

Sick and Singing

by Susan Andes Brizick

You have a full performance schedule and things are going great, la la la laaaah...oh boy, I'm sick. What do you do if you find yourself sick? Despite our best efforts to stay healthy, sometimes we do catch that cold. First take a minute and assess if you have to do the performance or not. If you are in the chorus, perhaps it is best to not expose the rest of the chorus to your illness, but if you are no longer contagious, maybe you can back off a little bit on a song or two. If you are the soloist or lead maybe you cannot cancel. If it hurts when you are singing, really take a moment to re-evaluate your technique and consider if it is worth the risk of a longer recovery.



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JUST BE SMART!

Take care of yourself physically:

- Get extra sleep
- Drink lots of water
- Wash your hands
- Take extra vitamin C
- Stay warm
- Avoid talking if you don't need to
- Do anything that will support your immune system and get you better

Take care of yourself mentally:

- Think about what you can and cannot do about the situation
- Get a little mental R & R
- Don't go overboard with the ramifications
Make a plan

If the show must go on.....

Take an honest look at how the sickness is affecting your voice. Sore throats often lead to a raised larynx and reduce the power of your voice and resonance. Swelling of the mucous membranes absorbs some of your sound and affects your resonance. If the cold has gone to your chest, it may impact your ability to quickly fill your lungs for good breath support. General aches can impair your endurance. Figure out how this illness is affecting your singing.

After taking a good look, make rational adjustments and reduce your expectations a little bit; you may not sound like you usually do.

- Maybe that high C is not going to be as loud as you know it can be.
- Maybe you need to add a few breaths into phrasing to help you.
- Maybe you need to increase your support or warm up for more time than usual.

It is better to get through a performance by singing on cue and in tune than worry about little changes. Showing up and showing professionalism is part of a singer's life and everyone will understand. In the meantime, do your best to relieve your symptoms and get better so you can do your best on that day! Remind yourself that you will wake up again tomorrow and the next time you sing you will be well and astound everyone!

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Many singing greats have had to make the show go on and admit they learned something from singing with a cold. Opera singer, Renee Fleming, states in her autobiography that she truly learned to sing when she was sick. She could no longer cheat on her technique and get away with it; she had to listen to her body and trust her technique to get her through.

This is not to encourage you to sing if you are very sick or if your throat hurts, but a means to help you get through it when you need to. Of course, the ideal would be to take care of yourself to the point that you never get sick (but let's be realistic, we do). But be smart if the show must go on.

Dr. Anthony Jahn's Advice (www.operadoctor.com):

- Make a realistic appraisal of whether you really need to sing or can cancel.
- Make an unemotional checklist of how your vocal production is impaired.
- Develop a strategy for working around those impairments.
- Use medications and adjustments in technique.
- Accept a philosophical attitude toward a temporary setback.

Stay healthy and smart about your singing!

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