

VOCAL PRODUCTION #1 – BREATHING and ALIGNMENT

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

POSTURE

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

BREATHING

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

Note your observations from the video:

BREATHING EXERCISES

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

The Fountain of Youth:

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

The Swimming Breath:

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

Chattanooga Choo Choo:

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

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BODY ALIGNMENT

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PELVIS:	Slightly Tucked
CHEST:	High and Expanded
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Posture

Liz Caplan, Broadway Vocal Coach

You will find that the efficiency of the vocal apparatus depends on the alignment of the body and the economy with which it functions. When the spine is out of alignment its ability to support the body is diminished and muscles intended for other things must provide that support. If the lower spine is weak, the abdominal muscles supply substitute strength for the torso; if the abdominal muscles are employed in holding up the body, they are not free to respond to breathing needs. Similarly, if the upper part of the spine abandons its job of carrying the rib cage and shoulder girdle, the rib muscles may take on the responsibility of holding the chest high, in which case they are unavailable for intercostal breathing. Finally, when the vertebrae of the neck are not well aligned, the whole channel through which the voice travels is distorted. With a weak neck, the jaw muscles, tongue muscles, laryngeal muscles, even lips and eyebrows become supporters of the head, leaving little chance of a free passage for sound.

Moshe Feldenkrais says in his invaluable book, *Awareness Through Movement*:

“Any posture is acceptable in itself as long as it does not conflict with the law of nature, which is that the skeletal structure should counteract the pull of gravity, leaving the muscles free for movement. The nervous system and the frame develop together under the influence of gravity in such a way that the skeleton will hold up the body without expending energy despite the pull of gravity. If, on the other hand, the muscles have to carry out the job of the skeleton, not only do they use energy needlessly, but they are prevented from carrying out their main function of changing the position of the body, that is, of movement.”

The first step, then, in freeing the voice, is *getting acquainted with your spine*.

Excerpt from *Freeing the Natural Voice* by K. Linklater