



FROM THE CHORAL REHEARSAL TO HOME PRACTICE ROOM:

A FOCUS ON PERSONAL VOCAL GROWTH OUTSIDE THE CHORAL CLASSROOM

*PHASE II, Week 3: May 11-15, 2020
Andrew Percifield, Director of Choirs
Mountain View High School*

1

PHASE II, Week 3: May 11-15, 2020

THIS WEEK YOU WILL:

- EXPAND YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE ANATOMY AND FUNCTION OF THE SINGING VOICE**
- EXPLORE THE RANGE OF SOUNDS YOUR OWN VOICE CAN CREATE**
- DEMONSTRATE RHYTHMIC BREATHING**
- GAIN CONFIDENCE IN YOUR ABILITY TO ADVANCE YOUR VOCAL SKILLS**
- DEVELOP A PERSONAL PRACTICE PLAN FOR YOUR OWN VOCAL GROWTH**
- GAIN ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR FURTHER APPLICATION**

INSIDE THIS PRESENTATION:

- The Voice as An Instrument
- Connecting the Breath to the Voice
- Vocal Sound Creation and Exploration
- Health and Environmental Considerations
- Practice vs. Rehearsal
- The Value of Patience
- Build Your Confidence: Record Your Progress
- Resources

2

BEFORE WE GET STARTED...

As you well know, a remote learning experience in a choir class does not provide you with the same educational experience that you have when we are singing together as an ensemble. I know the other directors share my feeling of emptiness without hearing a group of vibrant young adults join together in true harmony. You are loved individually and as a collective whole. We miss you and your music terribly, but aim to help you grow as a singer and person during this time of physical separation.

This week's unit will focus on what you can do as an individual singer to continue your own vocal growth during this time apart. Although you are not able to rehearse together right now, you have a brilliant opportunity to develop your own skills as a singer!

The following slides are intended to be a starting point and reference for your own vocal exploration and development. I will help you shape a personal practice plan that, with your sustained effort, will yield significant vocal skill development—which always leads to more fun singing! I look forward to visiting with your choirs this week. Until then...enjoy!

3

The Voice as An Instrument

In terms of speaking, singing, and other vocal sound creation, how well do you "know" your voice? Have you ever imitated sounds you hear such as animal calls or the speaking voice of others? Are you curious about learning all that your voice is capable of?

Feeling more confident in the sounds you create will allow you to *enjoy* expressing and emoting through your singing voice. The physical growth you are experiencing as an adolescent can be a frustrating challenge as you work to coordinate all the processes required for artistic singing. It is important to remember that the voice is an *instrument* and in many ways not so different from those playing in bands and orchestras. Unless you have studied the trumpet, you could not be expected to play with any degree of refinement. Without having some exposure or having time to research and practice, you almost certainly would not be able to play a scale on that horn! Everyone knows band and orchestra students have to practice regularly or they don't progress. The same is true of singers. You will "sound better" and be able to sing at a more advanced level as a result of personal vocal practice.

4

Anatomy and Physiology

- Singing requires the coordination of the power source (breath), vibratory source (vocal folds), and the resonators (such as the soft and hard palate, nasal cavity, skull)
- There are many resources available online that further illustrate these anatomical parts of the singers instrument. A great starting point for your study is [The Voice Foundation](#). Look at the many illustrations, models, and even watch videos of the larynx in motion. You will be able to see how your body adjusts to modify the sounds created. It is truly wonderful how the human voice works!
- After your review of the link above, can you identify these component parts of your body's vocal instrument? Can you manipulate your voice in any way (except painful!) to change the sounds you create?
- As you examine your own vocal anatomy and function, allow yourself to "just be curious" and play around with creating sound. Pay attention to sensation as you explore the varied sounds you can create. What do you "feel" as you create a specific sound? Can you repeat the sound consistently? Can you sustain and modify qualities of the sound? You will discover areas of technical strength as well as areas that will challenge you. Focus on the ones that challenge—that's where you'll find the growth!
- Here's a Suggestion: allow yourself to be a five-year old again! It's all play...until it hurts. If you experience pain while experimenting, stop! Singing, including exercises to practice singing technique, should never be painful.

5

Connecting the Breath

- Breath is the power source for the vocal instrument. Just like a motorized toy that relies on charged batteries to fully function, the voice simply can not perform the way it was designed without the proper energy flow.
- Focus on YOU and your voice during this time away from your choir! Now is the time to discover how you use breath when you sing. You will be unstoppable when you harness the power of rhythmic breathing.
- Don't expect the sensations of breathing to feel the same in all areas and applications of your voice. You will notice different registers, dynamic levels, performance styles, tempi, and things like your physical and mental condition can affect your voice from day to day.
- Breathing for singing must balance sensations of relaxation and freedom with energized coordination and control.

6

Tone Creation and Exploration

- The anatomy of vocal sound creation: onset, phonation, and release.
- Learning how to manipulate your breath will eventually allow you to effortlessly become a “rhythmic breather,” rather than just breathing and creating sound.
- Fun, physical exercises that get you moving are ideal for helping you encounter the various ways you can use your breath.
- Singers are not the only musicians that must think about breathing—obviously instrumentalists in a traditional band depend upon intentional and efficient breathing to create their best music.
- One of the more fun ways to encounter rhythmic breathing and sound creation:

7

THE BREATHING GYM!



- Rhythmic breathing is one of the best things you can focus on as an individual during this time away from group rehearsals. You will not just become a better singer, you will learn to “feel” music more.
- The “Breathing Gym” is presented by two professional horn players. Don’t let that make you suspicious of their value to you—horn players must be “masters of the breath” to play well, so there is much to learn from them.
- The BREATHING GYM is a fun approach to learning and establishing rhythmic breathing habits for singing. The lessons do involve movement and lots of “sound making,” so you might want to find a time and place that you can avoid an audience!
- Before you play this video: be prepared to move, breath, and make a lot of funny sounds as you build knowledge and skill.

8

Health and Environmental Considerations

- Remember that your instrument is housed in your body--a living organism. Your physical health and mental state directly affect your vocal production and product. Some days it will be easier than others to practice and progress, so be patient and learn to identify times that your voice should not be pushed. Again, singing should not be painful!
- Rest, nutrition, hydration, and mental state will affect your instrument. Overuse and/or abuse of the voice, being around smoke and other air pollutants, certain medications, and many other factors will temporarily affect ability and may cause permanent vocal damage.
- Become aware of how you use your speaking voice throughout your day. Do you speak in the upper or lower area of your voice? Where is your natural voice placement? Is it dark and covered, or perhaps nasal? Do any of these qualities change at different dynamic levels? Does your voice/throat ever "get tired" after talking for a long time? The health and habits of your speaking voice are reflected in your singing voice, so singer beware!

9

Practice vs. Rehearsal

Practice = You (one singer)

Rehearsal = Choir (many together)

- Do you understand the difference between these two terms? Mr. Seth McMullen has created a document titled, "Are We Practicing or Are We Rehearsing" that he has given me permission to share. I implore you to read it carefully and reflect upon your own contribution to your choir.
- This period of remote learning can be used for PRACTICE, and we all know you have an opportunity for practice like no other time in school history!
- How can you PRACTICE singing over the next few weeks? Can you find a way to create a realistic practice routine to maintain through the summer? If so, you should expect to make noticeable progress in your vocal ability before you return to choir next fall.

10

Are we practicing or are we rehearsing?

"Practice is personal; rehearsal is relational." – Jon Nicol

"Rehearsal is not the time to learn your part; it's the time for everyone to learn how to sing their parts TOGETHER! Don't waste everyone's time. Practice on your own, come to rehearsal prepared and watch how quickly the ensemble can improve with proper preparation!"

Rehearsal is not practice. Practice is not rehearsal. As musicians, we often interchange these two terms, but they are not synonymous. Practice represents work on your individual game. Vocal technique, range extension, onset, passagio (which sucks), solo work, listening, learning your part – this (and much more) are the goals of PRACTICE.

Rehearsals are when the results of practice are put to use. Ensemble technique, understanding of the whole, development of section (and ensemble) sound, the general polishing of literature, and the relational building of the ensemble are some of the goals of REHEARSAL. You cannot expect a team of athletes that shoot baskets religiously by themselves at home but never rehearse (see what I did there?) together have much success when it comes to a team basketball tournament. The same is true in our ensembles.

As a conductor, I too am required to follow these guidelines. I practice. A lot. I practice conducting. I study scores. I sing all the parts of all the songs. I listen to multiple recordings to determine the best performance practices. I plan rehearsals.

Understand that there are elements of our REHEARSAL that represent PRACTICE: sight-reading, breakout sectionals, warm-ups – all are valuable and necessary to the rehearsal process. But let's not mistake them for what they truly are – elements of PRACTICE during REHEARSAL. Our goal should be to minimize the amount of PRACTICE and maximize the amount of REHEARSING.

*Seth McMullen, Director of Choirs
Eagle High School*

11

PRACTICE PATIENCE: YOUR VOICE IS STILL GROWING

- The physical growth you are experiencing as an adolescent can be a frustrating challenge as you work to coordinate all the processes involved with singing. Be patient with yourself. Engage your sense of humor as it can distract you just enough to have fun—especially when you create unexpected new sounds!
- Be patient with your vocal abilities at this point in your physical life, your voice is physically growing and changing right now. Did you know the female voice continues its physical development into the early to mid-twenties? The development of the male voice typically continues well into their thirties and early forties! It is important to remember that you are only able to do what your body can do right now.
- If you have questions about the growth of your voice, please, ask your director or voice teacher. Through our training and experience, we are able to help you progress through vocal challenges. We are excited by getting to be a part of your journey as a singer!

12

BUILD YOUR CONFIDENCE: RECORD YOUR PROGRESS

*Practice makes perfect.
Practice can “make perfect.”
Practice will “make permanent.”*

Did you know you could practice confidence? You can! The natural result of your practice sessions will be heard in your expanded vocal abilities. The natural result of expanded vocal ability is increased self-confidence. That increased self-confidence will motivate you to practice more, which results in further expanding your vocal abilities...building even more self-confidence in your ability to use your instrument...

CREATE A PRACTICE ROUTINE FOR THE NEXT THREE WEEKS:

- Consider how and when you practice. Select a window of time that you have privacy from distractions and feel comfortable to move and vocalize in many forms. Aim to schedule 15-30 minutes daily Monday-Friday, or as regularly as possible.
- Focus on vocal discovery and production during these practice sessions. Consider yourself “free of the restraints” we can sometimes feel as a voice student. “Sing like no one can hear you!”
- Consider recording your practice sessions. Maybe you won’t feel comfortable the first few times, but try to video record yourself as you practice. What do you see? What do you hear? Although it will likely be uncomfortable for you to hear yourself at first, focus on listening as if you were the voice teacher. You may be surprised by some observations—make sure and listen for the “good” sounds too—not just the ones you want “to fix.”

13

TIME TO PRACTICE

CREATE A PRACTICE PLAN. FOR THE NEXT THREE WEEKS:

- **MOVEMENT:** Begin with a physical connection exercise. Stretching, massaging, and other forms of movement may be used to prepare your body (and mind) for singing.
- **ALIGNMENT:** find your body’s balanced alignment position. Establish physical alignment and practice sustaining that alignment...practice until you can maintain it without focusing on it.
- **ENGAGE THE BREATH:** The breath is the engine of the voice. Consider using an exercise you learned from the Breathing Gym or one you have practiced with your director in your classroom. Record yourself. What do you observe as you watch? Are you engaging in rhythmic breathing? That is the goal!
- **PHONATE (create sound with the voice):** Begin preparing the vocal folds for the highly coordinated physical process that is singing. Start with repeating gentle sounds (such as baby coos, dove calls, light sighs) and progress to more resonant sounds.
- **VOCALIZE:** Now it is time to start getting really familiar with your singing voice. During this portion of the practice time, target your vocal growth objective for the day. You may practice isolated vocal skills such as: onset and release, pitch accuracy, sustention, dynamic variation, tone production/placement, or many other technical areas. Think through exercises you have done with your director or voice teacher in the past. Use any exercises/experiences as a starting point for your own skill building practice.

14

KEEP SINGING!

I hope that you have found this lesson to be beneficial and that you have reconsidered the possibilities embedded within you. Your directors and voice teachers should be considered your primary resource for helping you at any point along the way. Don't hesitate to ask for guidance.

With a focused approach to your vocal development through private, regularly planned practice sessions, YOU WILL be a more capable and artistic singer. Imagine the fun when you return to your choir and director with a new skill set to express yourself in song?!

Best wishes to all of you, especially to all graduating Seniors!
We will NEVER forget the class of 2020!