

Vocal Technique Lesson with Romain – Handout Friday 28 August 2020

Learning how to sing 'Let it be'

Hello everybody! For today's and next week's lessons, I thought it would be interesting to work on a song that we all know and probably love: 'Let it be', in order to recap things we have been learning in the lessons over the last few months. This could be a sort of guide for you to use whenever you are learning a new song, as we will be talking about a wide range of things which are important when learning how to sing a song. Also, I thought this would be a good opportunity to integrate your playing to your vocal technique, if you can accompany yourself. If you can't do that, no worries at all, this is just something extra, you can still take a lot from the lesson hopefully.

1/ Finding the right key for you

Do you remember what we said last week? It is very important for you to find the right key when singing a song. Otherwise, you would be struggling with high or low notes, tiring your voice out by singing too low or too high for too long. We said that the vocal range of the song should roughly match your vocal range, and that all the notes you need to sing should be mostly comfortable for you sing. There can be slightly challenging high notes to reach, but this should always be reachable with a bit of practise.

For 'Let it be', the key that suits most my voice is probably F Major, which is the key we're going to learn the song with. If you think that this key doesn't really work with your voice, then transpose it, take it one or two tones up or down. If it is still challenging, try it another tone or two up or down and so on until you find the right key for you.

2/ Feeling the harmony, learning the chords

Today, we'll focus on the first verse only of 'Let it be'.

See the chords just below the matching lyrics and highlighted in red. Play them in order to get an idea of the harmony supporting your singing,

C C C D A C C F G A A A G G F F
When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me
F Maj C Maj D min Bb Maj

A A Bb A A G A G F
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be
F Maj C Maj D min (C Bb) F Maj

C C C D F C C F G A A A G G F F
And in my hour of darkness she is standing right in front of me
F Maj C Maj D min Bb Maj

A A Bb A A G A G F
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be
F Maj C Maj D min (C Bb) F Maj

The chords for the first line of the verse are F Major, C Major, D minor, Bb Major.

For the second line, they are nearly exactly the same except the last chord: F Major, C Major, D minor, F Major. Then, third and fourth lines of the verse are like the first two lines. The notes C and Bb which are in brackets are original notes that come just before the last chord of F Maj, and which you can add to your playing once you are confident enough with the chords.

3/ Discovering the melody and singing in tune

Being able to accompany yourself is definitely a great support when trying to sing more in tune. Even professional singers find singing 'a cappella' challenging and rely a lot on instrumental accompaniment to adjust their pitch.

The notes of the melody are on top of the lyrics highlighted in green.

Play the first chord of F Maj, and find your very first note to sing: C. Sing it on 'la'. Then, try and sing slowly, one after another, all the notes of this first line:

- Firstly, just on 'lalala', without bothering about playing the other chords. Be aware of when your voice goes up or down, if it is a small or bigger step. Try and visualize the journey of the melody and get familiar with its shape. You can help yourself using one of your hands, going up and down. For the 1st line, you repeat the same note four times, before going one small step up (a tone), then one big step down (a fourth), one medium step up (a third), repeating that note, going a big step up (a fourth), then one small step up, and another one up, singing that note three times before going down one small step and another one down, repeated.

- Secondly, do the same thing, still on 'lalala' but playing the notes that you are singing at the same time, even more slowly, to match the sound of your voice with the sound of the instrument you are playing, in order to refine the pitch/tuning. The notes you should be singing and playing are written above each line of the lyrics. Take your time, and enjoy the feeling of singing in tune.

- Thirdly, sing again that 1st line slowly, this time singing the lyrics instead of 'lalala'. If you can't accompany yourself, there is something very helpful that you can do: write down arrows next to each syllable you are singing, showing you if your voice should go up or down (small arrows for small steps and bigger ones for big steps).

Do the same work for every line of the 1st verse. You will find that the 2nd and 4th lines have the exact same journey, which is shorter than the 1st line and with only small steps. The 3rd line, looks quite similar to the 1st one but has got a few differences.

4/ Feeling the rhythm

The rhythms in pop songs and especially the Beatles songs sound often catchy and very natural. Actually, they would be sometimes difficult for a classically trained musician to write down on music staves, because they are often syncopated, with many notes 'off beat', not on the beats. Listen to the original song 'Let it be' and focus on listening to the rhythm while clapping or clicking on the beats, you'll see what I mean.

Then read the lyrics of the verse with the right rhythm. Don't sing or play yet. Focus on keeping a steady beat by clapping or clicking while just reading the lyrics. Try and see when the words or syllables match your beats or when they are 'off' beat: the very first two words of the 1st line 'when I' are 'off' beat, then 'find' is on the beat, 'myself', 'in times of' are all 'off' beat, 'trouble' is on the beat, 'Mother Ma-' on the beat, 'ry comes to me' 'off' beat.

The final step, which takes some time, is for you to combine singing, playing and rhythm. Start by clapping or clicking the beats while singing the words you were just speaking, focusing on both rhythm and melody. Work on each line a few times until you are confident, relaxed and enjoying it. Then, only then, you can add your playing to your singing:

- Firstly, by just playing the chords once, changing every four beats (every bar). Make sure you play the 1st beats ('down' beats) on time, think ahead. Here is a little tip: stop playing on the 4th beat and instead move your hand towards the next chord so you are ready to play it on time.

- Secondly, you can sing while playing all the beats on your instrument, or missing out every 4th beat as we just explained. It will give you a steady accompaniment, helpful if you want to be really tight with the rhythm you are singing.

- Finally, change, refine or customise the rhythm you are playing to make it sound more interesting and personal. Try different options but always being aware of the rhythm you are singing and feeling the beats.

Finally, have a go at singing the whole first verse with or without accompaniment. Don't overthink too much this time, just enjoy singing and 'let it be'...

Next week, we'll work on the chorus of the song, take care!