

# THE TEEN GIRL'S SINGING GUIDE:

*Tips for Making Singing the Center of Your Life*

Nancy Bos

### Lessons On the Internet

Do you wonder if lessons on your computer are good idea?

To answer that question, I turned to Valerie White Williams. Valerie has been teaching and singing since long before I met her in the Vocalist Usenet newsgroup (the earliest form of internet discussion groups) in 1993! We even participated together in an internet organized virtual recital, with performers spanning the globe. There is nobody more qualified that I know of to talk to us about taking



lessons over the internet since Valerie has been deep in the internet since those early days.

NOTE: Valerie uses the word Skype to represent all on-line one-on-one, live streaming apps which includes FaceTime, Zoom and others. Another option would be to call them "live online web based lessons." (LOWBL?)



Nancy: Do Skype lessons really work as well as in-person lessons?

Valerie: Yes! I was skeptical at first. But then I was totally surprised with how easy it was for me to tune into my students, hear what is going

on with their voices, and offer them instruction and feedback, just like in-person lessons. Since then, I've worked with students all over the world and I can honestly say they progress just as fast as my in-person students.

Nancy: What things are different about Skype lessons?

Valerie: Besides not having to go to your teacher's house or music studio, there really aren't many differences. First off, you don't have to spend time traveling to lessons. But if you are used to using your teacher's music, for Skype lessons you need to have the music and the accompaniment tracks you are working on available on your end.

Nancy: What are the benefits of Skype lessons?

Valerie: First off, you can take lessons with a teacher anywhere in the world! You are not limited to the teachers (or lack of them) in your local area. But the best thing about live streaming lessons is that web based interfaces, like Skype & FaceTime, use a split screen with a double mirror effect.

Singing into a mirror is one of the most beneficial things singers can do, yet it is so awkward! The double mirror effect on the computer screen



makes everything more comfortable and easy for your teacher to demonstrate and for you to clearly see what they are doing! It also

creates great bonding since on-line lessons are more direct face-to-face in ways that might feel too creepy in real life.

Other benefits include the ease of recording lessons through add-on recording programs and the ability to warm up before and practice new things right away after the lesson.

Nancy: Are there any downsides of Skype lessons?

Valerie: There are only two downsides that I can think of. The first is that technological issues can happen. Sometimes the connection is bad and there can be a delay, but that is becoming less and less common as bandwidth is increasing. I've found that if the connection is bad, it's best to hang up and call again. That often fixes the issue.



The other downside is that teachers cannot accompany their students in real time. If the connection is strong on both ends, it can sometimes work out but usually teachers and students need to take turns speaking, playing and/or singing. So when working on a song or vocal exercise, the teacher plays the exercise or vocal line at the piano and then you sing it back and so on, back and forth. Although this may seem like a drawback, it actually helps the students listen more carefully as they sing back what they hear. But when it comes to actually accompanying the students while they sing, it just doesn't work. Any accompaniment or backing track needs to be happening in the student's location. The students can then sing along to the accompaniment on their end so that the teacher can give feedback and suggestions.

Nancy: Do online lessons cost more?

Valerie: No. I charge the same as in-person lessons, and I think most teachers are the same.

Nancy: How do streaming lessons actually work? It sounds complicated.

Valerie: Here is what you need for live, web based lessons:

- + **A computer, laptop or iPad or other large tablet.** Phones are too small to see well enough to really be effective.
- + **A web cam.** I use a separate HD webcam through the USB port on my MacBook Pro as it gives me better placement options as well as a better picture. But you can simply use the camera that comes with your tablet or laptop.
- + **Internet with good bandwidth.** Streaming video is intense. Depending on your bandwidth, you might ask people who are sharing the connection with you at your home to stay off Netflix and YouTube while you have your lesson. Some people find the connection is best when using an ethernet cord to connect your computer directly to the router or modem.
- + **A comfortable, well lit room.** Lighting is an important factor in streaming lessons. For the best effect, you want to avoid backlighting and try to have some light directly on your face. I actually take a desk light and shine it right on my face when I do Skype lessons. It makes a huge difference.
- + **A way to send money online.** Most teachers, including myself, require payment in advance of the Skype lesson. My Skype students usually



pay me through PayPal, which requires a PayPal account. I'm also starting to use Square, which allows people to pay with credit and debit cards.

Nancy: How do I find a teacher who teaches Skype lessons?

Valerie: You can find most Skype teachers online, either by searching or going to YouTube. I've gotten most of my Skype students from my YouTube channel. Teachers who do Skype lessons will usually say so on their website or social media, but you can always email and ask!



Nancy: What happens next after you connect with a teacher?

Valerie: Once you and a teacher agree to work together, the first thing to do is find out what time zones you both live in. If you are both in the same time zone, it is much easier, but don't let that scare you from considering a teacher who lives further away! The first step is to share locations with your teacher and figure out the time difference. I use the World Clock Time Zone Converter.

Once you determine the time difference, you can find a time that works for both of you. If your chosen teacher is on the other side of the world, you may have to be creative to find a time. Also, be aware that not every country or even every state recognizes Daylight Savings Time changes, as in the US, so when those times come around, you need to re-address the lesson times accordingly.

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Once you have your first lesson scheduled, you will need to either sign up with Skype and add each other as contacts or exchange phone numbers with FaceTime. Then after you take care of the payment, all you have to do is show up at your computer at your dedicated lesson time. You've done all the groundwork and prepared yourself for lessons with your new teacher, so now you can just relax in your own home and enjoy learning how to become a better singer. Enjoy the journey!

Nancy: Cool! Thanks Valerie!

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