

Vocal Technique Lesson with Romain – Handout Friday 1 May 2020

Breathing better

Hello!

I hope you had fun with our last lesson. We learned vocal exercises (which were quite silly!), in order to become more aware of the diaphragm, the muscles in your tummy where the sound of your voice comes from. Controlling it better will make you the captain of your voice, for you to **be in command of your breathing**. And if you control your breathing, then you can control better the volume, pitch and rhythm of your voice.

If you read that previous lesson, it is always good to come back to it fairly regularly. If you missed it, please try and have a look at it before today's lesson.

In that lesson, we talked briefly about breathing, which is the topic of the lesson today.

If there is one thing which is vital to your singing, it is your breathing of course. Because your voice is just air really. A bit more than air actually, otherwise we would not hear it. So, it is air travelling from your diaphragm, going upwards and encountering your vocal cords, your throat and your mouth, finally producing a specific sound.

Because the last lesson focused on the diaphragm, maybe you have been more aware of your breathing too. We compared your tummy to a balloon that can be filled with air.

First exercise

Place both your hands on your tummy, and do some gentle breathing. When you breathe in, feel your tummy being filled in with air and getting bigger. And when you breathe out, feel the air in your tummy being blown out. I know, what I am saying sounds like the most obvious thing to say, but I believe many improvements come from being reminded about basic, simple things like this. Breathe in with your mouth open and fill in your whole body, sending oxygen to every part of yourself. And breathe out singing any note. If you wish to, you can change that note every time you breathe out.

Now the next exercises will help you control better your breathing by managing the flow of your air and **parameters such as its intensity, its length, its volume, its speed**. Why is it important as a singer to know a bit about all of that? Because this will obviously shape your voice.

Let's understand the differences between those parameters.

1/ Quiet vs loud

Breathe in and then sing loudly 'Ah'

Same thing, but sing quietly 'Ah'

It is very important to use that when you sing. We get bored when we hear someone sing with the same volume. Don't believe that you have only either a soft or loud voice because you can definitely control the volume of your voice, it comes with practice.

2/ Slow and long vs fast and short

Always compare a singer to an instrumentalist. You might have been amazed to watch a performance where a guitarist or a violinist plays super fast, a crazy amount of notes per second. If you look at their arms and fingers then, they look super active, extremely energetic. The voice can do the same, it will require the same fast, short and lively movements. The big difference is that you cannot see them, they are hidden there, in your tummy, and they are your breathing. If you remember the exercise we did last time about being a dog and having short breaths, that's what it is about. Or when we laugh, the same energy happens.

Now, probably harder than breathing fast is breathing slow. How many of us run out of air when we want to sing a slow song?

"A slow song which has very very very long lines to sing, which never never never ends, even when you think it is about to stop, it carries on forever and ever and ever."

In order to say that sentence, I had to be aware of its extraordinary length, and therefore control the flow of the air coming out. Try it yourself. Take a deep breath and try not to take another breath until the end of the sentence. Don't cheat by saying it fast, keep it slow:

"A slow song which has very very very long lines to sing, which never never never ends, even when you think it is about to stop, it carries on forever and ever and ever"

In order to expand your ability to sing slow, long lines, do the next exercise: Breathe in open mouth. Then let it out, singing firstly on 'ha', then 'a', 'e', 'i', 'o', 'u'. Just focus on controlling the flow of your breathing. It's got to be slow, calm, without sudden changes of intensity.

Let's see how much air you can get in and how slow you can breathe out.

If you are into meditation or yoga, and even if you are not, do the same and hum. Imagine you are a monk, and be as calm as possible. Relax your body and empty your mind.

Finally, try to apply those ideas to the songs you would like to sing. Imagine that the song you want to sing is quite soft, mellow and has got very long lines to sing, you will need to be able to produce a breathing which reflects that: slow, soft, long breathing. This is exactly the sort of breathing we just worked on. You will need to take deeper breaths before each line and control the speed of your breathing, getting it as slow as possible.

Well, I hope you find these exercises useful. It is something you can work on anytime, anywhere really. And hopefully, learning to breathe in and out better will make you an even more inspired singer!