

The Vocal Skills Puzzle

Why a Puzzle?

We seem to have to juggle many different elements under the title “vocal skills”, but the overall “picture” of the voice really can’t be seen until you manage to fit together enough of the pieces! Fitting them together is actually more important than perfecting each piece in isolation. You can’t work on resonance without phonation being a factor. Can’t work on phonation without breath support etc. etc.

Developing the Voice: Coordination of Skills

1. Exercising the voice – how often do you effectively practice?
2. Extending the range
 - o energy
 - o space
 - o depth
3. Lining up the voice
 - o vowels: horizontal and vertical alignment
 - o registers
 - o resonators: avoiding “breaks”

The Illusion of Placement...

‘Placing’ the voice is merely another mental image which can help a singer to improve phonation and resonance, and therefore correct tone colour problems.

“Basics” vs. Artistry

Often we seem to have a tug-o-war between working on the “basics” – Vocal Production – and working on the artistic parts of our performance. The JCDB tells us that artistry or emotional communication cannot be achieved until a degree of proficiency in basic skills is attained. Most often, we work the two elements separately – VP as technical, artistry as transcending technical. No wonder achieving both is a real challenge! Outside of our vocal warm-ups, we would do better to attempt to understand the vocal skills which CREATE the artistry we require, and then work on the artistry with that in mind.

“Beautiful sounds start in the mind of the singer. If you cannot think a beautiful sound, it is an accident if you make one. You must learn to ‘picture’ the sound in your mind’s eye and ‘hear’ it in your mind’s ear before it can become a consistent reality.”

| Fundamentals of Sound / Expression | |
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| • accuracy | Requires a firm, sustainable tone. |
| • word delivery | Firm tone, clear articulation of vowels and consonants and vocal flexibility. |
| • synch / unity | Clear articulation of vowels and consonants, on a firm, sustained tone. |
| • balance | Consistent tone throughout range and dynamics, sung with a free and energized sound. |

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| • blend / unit sound | Relaxed throat and open resonators for clear, rich tone, sung consistently throughout range and dynamics. |
| Elements of Artistry | |
| • tone flow / lyric flow | Consistent, free tone, on well coordinated breath support, cleanly articulated vowels and consonants. A natural delivery of the phrases also requires the singer be mentally engaged in expressing a beautiful message. |
| • energized vocal line / energy / forward motion | Well coordinated breath support, relaxed throat and open resonators for clear, rich tone, a free and energized sound, plus mental engagement. |
| • dynamic flexibility | Well coordinated breath support, consistent tone throughout range and dynamics, vocal flexibility and mental engagement. |
| • vocal style / inflection | Vocal flexibility and mental engagement. |
| • finesse / poise & command | Vocal flexibility, mental engagement, and confidence! |
| • emotional communication / physical communication | Free and energized sound, with mental engagement and a relaxed and expressive body. |

It doesn't matter what part you sing, practice it as a beautiful melody, with your heart and soul, and let your artistry bring out your best sound. If you are not mentally engaged in artistic sound and delivery, you will NEVER deliver artistic sound!

Singing is 90% mental, 10% physical. It takes more "muscle memory" than actual muscle! Our brain must learn to coordinate our instrument so that we can produce the sounds we want on demand, the ultimate in fine motor skill development! It takes hours and hours of accurate practice to make these skills automatic and EASY. As you achieve greater and greater proficiency / consistency, you'll find your artistic feel for the music will become more pronounced, as your brain is "freed up" to engage in the message.

Vocalises For Coordination

- Think "beautiful tone"
- Na-na (88,77,66,55) ee-ah (44,33,22) ou (1)
 - Resonance & phonation
 - Work over register "breaks", upward and downwards. (Ab)
 - Change to "Noh-noo" to practice vowel alignment consistency.
- Somewhere Over The Rainbow
 - Clean vowels and consonants
 - Free and energized sound
 - Prepare for each note mentally before you get there
 - Apply the range extension rules: energy, space, depth.
- That's What Friends Are For – in lead