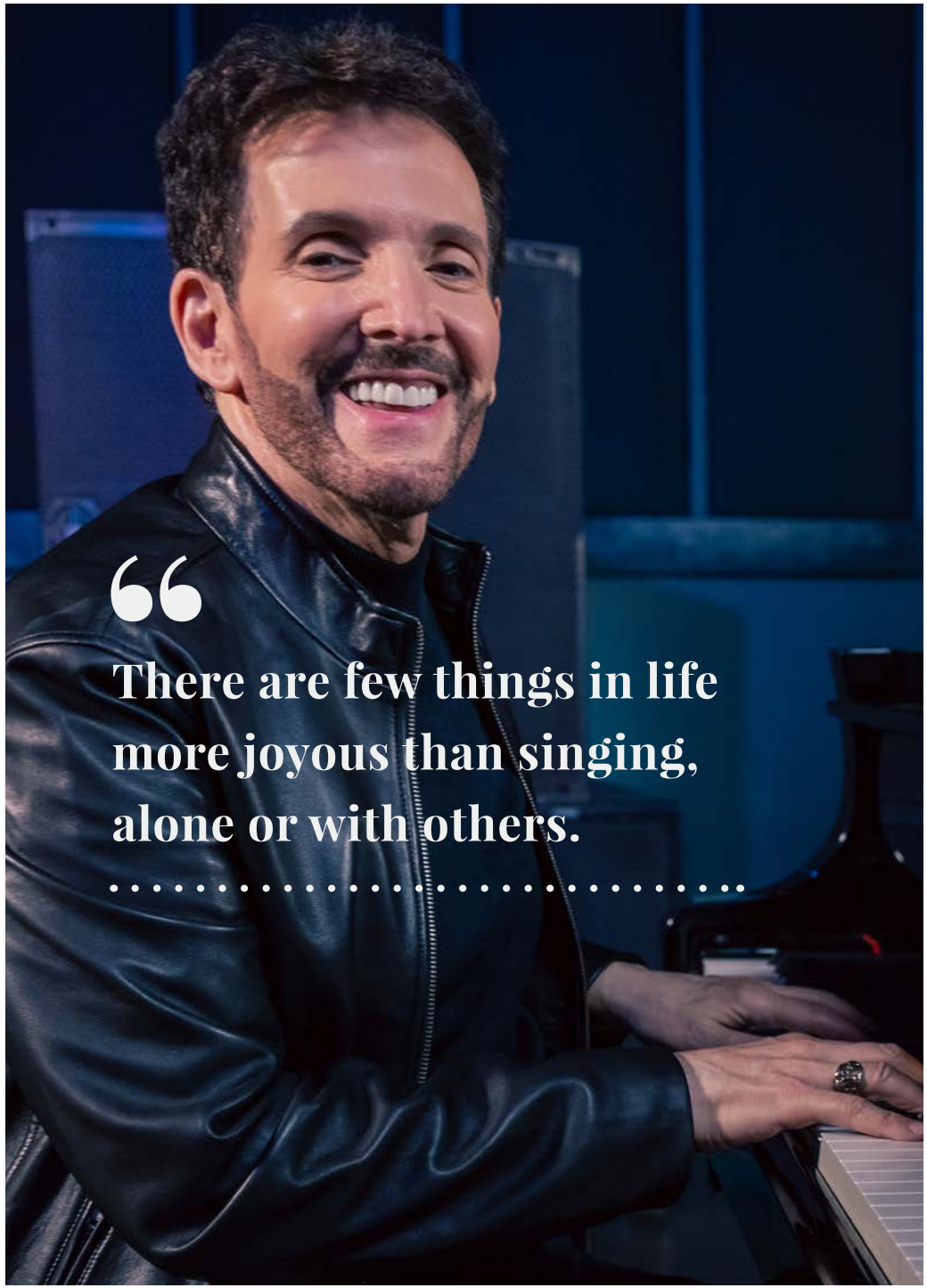
ACID REFLUX DOs & DON'Ts

Acid reflux – including 'silent' acid reflux that we are not especially aware of – adversely affects many singers' voices. Try implementing the following recommendations for at least a week and see if you *hear* a difference in your singing and *feel* a difference in your throat.

AVOID these foods and drinks:

- **Alcohol**
- **Caffeine** (not only in coffee, but also in tea, chocolate, energy drinks and many other products)
- **Carbonated beverages**
- **Citrus fruits and juices** (oranges, grapefruits, lemons, pineapples etc.)
- **Fried and fatty foods**
- **High-fat dairy products** (like cream and cheese)
- **High-fat meats**
- **Peppermint and spearmint** (in teas and chewing gum)
- **Spicy foods** (Szechuan, Mexican, Indian etc.)
- **Tomatoes, tomato sauce and salsa**
- **Vinegar**
- **Fish-oil supplements**
- **Powdered vitamin C drinks** (multivitamins containing vitamin C are fine)

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> Your voice is essentially a muscle and singing is essentially a sport.

FURTHER…

Avoid eating and drinking for at least two or three hours before bed; it's best to go to sleep on an empty stomach. If you do eat before bed, take a pre-emptive antacid. Even water stimulates the brain to cause the secretion of stomach acid.

- **If you suffer from acid reflux, try taking an antacid after meals and before singing for an extended period of time.**
- **Avoid aspirin, and products containing it.**
- **No smoking!**
- **Avoid stress…**
- **Try sleeping with your head elevated above your waist. An extra pillow is not enough – the whole bed must be slanted.**

FIGHT acid reflux with:

- **Ginger**
- **Bananas**
- **Salads** (without tomatoes and onions)
- **Oatmeal**
- **Fish**
- **Aloe vera**
- **Melons**
- **Chicken and turkey**
- **Fennel**
- **Couscous and rice**
- **Greens** (broccoli, asparagus, green beans, spinach, kale etc.)
- **Celery**
- **Parsley**
- **Non-citrus juices** (apple, cranberry, melon etc.)

Appendix B

COMMON VOCAL EXPRESSIONS IN POPULAR MUSIC

FRY: The phrase 'vocal fry' refers to the sound you hear when the (usually unsupported) voice gets very low in pitch. Often it happens unconsciously at the end of a sentence, when someone drops the pitch of their voice such that it sounds like it has fallen into a gravelly pit in the back of their throat. Sometimes it's done deliberately to create an effect or mood; if this becomes habitual, however, it can lead to irritated vocal cords and vocal fatigue. It's also possible to create the same effect in a healthy forward placement in your mouth, with breath support; my squeaky door exercise is a case in point. Some people find this helps gently vibrate phlegm off their vocal cords in a way that is soothing.

TWANG: This term means different things to different people. Country singers are often said to have a twang to their sound, as are Broadway belters, though the two are quite dissimilar in style. The good news is that it's created by an extremely forward nasal placement that is quite vocally healthy. Someone singing with a twang in their voice can usually sing for long periods of time without getting tired.

BELT: Someone described as a belter, or as having a belt voice, is singing with a strong chest voice, often on the nasal side, and usually pretty loud. On Broadway, comedic, brassy characters are often played by belters. They are generally distinct from characters played by 'legit' sopranos and tenors, who tend to have a more operatic quality to their voice. Creating a big belting sound can also be achieved by successfully combining the head and chest voices into a powerful mixed voice that can hit the high notes with a strong, pinging sound.

> **Whether happy or sad, you can release that emotion through song, and those who hear you singing will find expression for their emotions too.**

RIFFS & RUNS: These words are often used interchangeably, but there are differences. Technically, riffs are shorter than runs, with fewer notes. They are passing notes added to a melody to enhance it, and can impact the feel or mood of a song, making it more R&B, for example, or more pop. Vocal runs are longer and generally not part of the melody. They are usually used as an ad lib either over the melody or during an instrumental section of the song. For example, when the chorus is played for the third time (after the bridge), often the backup vocals will take the melody while the solo singer ad libs over the top. Runs can also be used to lead up to a melody, before it begins. A related term is 'melisma', where a run consists of many notes on a single syllable; these are often very ornate, and feature in many styles of music, from Handel's Messiah through gospel to jazz.

Songs Mentioned In This Course *(with Composer/Lyricist)*

PERFORMED IN WORKSHOPS:

Almost Like Being In Love (Frederick Loewe & Alan Jay Lerner)

Can't Blame Me For Trying
(Jay Brunswick, John Cowell, Mickey Kelley, Mike Yates)

Don't Talk Me Down
(Natalie Maree Dunn, Joanna Noelle Levesque, Peder Losnegaard)

Ev'rybody Wants To Be A Cat (Al Rinker, Floyd Huddleston)

Home (Charlie Smalls)

Ice Cold Thing (Mason & Julez)

Meadowlark (Stephen Schwartz)

Open Arms (Steve Perry, Jonathan Cain)

Plot Twist (Anna Duboc, Matias Mora)

Remind Me (Faust)

Still Hurting (Jason Robert Brown)

OTHER:

All Of Me (John Stephens, Toby Gad)

because i liked a boy (Sabrina Carpenter)

Blueprint (Momma Loves Me) (Shawn Carter, Al Green, Roosevelt Harrell)

Don't Cry For Me Argentina (Andrew Lloyd Webber, Tim Rice)

Espresso (Sabrina Carpenter)

Feeling Good (Anthony Newley, Leslie Bricusse)

Good Morning Baltimore (Marc Sharman, Scott Wittman)

Hopelessly Devoted To You (John Farrar)

I Can Hear The Bells (Marc Shalman, Scott Wittman)

I Enjoy Being A Girl (Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein)

Nessun Dorma (Puccini)

Ordinary People (John Stephens, Will Adams)

Please Please Please (Sabrina Carpenter)

Superfly (Curtis Mayfield)

What's Going On (Marvin Gaye)

You Can't Stop The Beat (Marc Shaiman, Scott Wittman)

Vocal Exercises

I have recorded these vocal exercises for you to work through, practise and return to time and time again. I am pleased to share the vocal warmups I have been using with my students for years with you now!

There are three levels of difficulty for each exercise recorded for both the **Soprano** and **Alto** voices, and the **Tenor**, **Baritone** and **Bass** voices, a total of 54 different exercises for you to use.

General note for *all* the vocal exercises: If it feels comfortable to sing lower or higher notes than those I play on the piano to accompany you on these exercises, then feel free to do so. But, never push your voice to extreme high or low notes if it feels like you are straining your voice. Struggling to reach for notes out of your range can create bad habits and, worse, be damaging to your vocal cords. The key is to stretch, but never strain!

In many of the vocal exercises I have suggested you sing them with a particular vowel sound because I think those are the best ones to sing at first. However, once you have practised the exercise with the suggested vowel at least six or seven times, try using other vowel sounds, eventually singing the exercises with all possible vowel sounds.

I also suggest physical movements for you to do to keep your body loose and relaxed while singing the vocal exercises. (For example, putting your arms up in the air and dropping them while singing the high notes, etc). Try them all since they can all be beneficial, but if some feel better to you than others, do those the most.

Finally, record yourself doing the exercises and listen back to make sure you are doing them correctly and singing them in tune!

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EXERCISE 1: VOCAL SLIDES

My students always tell me that vocal slides are among their favourite vocal exercises which makes me quite happy since I think they are the best vocal exercises to start a warm-up with and to begin the process of blending the upper and lower ranges. Some people call them sirens because they sound so much like sirens and some call them roller coasters because when you do them it can feel like you're on a vocal roller coaster!

Think of these as stretching before working out, playing a sport or taking a dance class. Do not sing them with too much volume or too heavy a sound. Keep them light and quiet when you first practise them, you can add volume once you are able to easily and smoothly go from your lowest note to your highest note. Try to focus the vibrations of each vowel on the roof of your mouth (your hard palate) to keep them in the healthiest place. This will be easiest on the *'ee'* vowel.

Firstly, take a deep breath in and sing one long held note on *'ee'*. Focus the vibration of the *'ee'* sound on the roof of your mouth without vibrato. Now try this on *'may'* – the E and A vowels will assist you in finding a forward vocal placement, vital for these warm-ups.

Now let's begin to slide! Firstly, start with a short slide on *'hee'*. The tip of your tongue should rest comfortably behind your front lower teeth. Even though we are starting on a low note, keep your vocal placement forward in your mouth by focusing the vibrations of the vowels on the roof of your mouth. Now try on these vowels preceded with an h – *'hoo', 'hoe', 'hah', 'hay'*.

Next – medium slides! Don't use a loud volume on these either, and don't let them get too thick or heavy. Aim for a light sound that gets thinner as you get higher to make the high notes easier. Try tilting your head slightly forward this time, and gently rolling it side to side as you perform the slides. You can also wiggle your jaw side to side to keep it relaxed. Again slide on these sounds – *'hee', 'hoo', 'hah', 'hay'*.

Finally, let's try the longest slides you can do, covering the widest pitch range from low to high. Start on as low a pitch as you comfortably can and then slide as high as you comfortably can. This time, try bending forward from your waist as you approach the higher notes in the slide, it'll make the higher notes come out easier. Feel like you're just falling forward, letting them go and releasing them as you get higher. Let's slide on *'hee', 'hoo', 'hoe', 'hah'*, and *'hay'*.

For **Level 2**, we'll follow a similar pattern but with a little bounce on the high notes, and for **Level 3**, I'd like you to bounce with your whole body three times. Each time you bounce in **Level 3**, see if you can let yourself release the notes a little higher.

EXERCISE 2: HUMMING

Humming is a great way to start singing actual notes after doing the vocal slides. It is a terrific way to achieve a healthy forward placement (subtle vibrations on the roof of your mouth) and a buzzy sensation in your mask area (the front part of your face around your nose and cheekbones). Be sure to keep your lips only loosely touching… do not press them together tightly. Don't strive for volume, keep your voice relaxed and quiet.

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LEVEL 1: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 1: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 2: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 2: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 3: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 3: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



EXERCISE 3: LIP BUBBLING

This is one of the most popular and well-known vocal exercises on the planet! There are several names that people use when referring to what I call the lip bubbling exercises. Some people call them motor boats because they make a sound like a motor boat engine in water and others call them lip trills.

If you have trouble getting your lips to move to create this sound (listen to **Exercise 3** to hear the sound I'm talking about), try pressing your fingers into your cheeks, pushing them in, up and forward. Push your cheeks in far enough that you can feel the space between your upper and lower teeth.

This exercise will put you on the path of keeping your lips as well as your facial and jaw muscles relaxed throughout your entire range. Be sure not to anticipate the higher notes with fear which will create tension. Sing with a feeling of 'sighing' and 'letting go' as you reach the higher notes. Also, do not push too much air through as this can trigger your outer neck muscles to tense up. Too much breath support is just as bad as too little! Try to stay energised but relaxed. The goal is to sing through your entire range passing through the different vocal areas (chest, mixed and head voice) smoothly and effortlessly. You never want to grab at your larynx with your outer neck muscles.

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LEVEL 1: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 1: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 2: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 2: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 3: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 3: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



EXERCISE 4: FALSETTO VOICE

This exercise will warm up your falsetto voice and help you become more comfortable using it.

Don't try to control the volume when you first sing these exercises. Sing them at whatever volume feels the most comfortable on your vocal cords. You can practise changing the volume from soft to loud in the future when you feel 100% comfortable singing in your falsetto voice.

Try to keep your teeth at least ½ inch apart when practising this exercise to break the tendency to keep your mouth closed which can make your jaw feel tight and affect the tone. I love the musical pattern I used on **Level 1** because it feels like rolling waves flowing in and out so it will help you to stay loose. You should feel a nice flow with this exercise.

LEVEL 1: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 1: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 2: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 2: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 3: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 3: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



EXERCISE 5: UPPER VOICE TO LOWER VOICE

This is a great exercise to practise the skill of transitioning smoothly from one vocal area to another, in this case from your upper voice to your lower voice. Singing it with the sensation of being in 'slow motion' will help keep the transitions **legato***, as will keeping the volume low and your lips and tongue relaxed and open.

You'll hear my voice suggest you sing this exercise on a vowel sound, but you could also sing it using the lip bubbling sound or even through a straw into water. (Listen to **Exercise 6** for guidance on singing through a straw.) The point is to hone your ability to sing through the different vocal registers smoothly without any noticeable changes in the tone quality.

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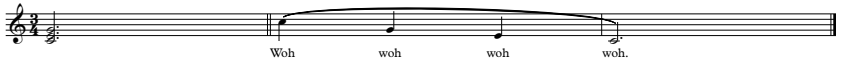
GLOSSARY*

legato

noun

A style of playing where notes are performed smoothly and connected, without noticeable breaks or pauses between them.

LEVEL 1: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 1: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 2: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 2: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 3: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 3: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



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EXERCISE 6: SINGING THROUGH A STRAW

Singing into a straw blowing bubbles into water has many benefits. It is a terrific way to develop your muscle memory, ensuring your breathing support muscles stay engaged to support your voice. It also strengthens your breathing support muscles as the water provides a little resistance to the breath. And, as it is a **semi-occluded*** exercise, a back pressure is created that puts your vocal cords in a healthy position to vibrate with less effort. You can buy special bottles that have built-in straws made especially for these exercises.

After you sing the vocal exercises through the straw, try singing through an entire song with a straw in water. My students have had very good luck with this practice!

Long narrow straws (3mm) create more resistance so definitely start with wider straws. Experiment with different straw sizes and different amounts of water in the bottles and see which feel the most comfortable. As time goes by you can try smaller straws and gradually add more water. If you feel too much resistance and your voice gets tired, immediately switch to a larger straw. It should feel effortless and soothing on your vocal cords when you are using the right size for you. It should never feeling like you are working too hard to push the air through the straw.

GLOSSARY*

semi-occluded

verb

A technique where the airflow through the vocal tract or an instrument is partially blocked or restricted.

LEVEL 1: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 1: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 2: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 2: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 3: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 3: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



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EXERCISE 7: RUNG

For this exercise you are going to sing the word ‘rung’, like the rung of a ladder. To gain the most benefit from this exercise, make sure you drop your jaw open vertically as far as you comfortably can and keep the tip of your tongue down behind your lower front teeth. Do not sing with a loud or a heavy tone, keep it light and moderately quiet. Done correctly this is also a good exercise to blend the vocal registers especially when singing through the difficult mixed middle voice area. It will also help to develop a muscle memory of freely dropping your jaw open vertically, breaking a common bad habit of keeping your mouth too tightly closed shut or spread too wide..

LEVEL 1: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



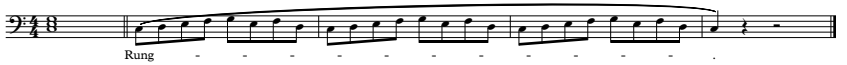
LEVEL 1: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 2: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 2: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 3: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 3: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



EXERCISE 8: SQUEAKY HINGE/SQUEAKY DOOR

This is an excellent exercise to help you find and develop your mixed middle voice. Many people find the middle voice (which is a mix of your lower and upper voices) difficult to master.

This exercise will help you with that. It is also quite soothing when you are a little hoarse and can even help loosen excess mucus off your vocal cords. It is an odd sounding exercise but don't let that scare you! The goal is to make a sound like a squeaky hinge on a door or a rusty old hinge on a gate. Focus on creating the sound in the very centre of your head (as opposed to the back of your throat). When the placement is correct and your voice is properly supported with your breath support, this exercise will feel completely effortless and you will experience no strain or effort on your vocal cords even when you transition into your highest notes. Almost all of my students love this exercise and request it at every lesson!

Allow your voice to become thinner and lighter as you get to the higher notes which will make them easier to sing. For some singers, this exercise has actually been a pathway into the whistle register. Consider this part one and **Exercise 9** as part two.

LEVEL 1: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 1: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 2: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 2: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 3: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 3: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



EXERCISE 9: HALF SQUEAKY/HALF NORMAL EXERCISE

Think of this exercise as the part two to **Exercise 8**. It is what I call a hybrid exercise. We are still going to use some of the squeaky hinge sound from **Exercise 8**, but we will simultaneously sing with a more normal singing tone. This exercise serves as a bridge to bring you to your completely normal singing voice while retaining the benefit of the squeaky hinge placement.

Drop your jaw open vertically as much as you can when performing this exercise.

LEVEL 1: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 1: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 2: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



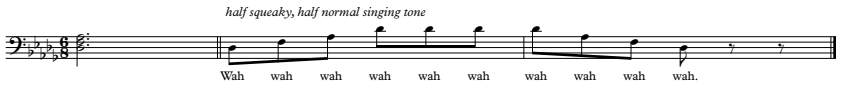
LEVEL 2: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 3: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 3: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



EXERCISE 10: VERTICAL MOUTH

Quite often people sing with their mouth spread wide with a bit of a smile. Occasionally this is fine, however, you certainly don't want to make a habit of this because it can create tension and tightness in your neck. (And of course if you're singing a sad or serious song it looks ridiculous if you are smiling!) This exercise keeps your mouth in a slightly vertical position and trains you not to spread your mouth wide, therefore avoiding tension in your neck while simultaneously creating a nicer, warmer tone. You may also feel a new sense of freedom singing this way once you get used to it.

LEVEL 1: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 1: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 2: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 2: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 3: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 3: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



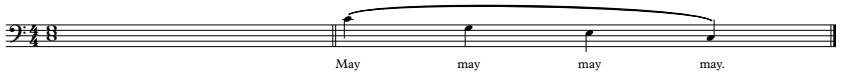
EXERCISE 11: NASAL EXERCISE

I've always had excellent results making sure there is always at least one nasal sounding exercise in every warm-up routine I do with my students. I always say to new students, *'Don't panic, I'm not trying to turn you into an overly nasal sounding singer! I'm having you do these exercises because they will put your voice in a very good, forward, healthy vocal placement which is perfect for warming up.'* They also will help develop your lowest notes which can become muffled or muddy sounding if your placement falls into the back of your throat. When you practice low notes in a forward nasal placement you will be surprised how much stronger they will sound with improved clarity and strength. The other great benefit of this placement is that it provides another helpful route to create a smooth transition into that important mixed middle range.

LEVEL 1: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 1: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 2: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 2: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 3: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 3: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



EXERCISE 12: VOCAL FLEXIBILITY

Singing scales and variations of scales is beneficial to increasing your vocal flexibility which will improve your runs and riffs, etc. I have started with the pentatonic scale because it is a good template on which to build improvisational runs and riffs as well as improving your sense of pitch. Once you know the musical patterns really well, try singing them acapella. Sing them slowly at first to make sure you're singing all the notes correctly and then you can speed them up and sing them quicker than I played them to develop even more agility.

LEVEL 1: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 1: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 2: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 2: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 3: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 3: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



EXERCISE 13: BIG INTERVAL JUMPS

When you are singing from one note to another, the space in between those notes is referred to as an interval. There are large and small intervals, it depends how far the space is between the notes. This exercise is helpful for you to get comfortable singing the larger intervals. Included with this exercise is the instruction to hold your tongue between your thumb and index finger (after first covering your tongue with a paper towel, clean face cloth or a sterile piece of gauze). The reason is that often people's tongues involuntarily pull back in their throat, especially when they are singing higher notes. They don't feel it or realise it is happening, but it can make a big difference in how easy or how hard some notes are to sing. With this exercise you can feel if your tongue is moving back and then you can retrain it not to pull backwards by relaxing it or by temporarily pushing it forwards to counteract the pulling back movement. Remember, you are going to hold your tongue in place, not pull on it!

LEVEL 1: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 1: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 2: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 2: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 3: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



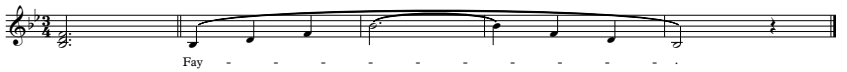
LEVEL 3: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



EXERCISE 14: LONG SUSTAINED NOTES

Some songs require that you sustain notes for long periods of time. This exercise will start you on the path of becoming comfortable holding longer notes. Two of the most important elements to successfully holding notes steady and in tune are keeping your breath support consistent and maintaining a healthy, solid vocal placement!

LEVEL 1: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 1: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 2: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 2: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 3: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 3: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



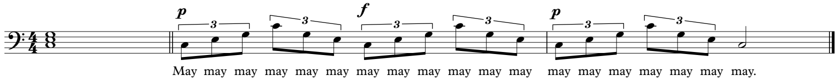
EXERCISE 15: DYNAMIC RANGE

One of the qualities that make a singer exciting and compelling is their use of dynamic changes, the contrast of singing loud and soft. This exercise will help you increase your understanding and skill level of singing with contrasting dynamics. Don't worry if you can't make a big difference between singing very softly or loudly at first. The more you practise the exercises, the easier it will become to sing with a greater contrast between the two.

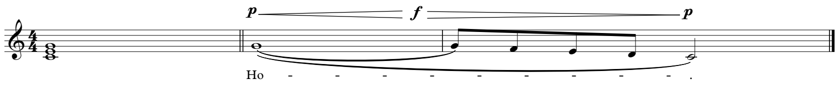
LEVEL 1: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



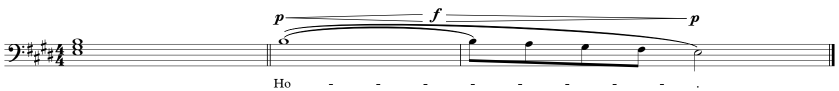
LEVEL 1: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



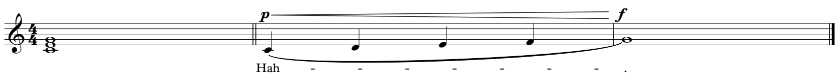
LEVEL 2: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



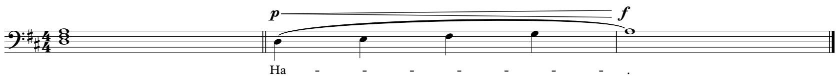
LEVEL 2: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 3: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 3: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



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EXERCISE 16: DICTION

If you have been told that it's difficult to understand your lyrics when you sing, these tongue twisting exercises are ***perfect*** for you! Practise these articulation exercises – they'll improve your diction, so everyone can hear your lyrics.

Try to keep all the vibrations and sound right up front in your mouth – if you're finding this tricky, introduce a little cry sound to help keep your larynx down as well as help focus all the vibrations up front in your face.

In **Level 1** I suggest you sing the musical pattern on Mamma Mia. However, in order to practise with more consonants and vowels, you can change the words each time you sing the exercise with various words and phrases. Try different ones each time you practise. Get creative and make some up! Here are some suggestions to get you going!

- **any apple**
- **buddy Billy**
- **common customs**
- **funny bunny**
- **longer lasting**
- **lovely lady**
- **lucky Lindy**
- **never noticed**
- **mellow yellow**
- **major minor**
- **mystery writer**
- **pizza palace**
- **royal ruby**
- **scary movie**
- **sweet and spicy**
- **legal eagles**
- **windy weather**

The combinations are endless so get creative and make up some of your own. If you find one that's very difficult, do that one the most often.

LEVEL 1: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 1: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 2: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 2: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 3: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 3: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



EXERCISE 16: DICTION (CONTINUED)

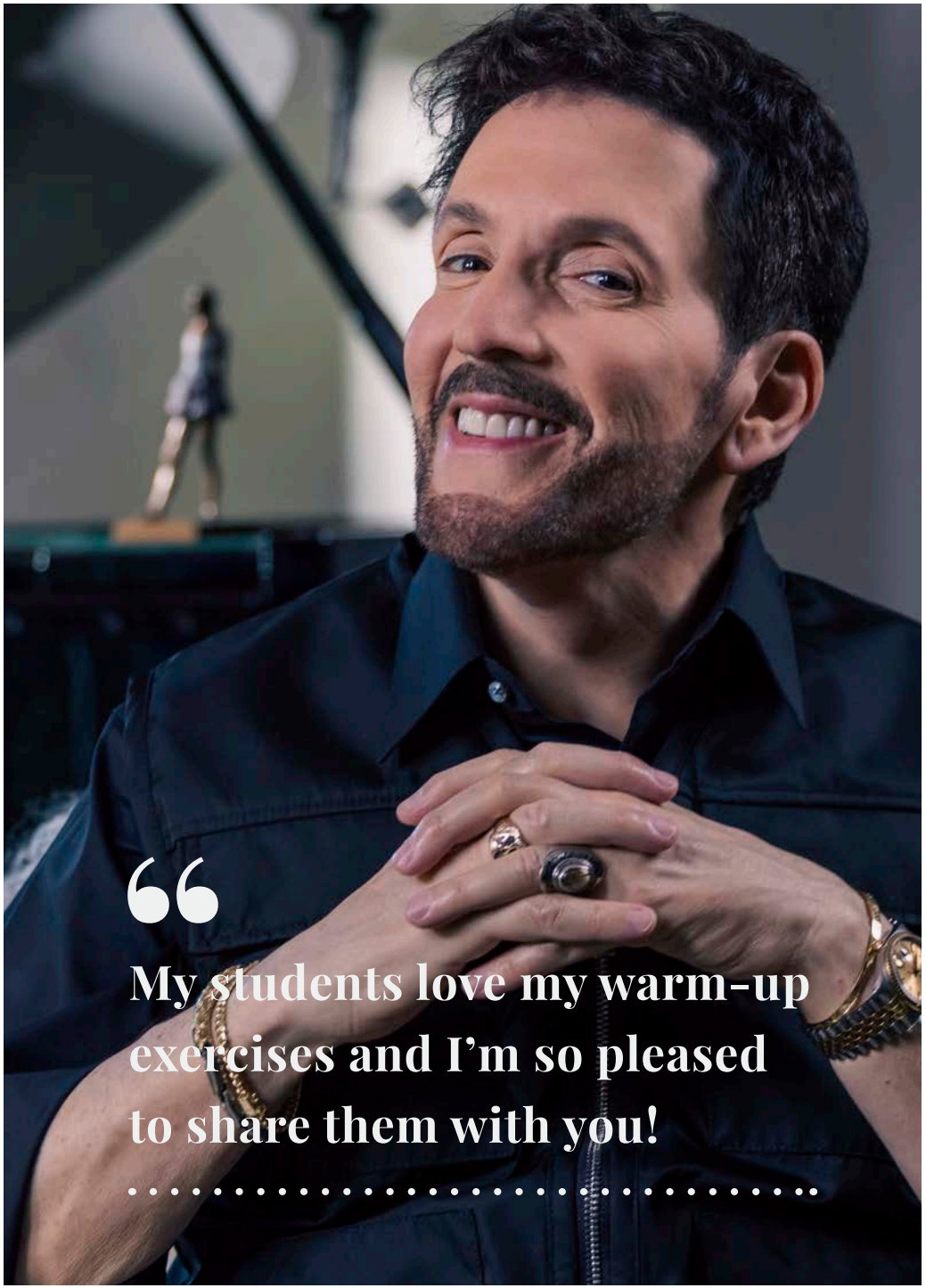
In **Level 2** I suggest you sing the musical pattern on *mee may mee may*. However, in order to practise with all the consonants and vowels, you can change the syllables each time you sing the exercise. Try different syllables to vary them each time you practise. Here are some choices:

- **boo boh**
- **cee coe**
- **fay foh**
- **doo doh**
- **hay hah**
- **jee joo**
- **lah loh**
- **rah ree**
- **tee tie**
- **yoh yay**
- **voh vah**
- **zoo zay**

In **Level 3** I suggest you sing the musical pattern on *'wiggly wiggly'*. Then just as in **Levels 1** and **2**, you can get creative and change it up each time using three syllables of mostly 'made up' words. My top suggestions to keep working different consonants are:

- **bibably**
- **diddaly**
- **fifally**
- **giggily**
- **jijally**
- **kikally**
- **ligally**
- **mimally**
- **ninally**
- **pipally**
- **sisally**
- **titally**
- **vivally**

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EXERCISE 17: IMPROVING YOUR PITCH

In Lesson 16 I have already taught you several very good techniques and tips on how to sharpen and enhance your sense of pitch. If you haven't already, explore these, and then try the following exercises.

When practising **Level 1**, the goal is to keep the repeating high notes on exactly the same pitch, not letting them waver by going sharp or flat. I would also recommend you record yourself doing these exercises and then listen back to hear if you are staying in tune the whole time. Another excellent practice would be to sing them using a recording software that shows you if you are going out of tune. Seeing the pitch represented on a graph on a screen while simultaneously hearing it is an excellent way to perfect your sense of pitch.

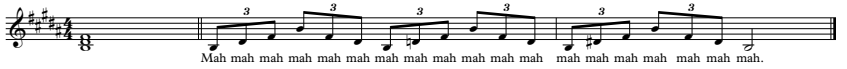
LEVEL 1: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



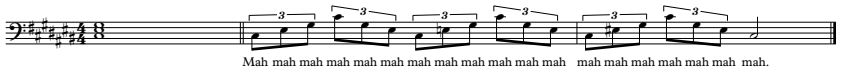
LEVEL 1: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 2: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 2: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 3: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 3: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



EXERCISE 18: LOOSENING UP

Here is another exercise where I'd like you to allow your voice to sound nasal to keep it in a healthy forward placement. The bouncy melody on **Level 1** and the bouncy accompaniment on **Levels 2** and **3** will really help you to loosen up! Feel free to walk, strut or dance around the room as you sing these exercises! Afterwards you will feel quite liberated and energised!

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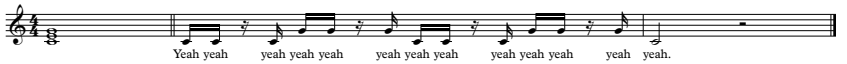
LEVEL 1: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



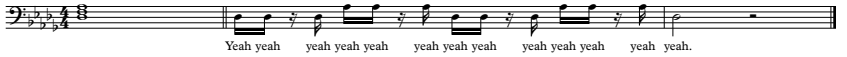
LEVEL 1: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 2: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



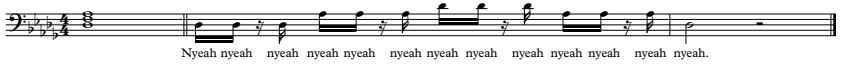
LEVEL 2: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



LEVEL 3: SOPRANOS & ALTOS



LEVEL 3: TENORS, BARITONES & BASSES



Bonus Lesson *with Marissa Jaret Winokur*

MARISSA: **Grease** *was my first Broadway show, and in its own way just as exciting as* **Hairspray**. *I grew up in New York, but outside of the city, and would go to Broadway shows with my parents. My father would get records at tag sales, in the days before eBay, and all day long I would be listening to albums in my room. I had Ethel Merman on loop.*

I wasn't a child star. I think the first show I saw was in fact **Evita**, *with Patti LuPone. I sat there and thought: that's what I'm going to do. I must have been about eight years old. I would cry during curtain calls because I was so desperate to be up there.*

I'm from a different era where we didn't have Instagram and we didn't have YouTube. So I did the high-school shows and when I graduated I resolved to go to New York. I knew I was going to be a star, but I don't think anyone else knew it. I was just that determined.

I didn't have anyone helping me. I went to auditions and open calls and got my Equity card at nineteen, when I became an understudy on **Grease**. *Sutton Foster was an understudy in the same group, which when I look back was pretty crazy. But I like to tell this story, because you have to start somewhere. I wasn't Tracy Turnblad straight away. I was Understudy Jan, with Sutton Foster as Understudy Marty, and we both went on to get Tony Awards, in consecutive years.*

But just because I have a Tony doesn't mean I get offered a Broadway show every year. I still have to show up. I still have to be on time, I still have to keep working. I still have to audition.

The best advice I can give for auditions is to really know what your intention is. Again, I come at this from the point of view of an actress, but I've also been on the other side, because I direct as well. If a girl comes in who sings better than anyone else but her eyes are closed, or she's looking up, I don't know what she means, what she's saying. I can't hire the girl who doesn't have intent. You should always know what you're trying to say through your song.

Always consult your notes. Be the character from the moment you walk into the room. Don't come in as one person and then switch to the thing you think they're looking for. Don't go in pretty if the character isn't pretty. I had an acting tutor who said it's all about breathing: you're breathing the character and you're there in your breathing, so if you can breathe, you can be.

Know exactly what you're singing about when it comes to a musical. Know what the song is. Your voice is going to be good regardless, or you wouldn't be there. But can you tell the story? My favourite song from **Hairspray** *was* **I Can Hear The Bells**, *because that's an actress's song. If you audition with that song and you can root for Tracy and feel for Tracy, then both of you will win. You have to make the listener feel something.*

ERIC: Sometimes you have to be really creative. A friend of mine, quite tall, auditioned to play the daughter of a leading man who was quite short; they didn't even want to see her, but somehow she talked her way in. All the other girls were dressed up in their best outfits, their hair nicely done. Not her. She said: it's a sitcom, funny, a farce.

So she showed up with her hair in curlers, wearing an old terry-cloth bathrobe and big fuzzy slippers, a copy of the *National Enquirer* under her arm. She hunched over a bit, waltzed straight up to the star, made her voice small and said, 'Hi Daddy, would you like a candy?' And that was it.

MARISSA: *One more thing… Most of the time, if you don't get the part, it has nothing to do with you. You could remind them of their aunt or cousin they don't like. They could already have cast someone in another part who looks too much like you. Mostly you have no idea why you didn't get the part. So do your best, then let it go when you leave.*

Getting the role has everything to do with you; not getting it, almost nothing.





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Bonus Lesson *with Sabrina Carpenter*

ERIC: Your songs are so personal. You take things straight out of your life, going right back to *Sue Me*, which was so brilliant. Do you have any songwriting tips to share?

SABRINA: *I think I've learned that there is no how-to manual and that your own instincts really are your best friend. I know it sounds like easy advice, but trusting my gut is what makes what I'm creating authentic to me. I signed with a label at the age of twelve, which was crazy, and it took me a while to escape that controlling influence. But the process of writing, the love of writing, is what I always come back to: I feel so great being able to put an experience or emotion into words. Most of our life we're dealing with feelings we don't understand, and it's such a positive to make something out of that.*

I think it's vital to stay true to your own voice. It's tempting to look at everyone else and what everyone else is doing, and those record executives who got hold of me so young really put that idea in my head – that what is working for other people is what you should be doing too. I've learned to shake off that mentality. I think you should do what feels most authentic to you.

I write everything down and will do for the rest of my life. Whether in a notebook or a voice memo, I'm constantly documenting thoughts and feelings that may or may not be useful in themselves, because somehow they guide me, in songwriting, to the place I need to be.

ERIC: I had a therapist once who said that thinking of an incident from childhood, however innocent, like going to have an ice-cream with my aunt, could turn out to be the thread that leads to the fabric. The ice-cream doesn't matter in itself – it could be the way my aunt made me feel.

SABRINA: *I've often had the experience of being in the midst of writing one song, then suddenly finding myself writing another, better song. I come up with a line I really like but it doesn't really fit and that takes me down a whole new path that somehow reveals more about my emotions than the song I started out writing. But I always like to finish my songs, whether or not they are good, just to have them there as a reference point. There are no unnecessary thoughts – they're all useful.*

ERIC: Everybody hates this question and nobody knows how to answer it. But I'm going to ask it anyway. Out of all the songs you've written, do you have a favourite, or one you that you especially love to perform?

SABRINA: *I started so young that I definitely cringe at some of my older songs – some I perform live to this day and others I've put in the graveyard. I mostly prefer my more recent songs because they are more in tune with my life right now. A song that exemplifies this is* **because i liked a boy**, *from my last album. That title came from a line I kept saying over and over when people would ask about a specific situation in my life: 'Yeah, isn't it funny, it's all because I liked a boy.' Then suddenly I realised that was my way into the song.*

I start the song painting a visual picture, then getting into another facet of that same situation, and it felt like the first time I was able to sum something up in a circle without ever having to speak on it again. That was a special moment for me, and I love singing that song live – and fans love to scream out the chorus too, which is like one big swear word.

• • • • • • • • • • •

SABRINA: *Another song I just put out is* **Please Please Please**. *Sonically I love it so much. It felt like something that had been waiting a long time to be written, both very aligned to all the music I loved growing up and also very much myself.*

ERIC: You were so modest when you went on *Saturday Night Live*.

SABRINA: *I've been doing this for such a long time, but there are still things I'm doing for the first time, so that excitement is still there. There's no half-arsing it when it comes to things you've dreamed of your whole life.*





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