

Class Title:

The Aging Voice

- I. The Aging Process
 - A. Societal views on aging vs. reality
 - B. Difference between chronological age and biological age
 - C. Changes in the body and vocal mechanism associated with aging
 - 1. Physical Changes
 - 2. Changes in the vocal instrument
 - D. Ten processes needed to maintain optimum health
 - 1. Muscle mass
 - 2. Muscle strength
 - 3. Basal metabolic rate
 - 4. Body fat
 - 5. Aerobic capacity
 - 6. Body's blood-glucose tolerance
 - 7. Cholesterol/HDL level
 - 8. Blood pressure
 - 9. Bone density
 - 10. Body's ability to regulate internal temperature
 - E. Key to Aging Well
 - 1. Appropriate ratio lean body tissue to fat-body tissue
 - 2. Appropriate muscle mass and strength
 - 3. Appropriate basal metabolic rate
 - 4. Appropriate aerobic and cardiac capacities
 - 5. Well-being resulting from above
- II. Maintaining quality singing throughout life
 - A. General Health Issues
 - 1. General well being and positive attitude
 - 2. Aerobic activity almost every day
 - 3. Appropriate, healthy diet
 - 4. Overall good physical condition – weight bearing muscles developed
 - 5. Vitamins
 - 6. Hydration
 - 7. Regular social interaction
 - 8. Enjoys conversation, laughing, reading
 - 9. Sings regularly
 - 10. Engages in productive work with short and long term goals
 - 11. Continues learning – accepts challenges
 - B. Physical exercises for lifetime quality singing: Posture - attention to stretching, posture and support muscles; Alexander Technique Support –abdominals, back muscles, thighs, knees

1. Breathing – work voluntary movement of abdominals; intercostal exercises combined with the continued involuntary movement of the diaphragm
 2. Physical flexibility/body alignment
 - Stretch long muscles
 - Leg strengtheners
 - Arm strengtheners
 - Abdominal strengtheners
 - Relaxation
 - Low impact movement; walking
- C. Vocal Flexibility
1. Establish a daily vocal warm up routine
 - Breathing into phonation
 - Yawn/sigh
 - Hum
 - Slide
 - Held pitch (timed)
 2. Improve resonance using specific exercises
 - Anchor pitch
 - Vibrato control
 - Range
 - Open pharynx
 - Flexible jaw, tongue, lips
 - Expressive delivery
- III. The Aging Voice in the Sweet Adeline chorus
- A. Acceptance and encouragement
 - B. Placement on risers
 - C. Continuing education
 - D. Making the most of your vocal contribution
 - E. When to retire
 - F. Support for your chorus other than as a singer

References:

Bunch, Meribeth (1995) Dynamics of the Singing Voice; Third Edition. New York: Springer-Verlag Wien

Sundberg, Johan (1987) The Science of the Singing Voice. Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press

Venneard, William (1967) Singing, the Mechanism and the Technic. New York: Carl Fischer

Exercises for the Aging (and other) Voices

Dede Nibler

Body Alignment – stand with your back to a wall and make sure that you are touching the wall at the upper back, the hips and knees. Feet should be close to the wall, but heels do not have to touch the wall. Move your head back towards the wall so that the base of the skull touches the wall. It should bring your chin down towards your chest. You will feel a great pull in the muscles of the upper chest, neck and shoulders. This exercise is to align the body so that the ears are over the shoulders and to help women avoid getting a “dowager’s hump.” Do this exercise 10 times twice a day.

Abdominal Muscle Development

- Lean forward and grasp the back of a chair with your hands. You should curve your spine so that the body is not standing upright. Hiss, blow, pant, bark, etc: Use any exercise which demands that the abdominal muscle moves in and up. A staccato 1-3-5-3-1 on any vowel is one that will help develop the abdominal muscle strength.
- Sit on the edge of a chair and place your elbows on your knees. Again, hiss, blow, pant, etc to work the abdominal muscle. The action is up and in.
- On a given pitch, hum two staccato notes followed by two hisses. Go up and down by half steps. This is great for tuning as well as working the abdominal muscle.

Bubble lips – this helps the abdominal muscles produce a steady, continuous inward force against the diaphragm, which will produce the continuous bubbling. Do not get discouraged if singers have difficulty with this exercise. It takes a while to learn to bubble. Putting the pointer fingers firmly but lightly at the corners of the mouth sometimes helps. Do not give up this exercise. It is a keeper.

Siren – helps remove vibrato and will assist in development of steady air pressure. Siren up and down and then land on a pitch and hold steady.

Vocal fry – gravel the voice on the lowest possible point (the vocal fry) and then slide up to a determined pitch. The vocal fry relaxes the vocal folds and will help the voice stay relaxed on the pitch. Keep the voice light and free.

Range – work all voices in all ranges. The higher pitches are the first to go and need the most attention. Keep the palate lifted, the air pressure steady, and the tone light. Arpeggios are wonderful for range extension.

False Vibrato – on an “ee” vowel, sing scale steps 1 and 2 four times at a steady tempo and then hold the scale step 1 for four more counts. Once the exercise becomes steady, do it faster and faster. The first part of the exercise will sound like a false vibrato and the held note will get cleaner and clearer.

Suspended Larynx - Sit in a chair with a hard, non-cushioned seat. Place your hands on the outside of the body, on the chair seat. Lift your body up as far as your arms will go and sing a pitch. Sit back down and sing the same pitch. Learn to make the pitch when seated as free and easy as the pitch when held up by your arms.