

Vocal Warm Up Suggestions

It is very important to warm up, especially before you expect to do a vigorous or lengthy sing. These exercises are SUGGESTIONS ONLY as to how to START your warm up, as the same exercises, or sequence of exercises won't be what you need each and every day. Similarly, should you want to recommend them to someone else, please note that what you need, and what someone else needs may be quite different depending on your overall vocal condition and experience and how flexible, or not, your respective voices are feeling at any given day or time of the day!

PLEASE READ ALL OF THESE NOTES, I.E. DON'T SKIP OVER ANYTHING UNTIL YOU'VE HAD SOME EXPERIENCE WITH THEM. I've provided section titles for that time when you want to get to something more readily AFTER you've had that experience.

PURPOSE FOR WARMING UP

Mostly what is important in warming up, as in any physical exercise, is to get the muscles moving, i.e. engaging well into your vowels, with an easy, flexible motion. While you are doing the exercises it is MOST important to pay attention to how the action feels.....it SHOULD feel easy! (This is one of those rare "shoulds" in life). Don't worry about the first few minutes.....I always hate the sound of my voice during those opening exercises, but I get through it by concentrating on how it feels....i.e. is it gradually loosening up, can I articulate easily and cleanly, is it starting to flow through the musical patterns?.....and so on. As the voice gets "warmed up", things start to sound better.

As you are aware, there are two primary sets of muscles, called registers, involved in singing – their common names are "chest register" and "falsetto". Each register has to be equally well developed to co-ordinate with each other to enable free singing.

SUGGESTED EXERCISES:

"Testing the waters"

If you are doing a warm up for yourself, you could begin with a descending 4-note arpeggio (doh-soh-me-doh) starting on middle C (men) or an octave above on high C (women). Your choice as to what vowel you want to use.....I often start with "OO". "OO" has a natural affinity with the falsetto, which is the register that gives our voices the warm, sweet sound. If doing this feels tight, however, switch to "ah" (like the Italian "Brava"). You can take the sequence up as high as feels comfortable, then begin to descend, and go as low as is comfortable.

Be mindful to take in a comfortably full breath (let the belly expand as the lungs fill) on the upbeat then release through the vowel you are singing on the downbeat. Let breath flow through the vowel, and let the vocal muscles flex. As the pitches descend, keep thinking linear, or sending the sound out. Remember the vocal muscles don't move up and down, they intensify and yield. It's only the pitches that move up and down. Concentrate on your vowel, breath flow, and keep it rhythmic.

How did that feel? Sometimes we need to give the chest register a bit of attention to make sure these muscles are going to behave themselves, and not bully the falsetto.

“Chest Register”

If it felt unsettled, try an exercise for the chest register. Begin on middle C – women, men can start there as well, however it is higher in the male voice, so men might want to start a bit lower, say G or F below middle C. Remember, this is to warm up, so you’re not wanting to start with a lot of vigorous tension.

Depending on how low your range goes you could do a descending triad (soh-me-doh) on “AH” as low as it comfortably goes. If you don’t have that low a range, just do a minor 3rd, (soh-me). Again, pay attention to how this feels.....is the vowel feeling engaged and sounds clear?

If not, try starting from near the bottom of your range, again on “AH”start by sending your breath into your vowel on the “me”. Begin to intensify the breath pressure into the vowel and keeping it smooth and connected let the pitch switch to “soh”; then keeping your “AH” going return to “me”. Some find that the sense of leaning into your vowel with your breath pressure helps to achieve this. Only take this as high as the “D” above “Middle C”, then back down as low as you comfortably can go. NEVER feel like you’re pushing! You may notice that it feels invigorated, but it should never feel stiff or hurt.....if it does, ease off; you’re working too hard!

“Falsetto”

After you’ve done some exercise with the chest you need to do isometric exercise with the falsetto. Remember, both muscle registers work together to give you your singing voice.

The falsetto can be worked in isolation from the chest register between “middle C” and the octave above for women and men to the “B” above “middle C”and yes, the isolated falsetto is in exactly the same place for women and men.

Using “OO” again, imagine you are hooting like an owl, or if that image doesn’t work so well for you, think of a glass bottle that you can blow over the top and make that hollow sound. Think of your throat as being that bottle neck and top, and breathing in through your “OO” just release a puff of breath back.

You are wanting ease of movement and a hollow, hooting sound throughout. You can play with “oo”ing on a single pitch, or a descending minor 3rd, or an ascending and descending “doh-ray-me-fah”.