

A Brief Overview of the Singing Process: 10 Steps for Optimizing Voice Performance

Clifton Ware, DM

1. Expanding the Mind (Volition/Cognition)

- *Self-awareness*—assess realistically (talent, background, learning style, goals)
- *Attitude*—think positively (3 Ps: practice, perseverance, & patience)
- *Readiness*—develop and practice requisite skills (cause-effect relationships)
- *Centering*—relax and focus on tasks (meditation, flow experience)
- *Imagination*—reconcile imagery with reality, i.e. how the vocal process functions physiologically and acoustically

2. Energizing the Body (Physical Preparation)

- *Emotions and sensations*—generate appropriate thoughts and emotions (joy, pleasure) that result in positive sensations, including ease of tone production
- *Mind-body state*—release negative, interfering tensions, especially in the articulators (jaw, tongue, etc.)
- *Physical health*—become a “vocal athlete”, by giving proper attention to nutrition, exercise, rest, and recreation
- *Body alignment*—create an up-stretched posture, comfortably expanded chest and buoyant stance

3. Developing Breath Management (Respiration)

- *Inhalation*—take relaxed, upward directed sniff-like breaths (with mouth open) to align the vocal tract for maximum resonance and to provide sufficient air in executing each musical phrase
- *Exhalation*—imagine releasing breath (airflow) through a high-arched breathing channel, conceptually allowing tone (voice) to follow “on the breath”

4. Producing Tone (Phonation)

- *Vocal-fold vibration*—learn and demonstrate the three types of vocal onset and sustained phonation: breathy, *pressed*, and *coordinated/balanced*
- *Techniques*—experiment with exercises based on the lip-buzz hum, whine, moan, and nasal consonants to achieve a coordinated vocal-fold vibration

5. Connecting Voice Levels (Registration)

- *Main registers*—understand the terminology, characteristics, and functioning of heavy/chest, light/head, and middle/mixed registers
- *Auxiliary registers*—identify *whistle*, *Stroh*bass, and *falsetto* registers
- *Techniques*—practice *glissandi* (sliding pitches) between high and low ranges

6. Optimizing Tone Quality (Resonation)

- *Vocal resonators*—maximize combined throat, mouth, and head (nasal) cavities to enhance harmonic overtones in achieving *chiaroscuro*, or a balanced bright-dark tone quality
- *Head sensations*—“allow” the breath/tone to be directed towards the upper forehead, around the eyes (mask), but don’t “stick” or “drive” it there
- *Tone placement*—become familiar with the three types of tone placement (throat, mouth, and head), and be able to demonstrate them
- *Techniques*—practice taking sniff-like, “surprise” breaths and maintain this type of

expanded, relaxed throat sensation throughout singing

- *Sensations*—conceptualize and sense a “letting-go” or release of breath, a resultant high resonance, and a body connection (mid to low abdominal area)

7. Voicing Vowels and Consonants (Articulation)

- *Dramatic speech*—affect an oratorical, Shakespearian-like speech, using ample breath flow, a higher pitched vocal range, slower tempi, and variable dynamics, from soft to loud
- *Articulators*—relax all articulating organs—jaw, tongue, lips, cheeks, soft-palate—affecting the let-go manner of a “boisterous drunk”
- *Phonemes*—voice all word sounds in a natural speech-like manner, according to standard rules of pronunciation

8. Integrating the Vocal Process (Coordination)

- *Unified gesture*—strive for a single, coordinated, and complete *Gestalt* action
- *Dynamic vocalism*—strive for a full range of vocal expression, evidenced by a vibrato pattern of 6–8 pulses per second, the ability to perform with both agility (fast *coloratura*) and *sostenuto* (sustained tones and phrases), a wide vocal range, and a full spectrum of dynamics
- *Reconciliation of opposites*—realize that the primary goal is to achieve a coordinated balance of opposites, including relaxation/tension, bright/dark tone, and inhalation/exhalation

9. Expressing a Song (Communication)

- *Musicianship*—execute all of the notes and instructions contained in musical scores with accuracy, including pitches, rhythm, tempi, phrasing, and dynamics
- *Scholarship*—research the musical and textual background of a song or aria to gain a deeper knowledge of the composer, textual source, and overall stylistic elements, thereby assuring thoughtful interpretation and dynamic expression
- *Language and diction*—learn the basic pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary of English, Italian, German, and French (possibly also Spanish, among others), and be able to enunciate them accurately and expressively
- *Stage presence and expression*—develop acting skills, because a singer also communicates with body language, with expressive posture, movement, gestures, and facial expression
- *Repertoire*—select a variety of appropriate song repertoire for your voice type, including *classical* (art song, opera, operetta, oratorio, and ensemble), *folk*, and *popular/commercial music* (musical theater and select classical-pop songs)
- *Communication*—remember that the ultimate goal is to effectively communicate the intrinsic nature (message) of a vocal composition to an audience, according to the creative intent of both the composer and textual source, as filtered through your unique talents and abilities

10. Practicing Your Craft Regularly and Diligently (Commitment)

Resources (Publications by Clifton Ware)

- *Adventures in Singing*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998, 2004, & 2008 (4e).
Website: www.mhhe.com/ais4
- *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy*. New York: McGraw-Hill 1998.
- *The Singer's Life: Goals and Roles*. St. Paul, MN: Birch Grove Publications, 2005 (www.birchgrovepublishing.com/).
- Website: *Integral Life Balance: The Integral Vocalist and Integral Artist-Teacher* (www.integralifebalance.com)

