

# Calibrate Your Sound

Caitlin Castelino





# Individual vs Group Warm Ups

## Individual Warm Ups

- Completed before rehearsal (and, preferably, daily to keep the voice strong and healthy)
- Purpose: warm up the voice to reduce likelihood of vocal injury, improve vocal range, smooth out the vocal break, allow the individual to explore their own respiration, phonation, resonance, articulation, and artistry
- Focuses on the needs of the individual

## Group Warm Ups

- Completed during rehearsal
- Purpose: create the target unit sound (“calibrate” the group sound) and energy, improve the overall skill set of all of the singers, allow the quartet or chorus to explore their combined resonance and articulation
- Focuses on the needs of the group while addressing needs of individuals

# Individual Vocal Warm Ups

- Semi-occluded vocal tract exercises:
  - Bubbling
  - Raspberries
  - Singing on v, z, oo, m, ng
  - Vocal function exercises
  - Straw phonation
- Vocal warm up CDs/videos
  - Sing, Baby, Sing
  - YouTube videos
- Exercises focusing on specific areas of need



# Vocal Function Exercises

- Created by Dr. Joseph Stemple to strengthen muscles that support the vocal mechanism and reduce vocal tension
- The following range is for the female voice
  - Men should sing these a fourth lower
- All exercises are completed twice
- Dr. Stemple's protocol instructs singers to produce the sound using a forward placement

Sing “Somewhere Over the Rainbow.” Make mental notes about how it feels to sing the song. Do you have any tension? Notes that are hard to sing? Inconsistencies in breath flow? Breaks in your sound?



## Exercise 1: Warm Up

- Sustain the sound “eee” for as long and as softly as possible on the musical note “F”
- Goal: 45 seconds with an uninterrupted tone flow



## Exercise 2: Stretching

- Slowly glide from your lowest note to your highest note on the sound “oh” as softly as possible
- Slowly glide from your highest note to your lowest note on the sound “oh” as softly as possible
  
- Goal: No voice breaks



## Exercise 3: Power

- Sustain the following notes, one at a time: Middle C (C4), D, E, F, and G.
- Sustain the notes as softly as possible on the sound “oh”
  
- Goal: 45 seconds with an uninterrupted tone flow

Sing “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” again—does it feel different?



# Keys to Vocal Function Exercises

- The softer the better
- Twice each, preferably 2x/day
- Perfect for the first warm up of the day
- Great as a cool-down after singing or talking all day

Used properly, these exercises will help develop vocal freedom, breath support, and power



# Focus Areas to Calibrate Your Group Sound

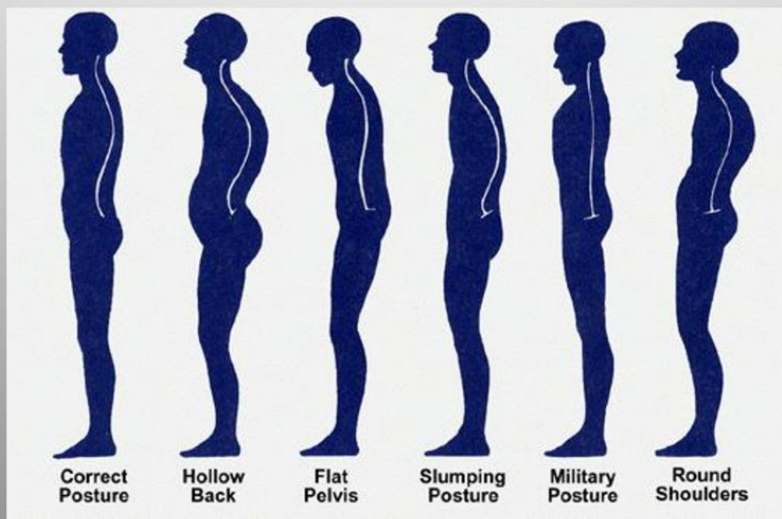
- Posture
- Reducing tension
- Respiration (breathing)
- Phonation and Resonation
- Articulation
- Tuning
- Physical and vocal energy

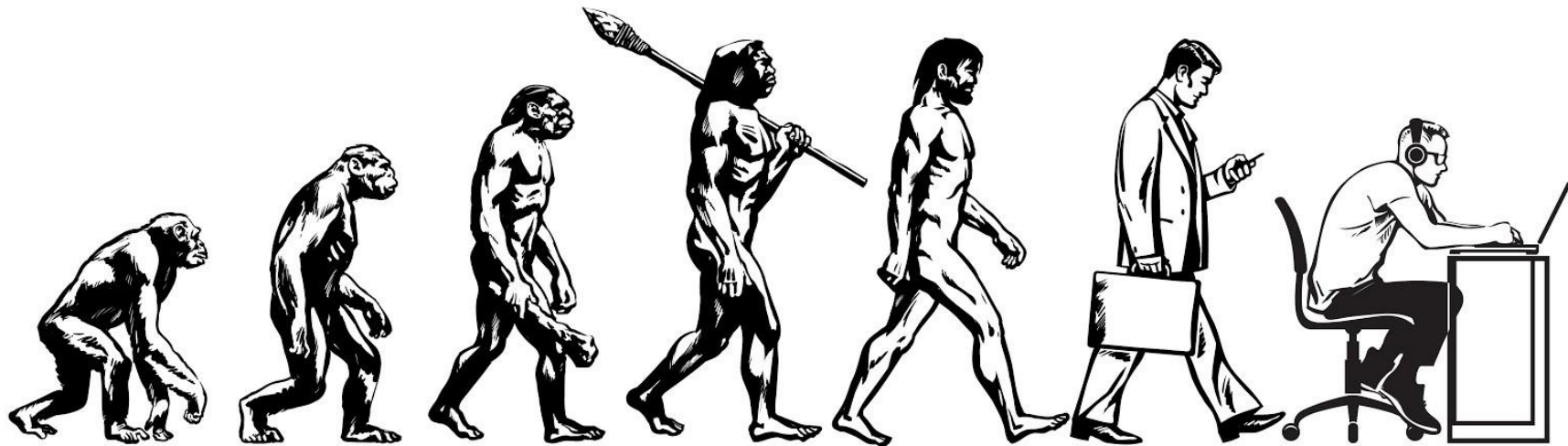
★ While exercises may be used to focus on a specific area, you will likely be targeting multiple areas at once, and each exercise should add on to the skills you have already set up

# Posture

- Remember to maintain good alignment throughout the vocal exercises
  - It's easy to “set up” singer's posture at the beginning and then neglect it for the remainder of the rehearsal
  - Find times throughout the exercises and your rehearsal to reset your posture

*Models of balanced (correct) – and unbalanced postures for singing*





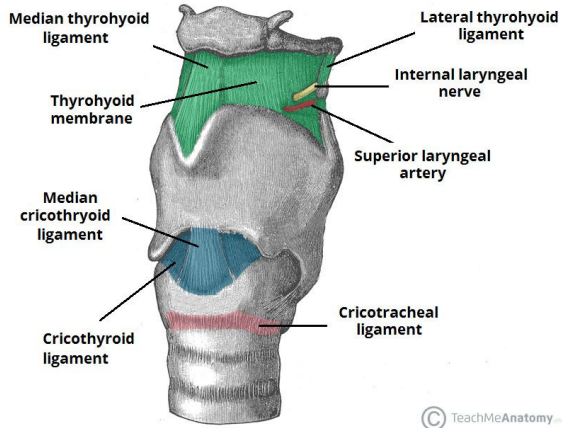


# Reducing Tension

- Lip, tongue, jaw, and laryngeal tension are common in singers
- Tension can lead to unhealthy habits, vocal injuries, lack of development of muscles needed for healthy singing, and voices sticking out of the unit
- Free, healthy singing should be the focus throughout exercises and rehearsal, so tension needs to be monitored and addressed
- Lip tension:
  - Bubbling
  - Monitoring lip placement, particularly upper lip
- Tongue tension:
  - Raspberry
  - Sing with tongue flat on bottom lip, monitor for tongue retracting, bunching up, becoming “pointy”

# Reducing Tension

- Jaw tension:
  - Don't overextend the jaw (more on this later)
  - TMJ pain or stiffening of muscles around TMJ
- Laryngeal tension:
  - Monitor for throat pain or discomfort when singing
  - Thyrohyoid space tightening
    - Circumlaryngeal massage
    - Monitor thyrohyoid space while singing
  - Goal: relaxed, low laryngeal position
- Tension along the vocal tract can cause noisy inhalation due to constriction of muscles. Focus on low laryngeal position, open space in the back of your throat, and absence of tension in the tongue, jaw, and lips
- Important to be aware of your body and voice, and any changes that you feel that bring about discomfort or pain





# Breathing

- Monitor for inconsistent breath support, poor breath management, strain in the sound, sagging posture as the exercise progresses. Once notes are added to the exercise, also monitor tuning
- 3D breath, breathe between the molars
- 3-3-7 Sh
- S-F-Sh
- Any scales or arpeggios on a bubble or “v”
  - Bubble 123454321-5-1
  - “V” 1358531
- Catch breaths--Listen for lapses in sound, particularly at spots where singers would normally breathe
  - Can do this in quartets as well. Listen to see if the sound is consistent enough that you cannot notice catch breaths and that resonance does not become compromised
  - ABCs without planned breaths--take out a letter as needed
  - Repeated intervals or scales (i.e. 12121212 or 12345432123454321) without planned breaths, take catch breaths as needed



# Phonation and Resonation

- Focusing on phonation in the absence of resonation is very challenging, as the sound that exits our mouth/nose has already passed through our resonators
- Low laryngeal position and absence of tension in larynx, throat, and articulators will allow for optimal resonance (“3D resonance”)
- Goal is never to “match” those around you. Find your optimal resonating space and it will complement the other singers, which will create a beautiful, unique sound
- You may find it is “easier” to sing next to certain people--this is likely because the timbre and optimal resonating space of those singers is similar to yours. This is why standing position in a quartet and chorus is so important!
- All vowels should be resonated through the vowel tunnel--tip of tongue touches the back of the bottom teeth, tongue in a “pringle shape”



# Phonation and Resonation

- Avoid resonating in the nose, except for the sounds “m,” “n,” and “ng”
  - Touch your nose--if you feel vibration, there is air passing through the nose
  - Sing+vowel (i.e. “sing-oo” or “sing-ah” on 5-54321)
    - Feel vibration in the nose on “ng” of “sing” but not on the vowel
    - Make it overly nasal with the vowel resonating in the nose, then with the vowel resonating through the mouth to feel the difference
    - On the vowel, think about lifting up while feeling space in the throat and feeling the tip of the tongue on the back of the bottom teeth
- Me-o-e-o-e-o-e-o-e-o (forward, back, mixed)
- Sing through all of the vowels to make sure they are all consistently resonated, start with your “best” vowels and move to the vowels that are most challenging
  - Ascending octave, break off by part when descend (tenor holds 8, lead moves to 6, bari to 4, bass to 2, then bottom three parts resolve to 5, 3, 1)
    - Loo lee | lah lay | luh lae | lih loh | leh lu (as in “look”)





# Articulation

- Reminder: reset alignment!
- Monitor jaw movement—don't overextend the jaw
  - Altoid space
- These are also good exercises for working on internal synchronization
- Nursery Rhymes
  - Peter Piper picked a peck of peppers x3 (up and down the scale from 1-5-1-5-1-5-1)
- Tongue Twisters
  - Red leather, yellow leather purse (1-5-1)
  - She sells seashells by the seashore (1-1-2-2-3-3-2-1)
- Minnie x4, Ming x4, What a pity x2, What x4, Zoom x4, Zah (all on one note or on a chord)
- Minnie (1-9-2), Mickey, Donald, Goofy, Chip, and Dale (1-5-1)



# Tuning

- Focus on intervals, ascending and descending lines
- Sing against the key note (have a row/voice part sing the key note and the other rows/voice parts sing against it, or have a section or half of the chorus sing the key note)
- Four part exercises, “martini glass” exercise
- Rounds (Alfred, Rose)
- Opposing exercises (i.e. tenor/lead do one pattern, bari/bass do a different pattern)
  - One section sings 1 ↓ 5 ↑ 1 ↑ 5 ↓ 1 ↓ 5 ↑ 1, other section sings the opposite. Vary the vowels to make sure it stays in tune regardless of vowel
  - One section sings ascending scale (1-8 or 1-5), other section sings descending
  - Mary had a little lamb—1/2 step intervals, then split (half sing the ascending pattern, half sing the descending pattern)

# Physical and Vocal Energy



- Physical and vocal energy are intertwined
  - Change in physical energy creates change in vocal energy
  - Must be from the core
  - Purposeful physical energy improves vocal energy more than simply moving the body
- Energy must be *relentless*
- Ideally want high energy from the very first exercise; however, you may need to slowly build it in depending on the level of the group
- Watch for sagging of posture, flat facial affect, loss of lift in the body and face. Listen for “sausage” or “wah-wah” sound, weak sound, phrases that are not extended (strong vocal energy is dependent on good breath support and breath management)
- Have a quartet member or a visual leader be responsible for identifying loss of physical energy while another quartet member or the director is responsible for sound and identifying loss of vocal energy
- All energy and sound must follow the same path—up and out!

# Physical and Vocal Energy



- Stand in circles (quartet circles up, chorus can have separate circles for each voice part, row, etc)
  - Observe others in the circle for physicality and facial expression
  - Encourages singer driven sound in a chorus setting, as they are not “following the director”
- Half and half choruses
  - “Audience” gives feedback
  - Identify partners, provide individual feedback
  - Visual coach and director give feedback
- Practice performing different emotions while singing
  - Director/quartet member holds up signs with emotions during the exercise or song, the chorus/quartet then performs while expressing those emotions
  - Are the singers unified in their expression?
  - How did the different emotions change the sound? Physicality?
  - Was there a perceptible change in facial expression when the emotions were similar?

**Remember: the purpose of group warm ups is not for each individual to warm up the voice during rehearsal. When you come already warmed up, the group is able to focus on improving the overall unit sound and higher level skills. You will start to see and hear improvement each week and keep moving your level up when you come prepared, already warmed up, and select exercises that help you target areas that need strengthening!**