



The Orange Spiel

News Of The Jacksonville Big O Chapter



<http://www.BigOrangeChorus.com>



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We meet at 7:00 most Thursdays at Shepherd of the Woods Lutheran, 7860 Southside Blvd, Jacksonville, FL
Guests always welcome Call 355-SING No Experience Necessary

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THE POWER OF "YES"-AND WHY PERFECT DOESN'T MEAN PERFECTION

from The Harmonizer

We almost turned down the talent-packed show because we thought we weren't good enough. What could have been our biggest mistake instead turned into a Gold Medal Moment.

The stage was bare save for a lone singer in a stark spotlight. The haunting melody began in solo, and two more singers took the stage and added their voices behind him ... then three more voices ... five more voices ... six more voices ... until the stage was full of voices, full of harmony. The audience was ... well, let me come back to that.

WE DID NOT BELIEVE IN OURSELVES

The performance of the Dubuque Music Men almost didn't happen. When the local theater reached out to invite us to perform on a fund-raiser for their Broadway Series, chapter leadership almost turned the show down. The show was to be filled with performances by area artists, and would conclude with a feature performance from a popular stage singer from Chicago. It was an impressive array of talent, and to be honest, our chapter leaders were worried that our tiny chorus would pale in comparison. We were afraid we would embarrass ourselves.

The Music Men, founded in 1948, had a long history in our little corner of Iowa, but we rarely grew beyond 25 or so singers. We competed often in Central States contests but rarely got more than middling scores. The judges would assure us that we had worth, but it was difficult to hold our heads high when we just finished last in yet another contest. But we kept going back, almost always improving on our score, but often feeling a bit worse about ourselves. The result of these contest experiences was that our perfectly imperfect chorus always doubted itself. Culturally, we always felt that we weren't good enough. And now, presented with the thought of stand-

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WANTED!!

MEN WHO LIKE TO SING!



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For more detailed,
timely information
see my weekly
publication:
Orange Zest

EDITORIAL

We are continuing to sing together while we focus on rebuilding. We are getting our voices back in shape after more than a year. We are getting our brains back in gear. We are going back to basics as we work toward being able to return to performing at a level of which we can be proud.

There are minimum numbers of singers we need to have as well as a proper balance between the parts in order to move ahead at full speed.

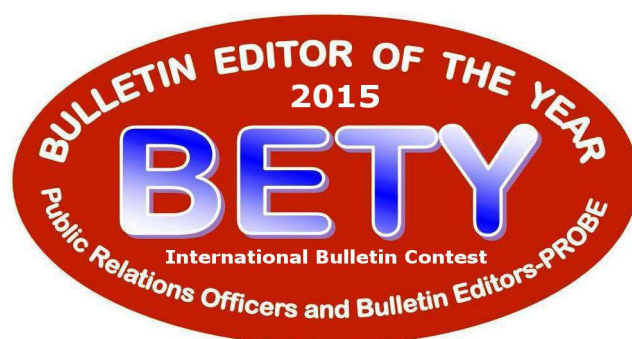
Now is the time for former members to return and for prospective members to join in on the ground floor as we move forward together. The goal continues to be to return to the level where we were before and continue beyond.

Those who have opted for COVID or other reasons to not be attending rehearsals during this troubling time, please keep in mind how much fun we have had singing together. If you get out of the habit of joining with us or start a new habit on "our" day, we could lose each other. At least, keep singing.

We have some positions (both board and committee) that need filling. If you can help, as a leader or a helper, please see Jason.

We need more members. Please invite friends, acquaintances, and even strangers to come as a guest. Many of those who try what we do, will enjoy what we do. Let's not be a well-kept secret.

Each and every man, improving, just a little, each and every day, will result in huge advances for the chorus.



THE POWER OF "YES" (continued)

(Continued from page 1)

ing on the stage with a veritable who's who of Midwest talent, we were afraid. We loved singing. We loved each other. But we were afraid. We were only a barbershop chorus—and we certainly weren't the the Ambassadors of Harmony. Did we belong on the stage with all those great singers?

We were safe doing annual shows for our friends and neighbors, but did we really want to shine a bright light on ourselves and stand in front of an audience who expected more? Even Society founding Father O.C. Cash had worried about sharing barbershop with unsympathetic ears. We loved barbershop, and yet, at the same time, felt a bit ashamed of barbershop. In a lot of ways, we were hiding from the world out of a sense that barbershop wasn't cool and that we weren't good enough.

"NOT FAIR—I HAVE TO FOLLOW THEM?!"

Ultimately, we got over our fears and decided to take the performance opportunity. We practiced and polished up our performance of Tom Gentry's arrangement of "Do You Hear The People Sing?" from Les Misérables. (The Dubuque Chapter was inspired by the 1999 silver medal winning "Les Miserables" set by



The New Tradition Chorus).

As the director, I was feeling pretty good, but our singers were still full of worries. And those worries only grew when we found out that we were slotted to perform on the sold-out show, right before the feature act of the night. Oh boy.

The performers on the first half of the show sang beautifully, the variety of acts was wonderful, and the audience of 1,200 was warm but not exuberant. Finally, when it was our turn, our best singer took the stage, began to sing, and as I've already said, one singer became two then four and so on, until our whole cho-

rus was on stage. The stage grew brighter, the sound grew louder, the passion was palpable.

The Music Men were singing their hearts out—mostly in tune, mostly in step—and then, from my vantage point in the back row, I noticed something amazing. Audience members were standing up. One, then two, then three, then more. By the end of the performance, and our less than perfect cut-off, more than half of the audience was already standing. The other half soon joined them in a thunderous standing ovation. The first of the evening!

I smiled—and laughed—and even cried. I was supposed to be the first man off the stage, but I stood there, and let my singers soak it in. I've never been prouder to be a Music Man or to be a Barbershopper. And I couldn't believe that we almost said "No" to this opportunity.

The moment that sticks with me most from that evening was after the feature performer took the stage, the first words out of his mouth were, "Not fair! I have to follow them?! Bravo!" And the applause—for us, now backstage—began again.

My none-too-subtle point is this: Always say "YES!" You don't have to be perfect to be perfect. Be proud of what you do. Be proud of each other. Be proud to be a Barbershopper! Never forget, that you don't need to be a champion to have a Gold Medal Moment, you just need to be you. And YOU are wonderful!

It's not enough to just play
the notes or sing the words.
For it to mean something,
you have to *feel* the music.
Because as a performer, if
you don't feel it, how can
you expect anyone else to??

ON BREATH

by Liz Garnett

from helpingyouharmonise.com

When two people you know mention a book in the same week, especially when it's a book whose title relates directly to your core professional interest, you know you're going to have to read it. James Nestor's *Breath* isn't written for singers (although one of his many eccentric case studies is a choral conductor), it is written for human beings who breathe. But of course those of us involved in singing like to think this is one of the things that makes our craft healthful, so it seemed prudent to check it out and see exactly how well things cross-reference.

Breath presents itself as one of those revelatory, 'this book will change your life' kind of narratives, and with its interweaving of ancient, traditional texts and modern science (though rather fringe science in some cases), skirts along that line between 'engagingly plausible' and 'woo'. As one of the friends who had read it put it, 'Some of it is quite bonkers, but some things make a lot of sense'. So, it's not one to read uncritically, and I'm going to focus my discussion of it on the bits which seemed more likely.

(This may, therefore, turn into a display of confirmation bias, ahem.)

The first most important point the book makes is that breathing through your nose is far, far healthier than breathing through your mouth. Our body supplies two ways to breathe, but the nose is specially designed for the job, whereas the mouth is a back-up option, with other roles most of the time. If you frequently breathe through your mouth because your sinuses are congested, they will only get worse – using your nasal airways is the best way to keep them working well.

This was not only the primary message of the book, it was also the one that has had me thinking the most, since singers are often invited to inhale through the mouth. In techniques that involve inhaling to the vowel you are about to sing, or taking a 'resonant' breath that 'coats the teeth', choral methods routinely use the intake of breath prior to singing as a vehicle to set the instrument up for the subsequent vocalisation.

Imperatives of performance and communication also often encourage an open mouth – smiles that show the teeth are seen as both more inviting to an audience, the oral equivalent of an open rather than closed posture. Though of course it's entirely possible to breathe through the nose while you smile with lips apart – I think this is probably what we mostly do when posing for photographs, but it's hard to be sure when

you're consciously analysing things you normally do without thinking about them.

And if we think about another turn of phrase we hear in choral instruction – to 'take a warm breath' – this is something that the nose is particularly well suited to. The nasal passages not only filter the air coming in, they warm it up on the way to the lungs. A breath through the mouth is by contrast cool (which is why you can feel it 'coat your teeth') and – more problematically for singers – drying.

So, this central point has surprised me by making me reconsider a very basic and integral part of singing technique. I can see a good deal of experimentation, both by myself and with others, before I decide to integrate this change into my praxis, but it is a compelling enough point to motivate that experimentation. Initial results suggest I'm getting a cleaner adduction between vocal folds this way, but I'll need to go beyond the exercises I've been playing with into some real repertoire before I make my mind up.

(I'm aware I've not actually presented any of Nestor's arguments for why and what ways nasal breathing is healthier. I felt that since he covers it at length, I don't have to.)

This is long enough for one post, so I will return another day to talk about some of the other themes in the book. Unlike today's 'do I have to rethink everything?' point, these others look much more like confirmation bias in action – elements of healthy breathing that do actually correlate well with how singing is typically taught in chorus contexts.



MAGIC CHORAL TRICK #392 LOW REGISTER BUBBLING WARM UP

by Janet Kidd
from betterchoird.wordpress.com

Many thanks to my friend Jill Woodley for revitalizing my enthusiasm for warming up the voice by bubbling.

She told my chorus that she's discovered that bubbling (or doing a lip trill) for the length of an entire song, sung in your low register works the best.

Although I've always realized the value of the technique I'm not sure I've ever done it for the full length of Billy Joel's *The Longest Time* – a fittingly appropriate reminder for the recommended duration of the exercise.

And bubbling it in a low register kept everything so relaxed that our voices warmed up significantly faster. (Yes – this is a rangy song, but easily manageable if the first note is right near the bottom of your range)

However, for the folks who simply cannot bubble in a relaxed, easy way I've tried a very gentle Zzz instead – and as long as the Zzz is kept light and very legato it works almost as well.

I've done this now with several of my groups in their Zoom rehearsals. Three minutes on Zoom seems like an eternity, but that amount of low bubbling was enough to get almost everyone to a self reported warmed up level of 7 or 8 out of 10. Sometimes I just had them bubble through a simple song multiple times (you don't have to use Billy Joel's song)

We tested for warm up level by singing through *You Are My Sunshine* to see how everything was feeling.

After that it took only another minute or so of bubbling or lightly Zzzing a simple two or three note exercise for people to start reporting that their voices were warmed up to a 9 or 10 out of 10.

All in less than 5 minutes!!



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Thanks in advance!!

Editor's Note: The latest version of the Amazon app (both android and iOS) now has an option to activate smile in the app, so that you can get the charity donations for purchases made in the app (if you enable it). Open the app and find 'Settings' in the main menu. Tap on 'AmazonSmile' and follow the on-screen instructions to turn on AmazonSmile on your phone.

A 5-STEP STRATEGY FOR ENHANCED MOTOR SKILL LEARNING (ESPECIALLY IF YOU'RE AN OLDER LEARNER!)

by Dr Noa Kageyama
from bulletproofmusician.com

Sometimes, when our dog (DJ) just sits there and doesn't seem to understand what we're asking him to do, we worry that he's not quite the genius that we thought he was. And the cliché that "you can't teach an old dog new tricks" definitely comes to mind...

Because on one hand, yes, there are studies out there which suggest that our ability to pick up new motor skills can indeed diminish a bit as we get older.

But on the other hand, there's also plenty of evidence that he – and we – can *totally* still learn new things and continue to improve throughout our lifespan. Even if it's not quite like it was in our puppy years.

And because the old dog cliché is a bit of a bummer, I perked up when I stumbled across some studies about a learning strategy called the "Five-Step Strategy."

It was originally developed to "enhance the learning of motor skills in self-paced tasks and sport skills." Essentially, by making sure your brain is maximally engaged in the learning process so you learn new skills more efficiently.

The initial studies on younger adults suggested that this could indeed boost learning, but the unanswered question was – could this help older learners learn some new tricks too?

A golf study!

Two researchers (Steinberg & Glass, 2001) recruited 30 participants (15 men, 15 women), with an average age of 65 and no previous golf experience, to participate in a golf putting study.

Participants attended one practice session per week, for three straight weeks.

Week 1

In the first practice session, a golf instructor gave them a 20-min lesson on the fundamentals of putting, walking them through the grip, stroke, etc.

Then, they took a quick 9-hole putting test to see what their baseline level of putting skill might be.

Week 2

In the second practice session, half of the participants sat through a 10-min lecture on golf equipment (the control group), while the other participants learned how to use a strategy known as the Five-Step Strategy (the strategy group). We'll take a closer look at what exactly this strategy looks like in a moment, but for now, just know that they were told to use this strategy during that day's putting practice session.

And what did their practice look like?

Well, they spent the first 10 minutes of practice doing a bit of metronome practice, believe it or not, to help them develop a smooth, rhythmic putting motion. And then they spent 10 minutes putting along a straight line, to get better at putting in a specific direction.

And then they shifted into more of a performance practice mode, where they competed against another participant to see who could get to 10 points first (where whomever sunk a putt in the fewest strokes earned 1 point). And then they did the same thing in teams – with one team of two participants competing against another team of two participants.

After all that, they took a couple minutes to complete a short anxiety assessment, and then repeated the same 9-hole putting test that they took at the very beginning of the study.

Week 3

The third and final practice session was almost exactly like their Week 2 practice session, where they spent 20 minutes practicing in a more relaxed sort of way, and then competed against each other for points.

But this time, after finishing their practice, the participants were given a 60-min break to "ice" them a bit and allow some forgetting to set in...

And then they did the 9-hole putting test again to see if their putting skills improved at all over the previous two weeks.

And did it?

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5-STEP STRATEGY (continued)

(Continued from page 6)

Results

Yes, indeed!

On their very first putting test, both groups performed about the same – 18.14 putts per 9 holes for the control group, and 17.55 putts per 9 holes for the Five-Step Strategy group.

But at the final test in Week 3, even after a couple practice sessions, the control group didn't really improve their scores at all – with an average score of 19.00 putts per 9 holes at the final test. Meanwhile, the group that used the Five-Step Strategy during practice shaved an average of about one stroke off of their score, and did **three** strokes better than the control group – with an average score of 16.33 per 9 holes on the final test.

So what exactly does this Five-Step Strategy entail, that the better-performing participants used?

The Five-Step Strategy

Here are the exact instructions used in the study (emphasis mine):

I am going to present you with a strategy which should improve your performance in these golf tasks. This strategy contains five sequential steps. They are readying, imaging, focusing, executing, and evaluating.

In the first step, I will teach you how to obtain the **optimal emotional state** for this task. To obtain this state I want you to take a couple of deep slow breaths. Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Now shake the tension from your body with a slight waggling of your arms. Do this technique prior to every putt. Also, think about a successful putt you had in the past.

The second step of the strategy is **imaging**. In this step, you are to mentally picture the ball go into the cup. Also, imagine yourself making the

desired stroke.

The third step of the strategy involves **focusing** on a relevant feature in the learning situation. Here, I want you to concentrate on watching the putter head hit the dimples of the golf ball. Do not think of any other thought.

After you are completely focused, you are ready to perform the act. Do not think of anything about the act itself or possible outcome. **Just do it.**

After you have completed the movement, the fifth step involves **evaluating** the quality of the outcome. Think about where the ball finished and adjust your stroke accordingly. Use the feedback of the event as a way to improve your putting.

More intentional practice

There's nothing super radical here, right? Like, it all makes sense, and seems to be a way to be more intentional about each practice repetition, and slow things down a tad. To make sure you're focused and present and attentive to what the goals of each practice attempt are, rather than just going through the motions. And also to reflect on what just happened and be more intentional about the next putt.

All of this might seem pretty obvious, and even familiar, but I think it can be easy to forget, and default to repeating a passage a bunch of times without much mental/physical preparation and reflection before and after each repetition. And sure, the mindless repetition does improve performance in the moment, and so it feels like progress is being made – but the real question is, *do these momentary improvements actually stick?*

To me, this study suggests that slowing things down in practice, and being a little more attentive and reflective though this process, could actually lead to more *retention* and *transfer* to performance – in the same amount of practice time.

Why does this help?

So why does this simple Five-Step Strategy help? And for older learners in particular?

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5-STEP STRATEGY (continued)

(Continued from page 7)

Well, the researchers cited a number of studies which speak to some tendencies that older learners might experience, that are addressed by each of the five steps in this strategy.

For instance, older learners have been found to experience higher levels of activation than younger folks in some settings. And if you're stressed in practice, the optimal emotional state step could help to calm you down a bit and ensure your learning doesn't take a hit.

There are also studies which suggest that older learners use imagery less often than younger learners, so it could be that the imaging step helps to offset this a bit.

There's also evidence that older learners have more difficulty paying attention to task-relevant stimuli and blocking out distractions, so perhaps the focus step helps with this.

Older learners have also been found to focus more on the mechanics of a task, than the goal of the movement (i.e. thinking about what the arm/wrist/hands/fingers have to do, as opposed to the kind of sound one wants), so the "just do it" step could be good practice at shushing one's overactive inner critic/micro-manager.

Some studies have found that older learners also are less effective at using external feedback, so the evaluate and adjust step makes a lot of sense too.

Take action

This particular study was focused on older learners, but don't forget that this strategy was initially found to provide a helpful boost in learning for young-adult-aged learners. And each of the five steps seem like pretty relevant and useful ingredients for more engaged and focused practice, so I think it's worth a try whether you're 8, 18, or 80!

A love/hate relationship with practicing?

I always had a bit of a love/hate relationship with practicing (to put it mildly). Which of course made for a lot of less-than-positive experiences on stage too.

It wasn't until I got into my 20's that I began to understand that *learning* a skill and being able to *perform* that skill in front of an audience are unique challenges, requiring different types of preparation.

It turned out, for instance, that the optimal headspace for practicing effectively (not just playing, but critical listening, analysis, evaluation, problem-solving, etc.) is almost 180 degrees opposite of the optimal headspace for performing effectively (playing and being intensely aware, but only of what's relevant in the present moment and none of the evaluative/analytical stuff).

That's part of the reason why when we find ourselves in "the zone" in performance, and suddenly notice that we're in that awesome headspace, almost immediately, we're no longer there and can't figure out how to get back.

It can all be pretty frustrating, but know that there are specific reasons why these things happen to us in the practice room and on stage. So it's not random, there's nothing wrong with you, you're by no means the only one who experiences this, and being able to play more consistently like yourself under pressure is as much a learnable skill as any other challenge you've encountered (and overcome) on your instrument.



FUNCTIONAL FREEDOM OF THE VOCAL INSTRUMENT

from singwise.com

My favourite passage in vocal pedagogy texts - and the pedagogic idea that has become the most transformative for me, both as a voice teacher and singer - is what Cornelius Reid writes in *The Free Voice* (p.18):

"The undeviating purpose of training is functional freedom, not, as is commonly believed, beauty of tone quality. An artist desires above all to communicate, and the benefit to be derived from a healthy coordinative response is that it provides absolute spontaneity of expression. With the attainment of functional freedom, the singer then becomes able to express what he has to say the way he wants to say it, not the way he has to. He has been released from the strictures imposed by 'tone consciousness.' Functional freedom alone is able to fully release sensitivity, insight, emotional and intellectual depth, and musical perception."

As singers, we want to sound good. Most of us are, in fact, preoccupied with the kinds of sounds that we're making and we're hoping that our audiences find them pleasing, moving... and maybe even a little bit impressive.

Is there anything wrong with having desirable aesthetics as a training goal? Of course not! Singing is, after all, largely about sound. When we're listening to recordings of our favourite singers, we're struck by the tone, timbre, and textures of their voices and how potentially their vocal sounds manipulate our emotions. They may even give us goose bumps or bring us to tears.

However, as a functional voice teacher, I know that some singers sound good **DESPITE** their technique, not **BECAUSE** of it. Some singers are able to produce acceptable sounds even though their instruments are locked and fighting against a great deal of physiological and acoustical interference, including undesirable tensions. Some sounds that seem, on the surface or at first listen, to be 'good,' may actually be produced in an inefficient and/or unhealthy manner that is unsustainable as a technique over time. But most singers struggle for years to achieve a given vocal aesthetic and never fully achieve it.

I believe that many singers find themselves unable to produce the kinds of sounds that they deem desirable or professionally viable because they're not focusing on 'first things first.' They attempt to superimpose their desired aesthetic on an existing technique (coordination) that is not serving them

well to begin with. They take an instrument that is not functioning well and then expect it to make the right sounds. Reid also writes:

To make beauty of tone the direct object of study is to put the cart before the horse. In the first place, no one can know the true textural quality of a given voice until functional freedom has been attained. Therefore, without functional freedom the natural beauty of the voice is unknown. Thus, the only conclusion to be reached is that the teacher who strives for tonal beauty as a direct object of study either has prescience, or is merely imposing his own aesthetic evaluations onto his students. Success in achieving pure tone quality will only come with the release of wrong tension, which is the meaning of vocal freedom." (The Free Voice, p.18)

When a singer is focused primarily (or only) on creating the target sound, he or she is placing the cart before the horse. We cannot find our natural or unique sounds, nor achieve what we're truly capable of as vocal technicians, when our instruments are not functioning freely enough to produce those sounds effectively. We may be able to create a poor imitation of the desired aesthetic, but at some point, our lack of functional freedom will betray us. Those sounds are never quite 'perfect' and we'll spend years being 'almost there.' So we need to first address the lack of freedom of our instruments that is preventing us from being able to find and unleash our true, full, and natural vocal sound. And as our instruments begin to become freer and less impaired by unwanted tensions and other interferences, we'll then start to hear our real sound emerge, along with an ever broadening array of textures, colours, and qualities that would otherwise not be accessible to us if our instruments were still fighting within themselves.

My primary objective as a voice teacher is to help my students achieve functional freedom. When their vocal apparatuses are functioning freely, they'll be able to make the kinds of sounds that they wish to make whenever they wish to make them, instead of being limited to a 'default' sound. They can't make those sounds with any degree of healthiness or sustainability, however, if their instruments are 'stuck'. So, my first responsibility is helping singers learn to position and 'play' the various components of their vocal instruments in ways that are mechanically advantageous and functionally conducive to achievement of their singing goals, including their aesthetic vision.

When singers are very tone conscious and aesthetics driven, they tend to be impatient and lack trust in the process of voice training. They want to achieve the target sound **NOW!** They don't always have the patience for, or see the wisdom in, first taking the time to free their instruments. But in the long run, voice training is far more productive, efficient, and successful when the horse is placed before the cart.

HOW THE MEISNER TECHNIQUE'S REPETITION EXERCISE CAN BE THERAPEUTIC FOR PERFORMERS

by Jillian Paige
from backstage.com

If you've ever said, "Thanks, you too!" when your waiter's just said, "Enjoy your meal," this article is for you.

So often in life, we try to make light conversation instead of truly listening to one another. In art and especially in theater, we crave genuine human connection. The exercise of repetition in the Meisner technique can help get us there both theatrically and therapeutically.

Sanford Meisner created the repetition exercise to get us out of our heads. In the book *"Sanford Meisner on Acting,"* he says, "A composer doesn't write down what he thinks would be effective; he works from his heart. I decided I wanted an exercise for actors where there is no intellectuality. I wanted to eliminate all that head work, to take away all the mental manipulation and get to where the impulses come from."

He continues: "I began with the premise that if I repeat what I hear you saying, my head is not working, I'm listening, and there is an absolute elimination of the brain.... That's repetition, which leads to impulses. It is not intellectual. It is emotional and impulsive, and gradually when the actors I train improvise, what they say—like what the composer writes—comes not from the head but truthfully from the impulses."

Repetition has abundant benefits for actors who want to get out of their heads. But there's a benefit to this exercise that goes far beyond evading self-consciousness.

Here's the deal: Humans long to be heard and understood. The repetition exercise allows people not only to be heard and taken seriously, but also to become expert listeners and steadfast focusers. Because of this, repetition isn't only useful in the acting world, it's also a scientifically proven tool to show understanding and cultivate trust, called "mirroring" in psychotherapy. Mirroring is used to show empathy and foster safety.

In her essay "Mirror, Mirror: Our Brains Are Hardwired for Empathy," body-psychotherapist Babette

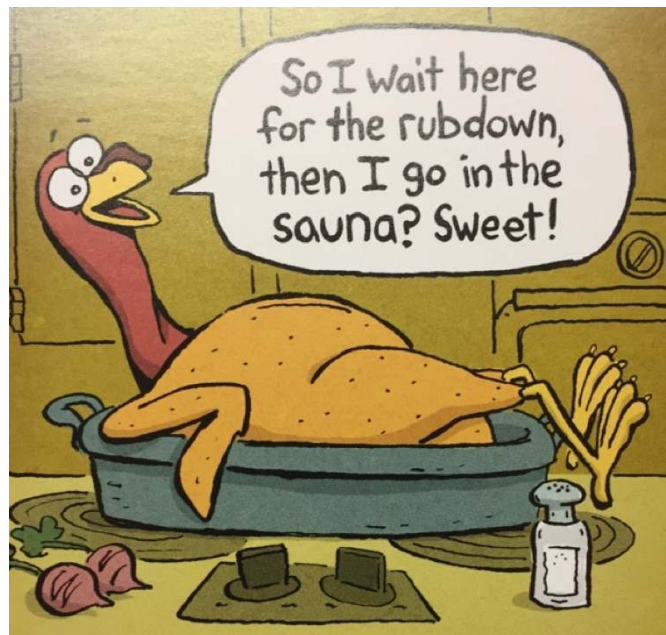
Rothschild says, "We're hardwired, it appears, to feel each other's happiness and pain more deeply than we ever knew. Moreover, the royal road to empathy is through the body, not the mind."

When we repeat back what we've just heard and pay close attention to the human behavior of the person in front of us, they are predisposed to feel joy. Our brains can't help but feel happy when we're mirrored.

A 2009 study conducted out of Ghent University found that the reward centers of our brains light up when someone mirrors our behavior or words. When someone repeats exactly what we've just said back to us, we feel heard, understood, similar, and accepted. Though the repetition exercise's purpose is to communicate honesty over pleasantries, the action of repeating back what we've just heard is innately therapeutic in nature, even if it isn't perceived well.

So the next time you're singing, try repeating what you feel in the moment. Let the truth of what you feel hit and affect you without judgement. Similarly, the next time you're in conversation, try repeating back what you've just heard in the moment. Mirror what the person has just said and affirm that you've fully understood them without judgement.

In your art and in your personal life, you'll witness the repetition exercise doing amazing things.



HOW TO FIND YOUR NATURAL SINGING VOICE WITH THE RAG DOLL EXERCISE

by Audrey Hunt
from spinditty.com

Have you ever wondered what your authentic singing voice sounds like? I'm talking about before your perception of what you sound like.

Is it really possible to find your natural singing voice? The answer is yes and I'm going to show you how to discover your real sound. To do this, you will be learning a particular body position known as the "Rag Doll." This particular position works because:

1. All body tension is naturally released.
2. The sound is activated by full vibrations in the "mask" area. (nose, cheeks).

Keep in mind that when you sing, your voice should be different than anyone else. There is not another you in this entire universe. While it's possible to find a direct look-alike, that person will not have your personality, thoughts, and feelings. So it is with your singing. Your desire must be to free your own unique sound, embracing every tone.

What the Rag Doll Exercise Will Do For You

The following steps will help you accomplish three important actions:

1. Introduce air into your lungs needed to sustain and control your tone.
2. Completely relax the vocal instrument, which is your entire body.
3. Align significant areas of your body so that vibrations are felt in critical areas.

Because your body is your instrument, you will be focusing on both the body and your breathing. I urge you to refrain from judging your sound. It will no doubt be something you have not heard before and it may even be a sound you dislike

But, don't judge your singing, and avoid comparing your voice to anyone else. Refuse to listen to negative criticism directed at you. Your goal is to discover your authentic voice. It's there, right inside you, and it's time to find it and claim it!

Are You Breathing Correctly?

Why This Matters.

In order to find your true, natural voice, it's necessary to double check your breathing. Be sure that as you inhale, your chest does not move and concentrate on expanding around your waistline. This is known as diaphragmatic breathing (belly breath).

The sound you make is determined to a large extent by air which acts as a cushion for the tone to ride on. This is what "vocal support" is all about.

I find that the number one reason for 90% of all vocal problems can be traced to insufficient air and releasing just the right amount of air during phonation.

Shallow, chest breathing, does not provide the stamina needed to produce a beautiful tone. I can't state this enough. Singers must inhale and exhale using the diaphragm, thoracic, and costal areas. Need help? [Here you go!](#)

Proper Inhalation of Air Occurs in the Abdominal Area and Not in the Chest

Benefits For Doing the Rag Doll Exercise

The following exercise is a relaxation exercise known as "The Rag Doll", an *Alexander Technique* Method of relaxation. When you do this exercise you will experience an improvement in your posture and less tension and stress in the upper body and even the back area.

For singers, The Rag Doll position will allow vibrations to be felt in the face while in the dropped position. Some call this 'singing upside down.' These vibrations act as resonating speakers for the voice.

This body position involves the following sections of your spine.

- The Cervical vertebrae which are the neck.
- The Thoracic vertebrae which are the middle of your back.
- The Lumbar vertebrae which are the lower back.

If you're ready, you are about to unhinge these 3 sections.

Begin With These Three Steps

Step 1. Stand with legs shoulder width apart. Unlock the knees.

Step 2. As you inhale, lift your arms out.

(Continued on page 12)

HOW TO FIND YOUR NATURAL SINGING (continued)

(Continued from page 11)

Step 3. Bring your arms straight up and over your head. Reach to the sky. Continue to hold your breath.

Continuing the Rag Doll exercise.

Step 4. Roll your spine slowly as you tuck your chin to your chest.

Step 5. Bringing your shoulders forward helps to touch your chin to your chest. If you can't do this, just allow your head to 'hand loose.'

Step 6. Continue to roll your spine down keeping your arms loose.

Completing the Rag Doll exercise.

Step 7. Remain in this position for about 10 to 15 seconds releasing all body tension. Notice how the knees are still slightly bent.

Final Step

1. Now **slowly** roll back up, one vertebra at a time, (counting 15-20) until you are upright and reaching for the sky.
2. You now have an up-stretched body alignment, ready for singing.

At this point, you have learned exactly what to do with your body to prepare it for finding your singing voice. And now you're ready to add sound to the Ragdoll position.

Adding a Hissing Sound

Repeating the exercise as shown above:

1. As you stretch your arms overhead, inhale deeply and hold your breath until your chin is tucked into your chest.
2. Then very slowly begin to release your air while you make a hissing sound (like a flat tire.) Continue rolling your spine downward toward your toes and keep hissing for 5-10 seconds in a bent-over position. Keep the knees relaxed.

Be sure to release your air as slow as possible. This air must last throughout the hissing. You are now learning how to control your air as you sing. This is a very important point for a better sounding voice.

3. Release all of your air, then roll your body back up slowly.
4. When your body is completely stretched upward, let your arms slowly fall to the side.

Adding the Sound of 'ing' to the Ragdoll

To help you to feel your own singing vibrations, repeat the above exercise replacing the hissing with an 'ing' sound. Here's how to do this:

- Produce the sound of 'ing' as in the word sing.
- After initiating the "ee" sound, hold on to the "ng" by allowing the back of the tongue to make contact with the hard palate (roof of the mouth.)
- This position brings the tone forward allowing the singer to feel the vibrations of sound resonating (vibrating) in the face. This is known as "the mask."
- Make sure you sing this 'ing' in a comfortable tone, not high and not low.
- The combination of breath and vibration releases your voice.

Practice this entire exercise a few times, then proceed to the final stage to find and hear your true sound.

The Final Step to Finding Your
Natural Singing Voice

Now you've come to the exciting part of this exercise. Providing you have followed the instruction up to this point, you will discover your natural singing voice. This is all that is left to do:

- Repeat the entire exercise, replacing the 'ing' sound with the vowel 'ee.'
- If you are completely relaxed and rid of all tension, you will feel vibrations in the area of the hard palate, the nasal area, as well as under the eye sockets.
- Be prepared to discover your true, natural singing voice.

Note: The vowel 'ee' is the easiest sound to produce so we begin with 'ee.'

But don't stop here. Experiment with each of the 5 basic vowels used in singing. These vowels are EE - EH - AH - OH - OO. How to Sing the 5 Basic Vowels

The Five Primary Singing Vowels

(Continued on page 13)

HOW TO FIND YOUR NATURAL SINGING (continued)

(Continued from page 12)



Summary: Singing Is Your Birthright

Singers use the entire body as they sing. Combining natural talent, hard work, and skill will bring a good result and the more you exercise your voice, the better you will sound. Tension is an enemy to the voice. Most tension lurks in the neck, back and face including the tongue. The windmill exercise combined with the rag doll position helps to release tension. To release tension in the face, warm up with trill exercises for the tongue and use specific exercises for the lips.

Because the body itself is the singer's instrument, the singer must treat the body like any good musical instrument. Avoid screaming, smoking, alcohol and straining the vocal cords (bands) at all costs.

A voice is as unique as the person it belongs to. Those singers that we love and admire know this. They use their authentic vocal sound.

Your voice comes into this world supplied with power, dressed with individuality and uniqueness. It's not about having the perfect singing voice. You are music and singing is music that enters your body the minute you are born. You are the song itself and singing is your birthright.

Singing is your birthright. Embrace your natural, authentic voice.

I wish you joy as you sing.

STOP SHREDDING YOUR VOCAL CORDS

by Cari Cole
from discmakers.com

Ever wonder why stars have issues with their vocal health? Why do professionals lose their voices and need to have surgery? Does it happen to everyone eventually, or are there proper vocal care techniques that can help to avoid these situations?

It's not inevitable, but it's highly probable that you will have vocal problems if you don't learn to use proper vocal care. Your voice is an instrument inside your body, and how you treat your body will reflect upon your voice.

First things first, your voice is not an instrument to screw with. Your vocal cords are not replaceable. You only have one set, and the way you care for them will determine whether you follow the road of deterioration that befalls so many singers or take the high road to vocal care, preservation, and health for your career.

It's not easy to be out on the road singing for a living and keeping your voice in great shape. There are many things you can do to care for yourself and keep your vocal instrument in good shape that aren't exclusively related to vocal technique and vocal performance (see my earlier post titled 8 Ways to Improve Your Vocal Health), but I want to talk about vocal technique and preserving your voice while you sing. I want to give you some vocal tips and teach you how to master your instrument, and address the key things you can do to ensure you never experience major vocal problems.

Of course there is MUCH more to explore regarding vocal care than what I can present in this article, but I picked out the biggest contenders that cause issues as they relate to the technical voice. Let's take a quick peek at what some of these problems are and how they develop.

Common vocal problems

Vocal abuse or misuse, such as excessive use of the voice when singing and talking or smoking, coughing, yelling, allergies, reflux, or inhaling irritants can cause abnormalities of the vocal cords, such as nodules, granulomas, polyps, or cysts. The difference between these abnormalities is mostly a function of what kind of tissue is involved.

Symptoms of vocal problems include vocal fatigue,

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STOP SHREDDING YOUR VOCAL CORDS
(continued)

(Continued from page 13)

hoarseness that doesn't clear, chronic throat clearing, throat pain, cough (sometimes with a little blood), and the feeling of having a lump in your throat. Surgery is a less optimal treatment for throat granuloma than vocal therapy, although "granulomas are often slow to regress," according to NYU Voice Center's website.

Most all vocal problems are caused by a combination of health, diet, and a lack of good technique – and are reversible with a little work. The best path is to first identify what created the voice disorder. In many cases, a brief period of voice therapy is the best approach to learn good vocal care and technique, including proper breath support and eliminating high pressure at the vocal mechanism.

How to avoid shredding your vocal cords:

1. Avoid coughing.

Coughing shreds your cords. When you have an infection, the body will naturally cough to get rid of it. Fight your infection with organic garlic capsules (nature's antibiotic) and quell that cough with Bronchial Soothe (available at Whole Foods or Amazon.com). It's the only remedy I've ever found that actually stops a vicious cough. Coughing will prolong your recovery time by twice as long.

2. Don't glottal.

Glottals occur when the edges of the vocal cords bang together in over-closure most always on a word that begins with a vowel. This results from poor vocal technique. The way to fix it is to add a soft "h" to the onset of words that begin with vowels, i.e.; "h-uh-oh", "h-everyone", "h-I"; "h-always". It can happen in the middle of a word too: "st-ay" – st-h-ay". A really good vocal coach can teach you more about how not to glottal, however keep in mind that from my years of experience I have noticed that most inexpensive or mid-level coaches do not have this kind of expertise and can even cause vocal problems. It's important to find someone that has a good vocal health philosophy as part of their practice.

3. Get your voice out of your throat.

Speaking low in your throat, or in a monotone can cause vocal problems like hoarseness, vocal fatigue, nodules, cysts or granulomas. Associate your voice with less pressure and move it higher into your mouth or head cavity to avoid undue pressure. Speak higher in pitch and raise the soft palate to move out of the

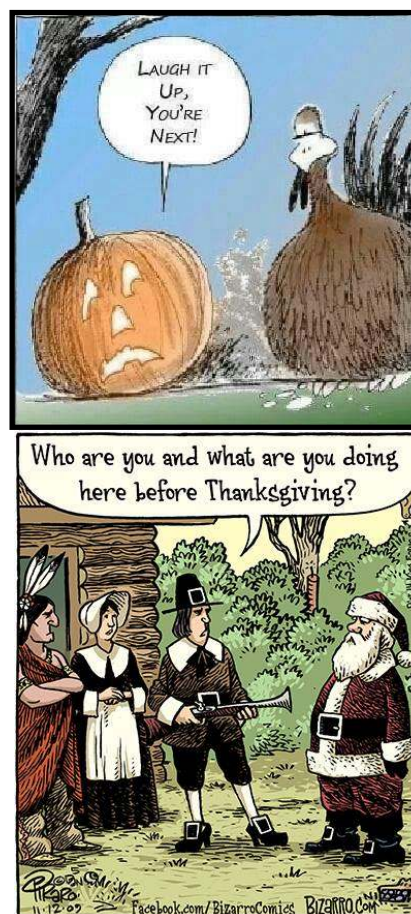
throat and let the voice "ring" in the head, mouth, and sinus cavities.

4. Stop talking so loud!

Don't yell or talk excessively for long periods of time (or speak over loud music regularly – bartenders beware). Yelling and speaking for an extended time can cause immediate vocal fatigue and hoarseness and can damage your singing voice. Keep in mind to speak at a normal volume as whispering also strains your voice. If you know your speaking voice is a problem, find a speech therapist or vocal coach who understands speech therapy to help you get back on track.

5. Study vocal and breathing technique.

Find a great (not just a good) professional vocal coach who specializes in fixing vocal problems and knows a thing or two about how to speed you back to health. Having a great coach is your secret weapon to keeping your speaking and singing voice healthy for life. Until then, check out my Singers Gift Vocal Warmups that not only warm you up, but strengthen your vocal instrument the healthy way.



FREE YOUR VOICE

by John Newell, Lead, *Realtime*
from Let It Out ©2013 Used by permission

Your goal is to be able to inhale quickly and then exhale slowly and consistently, all the while without excessive effort. Of course, you do not always need to inhale quickly - your first inhalation before starting to sing can take plenty of time - but you need that ability.

Listen carefully to how you inhale. An inhale that is quieter and lower in pitch is more likely to be unimpeded and deeper into the diaphragm. If it loud, raspy, and has a higher pitch to it, it is either chest breathing or has obstacles impeding it, or both.

Do not force open your throat and tongue muscles. Keep the muscles in as natural a state as possible.

Do not concern yourself with breath capacity, unless you have asthma or another respiratory disorder. Breath capacity simply means how much air you can take into your lungs. You cannot increase it. Your lungs can take in a specific limit of air and no more. However, they can take in less. Most people confuse breath capacity with singing long phrases. But you can change the rate of your exhale to last longer and be more efficient with your breath.

Beware of over-articulating when you sing. Do not allow the outward airflow to be disrupted by consonants (except for occasional emphasis or effect). Form consonant sounds lightly and nimbly - but clearly - using the tip of your tongue and the front of your lips. Be sure your consonants work *with* your consistent outflow of air, not against it.

Breaths are crucial between phrases. The inhale is part of the performance. It does not mark a stop in the action or else the flow of your music will be very disjointed. The speed, duration, and nature of your inhaled breath should support the musical and emotional themes. Use the 'drop in/fall in' approach as inspiration for the emotion of the next phrase, as if discovering the words or the feelings for the first time. Allow the inhale to provide the inspiration for the notes and words you are about to sing, as if they just came to you. As the breath falls into you, feel the inspiration and courage well up within you to utter the words that follow.

The benefits of following this approach to breathing include connection lines together, proper resetting of your body and face between phrases, keeping a song fresh, making it seem as if the words and music are spilling out of you for the first time, and a legato flow of vocal tone that is more engaging and more exciting for your audience.

FREE SINGING TIPS

by Yvonne DeBandi
from a2z-singing-tips.com

S = Sing through the vocal breaks. If you do not teach the muscles the necessary actions to sing through the trouble spots, success will never be achieved. Sing through it, sing through it again, and again.... *Free*

FREE SINGING TIPS

by Nicole LeGault
from a2z-singing-tips.com

S is for Style. Placement (bass & treble, etc...), singing raunchy or raspy (without going hoarse!), vibrato, and falsetto are all stylistic techniques that can be learned, developed and mastered. Why not be versatile as possible?

FREE SINGING TIPS

by Mick Walsh
from a2z-singing-tips.com

S. Soft Palate. This fleshy little feller needs to be raised when we sing and there's an easy way to do it. Just imagine a little smile at the back of the inside of your throat and hey presto, your soft palate will rise. Have a yawn too. Get used to this yawny feeling as it's something similar to what we want to happen when we raise the soft palate and sing with an open throat. When you yawn though, try not to drop off to sleep. Hello You still there...hello ..wake up!!!

FREE SINGING TIPS

by Teri Danz
from a2z-singing-tips.com

S= Sing, Sing, Sing -- Sing everyday. If you aren't in a group, sing in the car, take classes, and most importantly, do vocal exercises. They will maintain your instrument (and build it) as you look for a steady singing gig.



QUARTET CORNER

Our quartets are practicing social distancing or re-grouping.

What is YOUR quartet doing? Don't have one? Find three other guys and start one! Can't find a match? Drop me a line and I'll run a list of guys looking to quartet up here in the bulletin. It's one of those really fun things that you don't fully understand until you've done it.

It's never too early to be thinking about Singing Valentines. Quartets are always needed, officially formed or pickup. It's only a few easy songs. Learning more than one voice part to these songs can help make you easier to fit into a quartet.



CHAPTER QUARTETS



On Point

Dillon Tidwell, tenor
Daniel Pesante, lead
Timothy Keatley, baritone
Alex Burney, bass

Slice!

Terry Ezell, tenor
Eric Grimes, lead
Jason Dearing, baritone
vacant, bass

No Name Yet

? tenor
? lead
? baritone
? bass



Big Orange Chorus

REHEARSAL SCHEDULE

Thu	04 Nov	Shepherd of the Woods
Thu	11 Nov	Shepherd of the Woods
Thu	18 Nov	Shepherd of the Woods
Thu	25 Nov	Thanksgiving Day (no meeting)
Thu	02 Dec	Shepherd of the Woods
Thu	09 Dec	Shepherd of the Woods
Thu	16 Dec	Shepherd of the Woods
Thu	23 Dec	Christmas Break (no meeting)
Thu	30 Dec	New Years Break (no meeting)

BIRTHDAYS

Jim Hughes	11 Nov
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PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

...more to come

⇒ **BIG O BUCK\$** ⇐

BIG O BUCKS SCHEDULE

...more to come

RECENT GUESTS

Chuck Cashin	Jim Akers
Willy Vidmar	Mike Morgan
Dale Pratt	Hudson Pratt
Dan Newsom	Trans Maynard
Asrul Dawson	Bill Caruso
Ethan Erastain	Alex White
Tristan Arthurs	Mark Murillo
Roger Erastaine	Ron Blewett
Jon Greene	Jim Harper
G Lane	Brandon Edwards
Joe McLean	Adom Panshukian
Christian Cornella-Carlson	
Ray Parzik	Michael Reynolds
Ed Fitzgerald	Kyle Batchelder
David Brown	Thomas Barhacs
Pat McCormack	David Brown
Thomas Barhacs	Richard Breault
Justin McGhie	Emily Dearing
Sean Henderson	Doug Owens

WELCOME

NEWEST MEMBERS

Les Mower	April
Ray Parzik	August
Ed Fitzgerald	September

I'll talk to anyone about anything,
but sooner or later I'll tell him I sing.
I'll invite him to visit on Thursday night
and if he likes what he hears, he just
might become a member and maybe
he'll bring another good man
who likes to sing.

2021 DIRECTING TEAM



Jay Giallombardo
Front Line
Director

2021 OTHER CHAPTER LEADERS



Dave Walker
Uniform
Manager

PHOTO
NOT
AVAILABLE

vacant
Chorus
Manager



John Alexander
Bulletin
Editor



Frank Nosalek
Webmaster &
Technology

PHOTO
NOT
AVAILABLE

vacant
Show
Chairman



vacant
Big O Bucks
Coordinator

EDITOR'S NOTE

Article and column submissions are solicited.
Help make this a better bulletin. Send me stuff!
The deadline for December is 26 November
Items without a byline are from the Editor.

The Orange Spiel
John Alexander, Editor
2429 Southern Links Dr
Fleming Island FL 32003

Back issues are available online at:
www.bigorangechorus.com/newsarchive.htm
More specific and timely performance information
is in my weekly sheet, *Orange Zest*.

**Print off two copies
of this newsletter
to share – one with
your family and
one with someone
you are bringing to
a chapter meeting.
Let them know they
belong here!**

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**IMAGINE 80 MEN ON THE RISERS
BE A SINGER-BRINGER**



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