

INTRODUCTION TO SINGING AND VOCALISING

VOCAL PREP MODULE 1 **Posture, Breathing and Consonants**

(Video: MV Vocal Prep Module 1 AF)

Warming up your body:

- Stand up to sing
- Stretching to warm up your body, relax the muscles and breath freely
- Finding your optimal singing position

Exercise: Shake your right hand for 5 seconds
 Shake your left hand for 5 seconds
 Shake both hands for 5 seconds
 Shake your right foot for 5 seconds (keep shaking your hands, keep your balance!) Shake your
 left foot for 5 seconds (keep shaking your hands, keep your balance!) Shake everything for 5
 seconds
 Jump on the spot letting everything go
 Allow your body to relax into an upright position with feet shoulder width apart, no locked
 knees, shoulders lowered and relaxed, the top of your head extending up to release tension in
 your neck, arms falling by your side.
 Breathe freely - a few focused inhalations (in through the nose) and exhalations (out through the
 mouth) of breath and enjoy the relaxed position your body is in.

Breathing and Breath Support:

It is important to do approximately 5 mins of breath support exercises each time you engage with your modules/personal vocal practice prior to working on any melodic material. This ensures that you are engaging the breath appropriately and your instrument is responding to the active use of the breath which is different from just breathing passively/normally.

NOTE: To check your muscles are engaging keep your hands on your abdomen and cough lightly, laugh or sob (depending how you're feeling about the current world situation!). There should be slight differences in muscle engagement - can you notice the difference? It's all to do with the engagement of the breath...

Task: While doing your breath support exercises place your hand on your stomach or hold each side of abdomen with your fingers and sense the muscles engaging with each execution of the exercise. You should be able to feel the bounce (if articulation is short), a holding of the muscles (if the gesture is legato) and the muscles releasing at the intake of breath when the exercise is over.

Exercise: Using different unvoiced and voiced sounds we can create a phrase with a *mezza di voce* effect
Starting *piano* (soft dynamic), *crescendo* (get louder) to *mf* (medium-loud dynamic) and then
diminuendo (get softer) to *piano* again $p < mf > p$

- Unvoiced consonants/sounds "who" "sh" "f" "s"

Practice each word 3 times and use your breath support to control a continuous flow of air
NB: Don't forget to take a relaxed but active 2 sec breath in before each *mezza di voce* phrase

- Voiced consonants/sounds: "j" "v" "z" "r"

Practice each word 3 times and use your breath support to control a continuous flow of air
NB: For voiced consonants there should be 75% breath and 25% voice

Exercise: Sirens (sliding up and down in pitch – *glissandi*)
Carnival whistles (sliding up in pitch incrementally by supporting with the breath the rise in each pitch step)
Try singing both these glissando variations on different voiced consonants

'zzzzz' 'vvvvv' '33333' (soft g sound) 'rrrrr' 'mmmmm' 'nnnnn'

- Warming up your voice by starting with gentle humming and then some siren slides on 'ng' or other voiced consonants getting gradually higher and lower is an excellent way to quickly warm up your voice.

VOCAL PREP MODULE 2 Sustaining Vowels and Singing Scales Degrees

(Video: MV Vocal Prep Module 2 AF)

Technical exercises:

Vocalising Vowels – as singers we need to be able to clearly pronounce vowels as well as consonants when we sing words that have been set to a particular melody in a song so we can be understood. Just like consonants, vowels need to be well supported by the breath and continuously sustained so they can connect with the consonants and the word can be clearly heard when we're singing.

- The 5 'Italianate' vowels: I E A O U

We can practice our vowels by focusing on these 5 specific vowel sounds and perfect the way we pronounce them to ensure the position of our tongue is correct (the tip of our tongue sits behind our lower teeth) and we are producing a clear and beautifully sung vowel (the rear of our tongue will move up and down depending on what vowel we are singing).

Exercise: Starting with your mouth closed 'mmm' we are going to practice singing different vowels together, oscillating from 'I' to another vowel
Starting on a comfortable pitch in the lower part of your vocal range (say C or D)

- Enjoy singing the note with a closed mouth, then open up to I then E then I then E then back to I again over one phrase breath MMM – I – E – I – E – I

NB: Remember to take a relaxed but active 2 sec breath in before each phrase and support the phrase with your breath like we did when we practiced our consonant sounds. Your mouth position should be very relaxed and the shape of your mouth should be vertically round.

- Change the vowel to oscillate between A O U
MMM – I – A – I – A – I MMM – I – O – I – O – I MMM – I – U – I – U – I

We can also change the note to sing on, up or down, and practice singing and sustaining these vowels in different parts of our voice.

N.B: Remember when you sing exercises at a higher pitch (on a higher note) you need to provide more breath support and always allow the air to flow freely and smoothly.

Variation: In a similar fashion we can sing a phrase with all 5 vowels
MMM – I – E – A – O – U
Try this on different pitches stepping up and down creating a sustained vocal line

Melodic/Rhythmic Exploration: Introducing Scale Degrees: 4-4-2-2-4 Round

Definition of the term scale degree refers to the position of a particular note on a scale relative to the tonic, the first and main note of the scale from which each octave (eight notes consecutive notes) is assumed to begin. Degrees are useful for indicating the size of intervals and chords and whether they are major or minor.

Exercise: Singing a major scale on scale degrees ascending and descending – singing numbers 1 to 8 and back to 1
Start your scale on scale degree 1 on a low note in your vocal range (say C or D)
Singing a major scale requires scale degree 3 to be happy (you can make scale degree 3 sound sad which is the first step to singing a minor scale)
Sing the scale on scale degrees as legato (smooth) as possible - 1 to 8 and back to 1

Variation: Try singing specific scale degrees (leaving out numbers) – for this melodic exploration we need scale degrees 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6
As you sing the scale think the missing numbers to check you have sung the right notes with the appropriate numbers

4-4-2-2-4

3-3-3-3-2-2

6-2-4-4

2-1-2-2-2-1-2-4

Questions:

- How many parts to this song are there?
- What do the numbers mean?
- What scale degrees does it use?

Exercise: Try singing a round with me. Listen to me sing the first phrase (4-4-2-2-4).
The second entry of the round is after the first phrase.
Start singing the first phrase and continue singing the melodic pattern with me
NOTE: I will always be a phrase ahead of you

Definition of a Round refers to a musical composition in which two or more voices sing exactly the same melody (and may continue repeating it indefinitely), but with each voice beginning at different times so that different parts of the melody coincide in the different voices, but nevertheless fit harmoniously together.

Questions:

- Can you sing this starting on a different pitch i.e. higher or lower?
 - How will you find the scale degrees you require to sing this exercise i.e. 1,2,3,4,6?
- Try singing the melody with different articulation:
- a legato version - sustaining all the consonants and ensuring the consonants vocally connect with the vowels.
 - a staccato version - sing the numbers as short words and ensure you're still subdividing so you don't speed up or shorten beats.
 - Sometimes tapping the subdivision with your finger as you sing helps keep you steady and rhythmically accurate.