

MUSCLE TENSION AND YOUR SINGING

WHAT IS MUSCLE TENSION? Hypertonic muscles that cause pain, discomfort and/or lack of mobility and strength.

WHAT CAUSES IT?

- Injuries
- Our Lives! These are called Activities of Daily Living (ADL's)
- Desk/Computer work, driving, repetitive tasks and CELL PHONES!

HOW DOES THIS AFFECT OUR SINGING? Muscle tension is contagious, when one muscle is hypertonic, it's only a matter of time before the other muscles it works with AND the muscles around it also become hypertonic. This will change vocal production efficiency and tone quality.

HOW CAN WE TELL IF WE'RE TENSE? Below are some signs to look for:

- Of course muscles that become visibly tight when singing, particularly the Sternocleidomastoid and the scalenes. Note that these muscles ARE NOT involved in breathing OR jaw movement so there should be no reason for there to be any tension in that area at all.
- If you are seeing vasculature "popping out" this means the underlying muscles are tense.
- Posture!!!! From the side your body should be lined up as follows: Ankle bone, center of the knee, hip joint, shoulder joint and the hole in your ear. See the figure on the next page. This is a chicken or the egg situation, did the poor posture cause the muscle tension or did the muscle tension cause the poor posture? Let's cover our butts and fix both!

REHEARSAL TRAPS AND NO NO'S:

- No "reaching for notes" physically with your jaw and head.
- Focusing on the director does not mean physically leaning your head and neck forward, a habit that many have with only the best intentions!
- When "checking for hot air" don't bring your head to your hand, bring your hand to your face.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT THIS TENSION?

In most cases we cannot change our jobs or ADL's but we CAN modify them.

- Change up your "dominant side" for repetitive tasks. Change up that purse shoulder!
- Perform stretches daily.
- Get a massage!

STRETCHING TIPS:

- Only stretch to a point of mild discomfort, it should not be painful!
- Do not "bounce" a stretch, this can cause muscle spasm and injury.
- Don't overstretch to meet a goal. You will see results in time.
- Don't be lopsided, stretch both sides even when only one side is bothersome.

MESSAGE TIPS:

- Partner up so one person is being massaged at a time, it will be more effective.

- Use your bodyweight, do not muscle from your hands and wrists, this can cause injuries. Risers are perfect for this, have the partner massaging be a row up.
- Communicate: ask for sore areas and check in on pressure.
- If you aren't a professional, don't massage the neck in front of the jaw line.

ANY QUESTIONS?

