

Warming up the Voice

A few wee exercises you can do to warm up your voice before singing on a demonstration. From Penny Stone, for Protest in Harmony, 2017.

Yawning – stretches and opens up the whole of your throat and chest system, and helps to ‘reset’ your breathing system from whatever other roles and stresses it has been managing.

Laughing – (pretend or real!) exercises and wakes up your diaphragm, the big muscle at the bottom of your lungs that controls the slow, controlled ‘out’ bit of your singing, as well as the quick release ‘in’ breath.

Tongue – stretch your tongue by counting your teeth with the tip of your tongue or making slow circles on your inside cheek with your tongue. You’ll soon feel the stretch in your jaw and throat. Shake your head with a loose jaw afterwards.

Breath – just letting a few breaths breathe themselves and noticing how they feel in your body – in your ribs and belly, chest and back, and also in your mouth and throat, jaw and shoulders, is the best way to connect with your breath before singing (especially if you’re on the bus – no-one will notice!) You can take this breathing time as well to engage with your feet, legs and hips, which will help to give you a more grounded and full bodied singing voice when you start singing.

SPLAT – Singers Please Loosen Abdominal Tension! This is a reminder to let your belly relax. As a warm up, connect to your your breathing by blowing out a ‘shhhh’ sound until you think your lungs are empty, then squeeze more air out, then let your belly SPLAT to allow the air to come in through your (yawn shaped) mouth as quickly, gently & quietly as possible.

Siren – this is the lowest impact voice exercise you can do, and is a great warm up, as well as a way to explore the outer edges of your voice, and the often ‘clunky’ feeling bridge in the middle that lots of us experience. Say the word ‘sing’ and hold the ‘ng’ sound on and extend it. Then start to slowly slide the ‘ng’ sound up and down like a siren. Keep slowing this down and experiment with different bits of your voice. Keep it soft and light.

ZZ/NYEH – try singing a tune you like (or are about to sing) on the ‘zzzz’ sound, and another on a ‘nyeh’ sound. This pair of sounds will help to warm up a lot of the smaller muscles around your neck, throat and face ready for singing the actual songs, words and all.

‘Vocal fry’ or ‘pulse register’ – this is a croaking sound that comes out when you relax your vocal folds. You can find it by sighing down onto a relaxed ‘croak’ sound (you’ll know if it’s constricted instead of relaxed because it will hurt a little – stop if it hurts and try again, you’ll find it soon enough.) It is a bit like giving your voice a massage, and can be done to help warm up or to rest and revitalise a tired voice. Probably not one for the bus....

Voice Care

Water - Drink lots of water, ideally at body temperature rather than too cold or too hot, as this will lubricate your voice without shocking it.

Enjoy – honey, ginger, sage tea, liquorice tea, lemon and ginger tea.

Avoid – (ideally... when singing, or immediately before) dairy, caffeine, alcohol, smoking, spicy food, nuts, cold drinks.

*If you have a **sore throat** or have lost your voice:*

Rest your Voice - I can’t say this strongly enough, it’s the quickest way to get your voice back, just don’t speak at all for a couple of days.

Steam – this is the best thing for helping to revive a sore throat – you can use an electric steamer, a bowl or mug of boiling water, or lean over a pan on the hob (not too close!) You can also have a steamy shower or bath & this will help to shift any gunge getting in the way of your singing voice.

Of the previous exercises, the **vocal fry** is a very low impact exercise that can be done however sore your throat is. And the **siren** can be done as you’re recovering to ease your voice back into full singing.

Cold weather singing – Wrap up warm, *especially* your throat. Drink plenty of warm liquid. Eat ginger or drink ginger and lemon tea. When not singing, breathe through your nose to help warm the breath before it hits your throat. Cuddle your neighbour! (this has nothing to do with voice care but still...)

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