

# Vocal Health and Expression

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## **Our goals for this session:**

- Activate the body
- Free the voice
- Identify vocal tools we use to express emotion
- Use those tools to the fullest while keeping the voice healthy

**We will move first, then think and talk.**

**But keep moving while we think and talk.**

*Imagine a ball of energy about the size of a tennis ball in your hand. Feel your hand shake? Move that energy through your hand, up your arm, through your back, down the other arm, then out your hand. Do that in reverse!*

*Now start that energy ball in one foot, move it up your leg up to your head, then back down the other side. Reverse that as well.*

*Next, some basic stretches, particularly shoulders and arms, while we talk about a few other things.*

- Free ourselves from using the words “right” and “wrong”
- Descriptive words are usually more useful than judgment words

### ***Remember---***

- Choir directors are often the only voice teacher a singer ever has
- If you are functioning as a voice teacher, that side of your teaching deserves attention beyond a 50-minute session once a year.

**The number one vocal problem choir directors have is overuse. No amount of good vocal technique can fix that.**

- Overuse and other vocal abuse is often present in both choir directors and choral singers.
- Overuse multiplies and amplifies vocal issues
- Vocal overuse and abuse is contagious. Singers can catch it from their directors and from the singers around them.

*Let's review some basics items that are important to vocal health.*

### **Posture**

- Balance. Find the point at which you lose your balance in all directions. Until you have gone too far, you don't know where too far is.
- Athletic stance. Singing is a sport.
- Core strength.
- High energy level without tension

### **Breath systems**

- What causes air to go in (start with rib expansion)

- What causes air to go out (keep the rib expansion muscles active)
- Balancing those forces
- Experiment with the ratio of air flow rate to amount of sound
- Cycle between dense (more sound, less air flow) and breathy (lots of air flow, less sound) sounds

### **Free flow of energy**

- The “little ball of energy” should move without getting stuck in any particular spot
- Release tension points in face, head, neck, especially where tendons and muscles connect to bones

### **Making sound**

- Don't “sing” yet, we have too many habits associated with that word
- The other physical things we have established need to remain in place
  - Posture
  - Air flow
  - Free flow of energy without points of tension

### **Humming**

- A hum is just a vowel (experiment with different interior vowels) with the lips touching
- Cycle/siren through upper part of voice, then lower part of voice

### **Vowels**

- Closed “ee” to activate high frequencies
- Open “oh” to find full spaces
- Find a real “ah”
  - Mouth taller than it is wide
  - Cycle between “uh” and “ah” to find the difference  
Full range bridges
- Cycle/siren “ah” to “oo” in upper range
- Cycle/siren “ah” to “oo” in lower range
- Barely dip from upper into lower
- Barely dip from lower into upper
- Full range sirens

## **Express**

- What aspects of sound can we vary to change the emotional message of a sound?
- Until we have found the point of “too much,” we probably haven’t found where “enough” is
- Use notes and words that aren’t associated with old vocal habits to experiment with the aspects of expression

*It is not a song, it’s an exercise.*



## Color

- Bright vs. Dark
  - Relative strength of high frequency vs. low frequency
- Experiment with some basic color ideas, not being too attached to the outcome.

Green  
Red  
Blue  
Yellow

## Dynamics

- Find *mf*, then other dynamics are relative to that
- Dynamic shapes
  - Getting louder
  - Getting softer
  - All the other dynamic shape variants you can draw

## Tempo

- Fast
- Slow
- Gradient shapes over whole phrase
- Inflection of individual words

## Consonants vs. Vowels

- Sing the words without any consonants
- Add in consonants a little at a time
- Vary the strength of the consonants in relation to the volume of the vowels
- Vary the actual time spent on the consonant portion of the words

## Time for Emotion

- Everything we have worked on so far has just been gathering the tools, but now we start to build something
- We will try some single emotion words as prompts, and experiment with how we use the tools we have examined
- Give yourselves completely to the expression. But don't hurt yourselves.
- *frequently, ask if the expression resulted in tension or vocal stress, and see if you can do just as much expression without the tension and stress*

## Enthusiasm

Tenderness  
Anxiety  
Amusement  
Passion/Lust  
Pride  
Relief  
Amazement  
Irritation  
Outrage  
Bitterness  
Disgust  
Despair  
Shame  
Panic  
Surprise  
Irritation  
Rage  
Envy  
Shame  
Horror  
Hope

### **Apply it to your pieces**

- If you get in a rut with a piece, break the old patterns by trying a radically different emotion word than is “right”
- Until you have gone “too far” with an emotional concept, you don’t know where the most effective level is
- “That didn’t quite work” is the description of a successful experiment and the basis for the next experiment

### **Build healthy, expressive voices in yourselves. And in your singers.**

- Find the balance of forces in your body, and your singers will be more balanced

- Give yourselves and your singers time to recover and rest. Seriously.
- Release tension every opportunity you get.
- There are an infinite number of ways to express every piece, explore them fully

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