

Vocal Technique Lesson with Romain – Handout Friday 26 June 2020

High notes/Head voice

For many of us, the most challenging thing in singing is to sing high notes. It seems harder to get these high notes in tune, loud enough and with a good sound quality.

The key for getting better at singing high notes is to not think of it as a challenge. Because the more stressed you are, the more tense your body and your voice become which makes the whole thing even harder and even impossible. You definitely need to stay relaxed and use a few tips and advices that we will learn today.

CHEST/HEAD VOICE

Now, sing some high notes for me.

How can you describe the quality of your voice when doing that?

Some of you may say that your voice sounds weak, shaky, if you are not used to sing that high. Some of you who have already experienced high notes many times may say that your voice sounds quite good and confident.

Now, sing some notes in your medium or lower voice and alternate them with high notes in order to compare them.

If you are relatively experienced, you may not notice a big difference in terms of quality and volume. If you are not very experienced, you probably notice a bigger difference. Your medium or low notes sound louder and better than your high notes.

Have you heard of ‘chest voice’ and ‘head voice’?

As you can imagine, the chest voice sounds or resonates primarily in your chest, while the head voice sounds or resonates primarily in your head.

Guess which voice you used when you sang the lowest notes, and which one you used when you sang the highest notes.

Try again and feel the difference.

The chest voice is for your low and medium notes, the head voice for your high notes.

When you sing high notes, you can feel your head vibrate more. Sing again while placing your hands on your head, and try to feel it.

What are the natural differences between chest and head voice?

Naturally the head voice will sound softer, and weaker in terms of volume.

When you were practising the scales and arpeggios, you probably noticed that change, without being able to know what it was.

SWITCH OR THRESHOLD

When you sing these warm-ups, there is a moment for your voice to switch from your chest voice to your head voice. And that moment is when it is too high for your chest voice to sing notes with the same precision. This is not set in stone, and it is not a single ‘switch’ note but actually a group of notes which are ambivalent, which can be sung either with your chest or your head voice.

Try and locate these notes:

Sing a big scale of all the notes you can possibly sing, starting from the lowest one and going up to the highest one. Whenever it gets too high for your chest voice, switch to your head voice.

If you are not sure about where this is, try again but not thinking about when to switch. It will happen naturally. Just try and spot the moment it is happening.

Remember that ‘switch’ or ‘threshold’ note and think of it as the lowest note of a group of notes which are potential other ‘switches’. After a few warm-ups, you will probably get a new ‘threshold’ note, a bit higher than the original one.

DIAPHRAGM

You can also delay that switching moment by learning about how to use better your diaphragm.

Do you remember the lesson about diaphragm?

We said that using your diaphragm will help you improve your voice in many aspects.

Well, it is especially true when it comes to singing high notes.

Controlling your diaphragm will improve three things:

- the volume of your voice
- the quality of your voice
- the flow and length of your voice
- the precision of your voice

We said earlier that high notes are challenging because our voice tends to lose volume, quality, length and precision. You can see now why. It is because we are not using our diaphragm as much as we should.

The fatal error is to think that our head voice doesn't need anything else than our head to sound good. This is wrong. Even though the main vibrations happen in your head, you still need that impulse and control from your tummy, your diaphragm.

So you should be thinking of your head voice as a chest/head voice rather than just a head voice.

It is even a double mistake because the head voice actually needs even more support from the tummy than the chest voice does. This is both a paradox and the key for big improvements.

The highest you have to sing, the more grounded towards your diaphragm you should be.

Every time you voice has to go up, your focus should be to feel more your lower tummy and diaphragm. Which means you need to save your breathing for the highest notes. As they require more energy from your diaphragm, they need more air.

This is not easy to realize this, but once you do it, it will change your singing. And you won't have to sing too much about it, it will become more and more natural.

FIFTHS

We are going to sing fifths on 'o', 'a', 'o'

Fifths - low voices women and men	Fifths - high voices women and men
<p>Sing your low G on 'o'. Now find the fifth above G, D. Sing it on 'a'. And finally sing again the starting note G on 'o'. Sing the three notes on 'o' 'a' 'o'. Now the way to sing this warm-up properly is: -to sing it as smoothly as possible, without stopping between each note and having smooth changes between each note. We want to hear a slide up and a slide down rather than three separate notes -to think of saving your breathing for the top note. The low note should be quieter and the top note a bit louder -to engage your diaphragm, feel more grounded when you have to reach the top note. If it helps, you can use your arms and shoulders to feel that: slightly higher when singing low, slightly lower when singing high</p> <p>Here are the notes for the warm-up: G-D-G, Ab-Eb-Ab, A-E-A, Bb-F-Bb, B-F#-B, C-G-C, Db-Ab-Db, D-A-D, Eb-Bb-Eb, E-B-E, F-C-F, F#-C#-F#, G-D-G</p>	<p>Sing your low C on 'o'. Now find the fifth above C, G. Sing it on 'a'. And finally sing again the starting note G on 'o'. Sing the three notes on 'o' 'a' 'o'. Now the way to sing this warm-up properly is: -to sing it as smoothly as possible, without stopping between each note and having smooth changes between each note. We want to hear a slide up and a slide down rather than three separate notes -to think of saving your breathing for the top note. The low note should be quieter and the top note a bit louder -to engage your diaphragm, feel more grounded when you have to reach the top note. If it helps, you can use your arms and shoulders to feel that: slightly higher when singing low, slightly lower when singing high</p> <p>Here are the notes for the warm-up: C-G-C, Db-Ab-Db, D-A-D, Eb-Bb-Eb, E-B-E, F-C-F, F#-C#-F#, G-D-G, Ab-Eb-Ab, A-E-A, Bb-F-Bb, B-F#-B, C-G-C</p>

To sum up what we said today is that the key to sing high notes like a diva, is to not behave like a diva, but to keep calm, take it easy and engage our tummy muscles.

Have a good week guys!