

“TD LIKE TO TEACH THE WORLD TO SING”—CROSS-CULTURAL VOCAL TECHNIQUES FOR THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

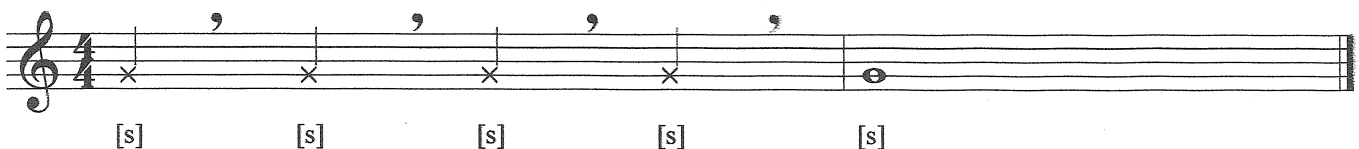
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POSTURE

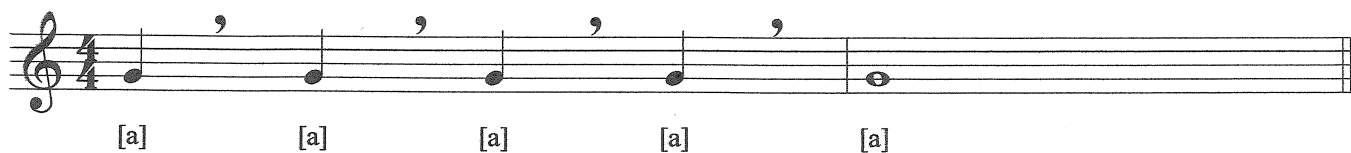
1. Begin by placing feet your hip width's apart; rock gently forward, all weight on the toes without lifting the heels—feel this. Rock gently back, all weight on the heels without lifting the toes—feel this. Next, continue rocking gently until you can sense a middle ground, where your weight is equally balanced between the front and back of the foot. Feel this sensation. its effortlessness.
2. Place one foot slightly ahead of the other – for balance, for ease of movement in performance, so knees don't lock. Test again for sensation of balance and for the sensation that the ankle joint is centered in the middle of the foot.
3. Gently rock the knees so that they feel stacked immediately above the ankle joint.
4. Gently rock/circle the thigh/hip joints so that they feel stacked immediately above the knee joint.
5. Bring the shoulders all the way to the front of the body, scrunching them forward; roll the shoulder up in front of the ears; roll them around the ears and to the back as far as they will go.
6. Hold the shoulders in this furthest back position for a few seconds, then GENTLY release them downwards into a natural position.
7. The arms should be hanging in a straight line and the middle finger of each hand should be able to brush lightly against the side seams of whatever garment is worn. The chest should feel lifted (Miller's "noble posture") without jutting out militarily.
8. Roll the head VERY slowly and gently in either clockwise or counterclockwise direction; after two or three rotations, reverse the direction for the same number of rotations. Allow the head circles to become smaller and smaller until they are so small no circle is possible.
9. Allow the head to come to rest with the sensation that the head itself is not on top of the neck, but actually resting directly between the shoulders themselves.
10. Walk around the space maintaining this posture, experiencing its freedom and weightlessness. Allow different movements of arms, legs, head to test this freedom.

BREATHING/ONSET

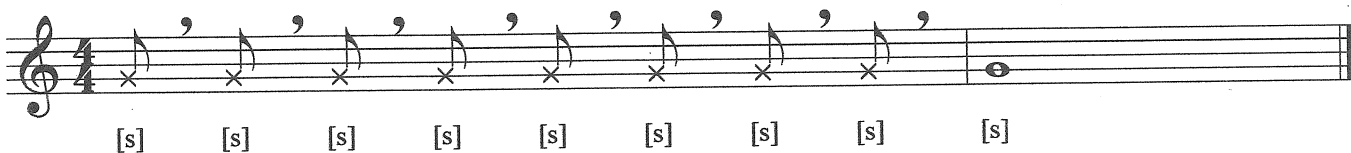
- Begin breath *management* with the sibilant /s/, taught at the same time as posture alignment.



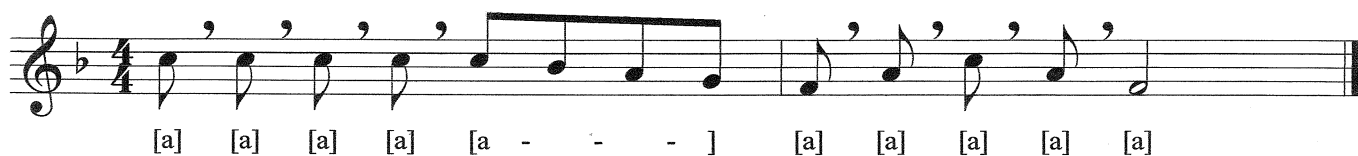
- Open the voice to /a/ on the same exercises. Repeat the exercises with pitch, varying from F2 to no higher than D3, staying in middle voice.



These same exercises are then executed at twice the speed to encourage a faster breath response. I ask my students to *think* the speed faster, not simply try to execute the abdominal/diaphragmatic movement faster from a purely physical perspective.



- Introduce the surprised “gasp”—a *gola aperta*, or open throat sensation, during inhalation. Some teachers refer to this as the beginning of a yawn, or sniffing a rose deeply through the nose—the idea is the same and gets much the same results. Practice the gasp that turns immediately into a sigh, which becomes the first note of any exercise you choose.
- Move into agility exercises, which are important in producing a more efficient coordination among all the separate parts of the vocal mechanism (Miller, p. 42). Agility should be taught as early as possible, since it simultaneously employs *and* inculcates good breathing habits. The exercise below incorporates the rapid breathing response required for repeated short tones, thus reinforcing the half-breath needed for staccato and agility; utilizes a legato descending scale, requiring the breath to be used in a differently; then finishes with short tones which change pitch, encouraging the vocalist to listen while singing. If a student “misses” the internal pitches, I usually make them sing the scale again! Vary the scales (and the vowels) to match the student’s tessitura and skill level. This is not an exercise to expand range, but rather to help the student negotiate the passaggio events—the exercise should be easy for the student.



During this exercise, and others like it, I ask my students to incorporate 3 additional concepts. I suggest they (1) think a “new” vowel on each and every tone to balance the breath flow through the vocal line. This concept is an important one to encourage legato singing, since each vowel “matches” every other same vowel in a melismatic scale. In order to teach this skill, the (2) “finger technique” has worked well with my students. I ask them to imagine an organ keyboard (not a piano!) to introduce the sostenuto of breath, if you will, necessary to move from pitch to pitch in a legato passage. If the finger is not depressed, the sound cannot be made. At the same time, I also introduce the concept of (3) “extending” the voice to fill the space, or project it in a healthy way, by having them find a physical place to “send” the voice. Obviously, these skills take time to master!

RESONANCE/VOWELS

- Find a natural production of each vowel based on vernacular speech, because it has less entanglement than a student’s perception of vowels in singing. (Smith, p. 51)
- Use the IPA equivalents chart to bring about natural vowel sounds – we briefly explore each student’s native language to find our own equivalents. We also explore vowel elongation as a continuation of natural speech and then transfer that to the exercises.
- Use nasal consonants and continuants to bring about a rapid coupling and release of the nasopharyngeal and buccal resonators. (Miller, p. 86) Again, different languages present varying aspects that either help or hinder singers. For instance, Arabic has 3 different /h/ and 3 different /k/ sounds, which traditional Western singing languages do not have. Asian singers have no difficulty finding a nasal tonality; it’s easy to use this in nasal continuants and consonants exercises, but teaching them to drop the tongue/jaw to achieve a more resonant sound may take extra time. Explore these on an individual basis and use available online and print resources for additional ideas.
- Use the downward sigh (/a/ or /o/) to encourage bridging the *passaggio* events present in every voice. This is especially important in male singers trying to transition to a lighter, more resonant sound.

ARTICULATION

- Teach the tongue and lips to quickly enunciate the word while not interfering with the breath flow. Exercises involve using different families of consonants to help the tongue become very quick to return to a desired position for maximum resonance while keeping the base of the tongue and the jaw as loose and relaxed as possible. In the exercise below, vary the keys and consonants as desired, juxtaposing highly contrasting ones, such as voiced/unvoiced.



sa - za - sa - za - sa - za - sa - za - sa - za - sa
be - pe - be - pe - be - pe - be - pe - be - pe - be
thy - thigh - thy - thigh - thy - thigh - thy - thigh - thy - thigh - thy

PERFORMANCE/EMOTIVE

- These aspects can only be taught by trying them on and wearing them around the studio! I use emotion cards and gesture cards based on Ann Baltz's *OperaWorks* training sessions, and these are highly effective in getting students to (finally) realize the fun, the beauty, and the transcendence of singing. These aspects I often teach in the weekly voice studio class, where everyone's inhibitions are gently broken down and they learn to trust their audience and themselves.

Dr. Weiler's Guide to IPA Italian/English Word Equivalents

IPA Symbol		American English Word Equivalent
i	k <u>nee</u>	
e	ch <u>a</u> -os	
ɛ	n <u>e</u> t	
a	Brit. f <u>a</u> -ther	
ɔ	c <u>o</u> re	
o	p <u>o</u> le	
u	p <u>oo</u> l	

Works Cited

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