

Subject: Voice Masterclass

Basic Voice Technique

Students should learn vocal and breathing techniques because if students sing without understanding these techniques vocal issues could arise. Vocal problems such as muscle tension, over singing, pushing air through the vocal chords and nodules can seriously affect a student's vocal health. In some cases these issues can be handled with vocal and breathing exercises. Learning vocal and breathing techniques can also strengthen the tone of the voice, extend vocal range and allow students to sing longer phrases. Healthy voices that will allow students to continue singing throughout their life are necessary and therefore, vocal and breathing technique will be required as a learning objective in this curriculum.

Technique will be taught through vocal and breathing exercises. Exercises can be modified to suit individual student needs.

In the first section, students will learn how to take low, relaxed breaths. Relaxation and meditation exercises will help students loosen up the tension they have when they breathe. Students will develop their ability to match pitch and develop their vocal tone by singing ear-training exercises that require students to match pitch with an instrument or voice.

The second section will involve students developing and extending their vocal range by practicing vocal exercises of more than one octave. Students will also focus on using the diaphragm to control the breath. There are many breathing exercises that will allow students to see the movement of the diaphragm when breathing.

In the third section, students will learn about the different dynamics and will practice singing their chosen songs at different volumes. Students will continue to work on taking low breaths controlled by the diaphragm and also will practice taking quick catch breaths when singing their songs.

Concepts taught in the fourth section will include singing in the head voice, chest voice and mix voice and singing melodic phrases. Students will practice melodic phrasing in their songs by changing dynamics, adding slurs or other phrase markings and planning where they will breathe. In the fifth section, students will practice switching between the three voices by singing vocal exercises that have large ranges. Students will learn how to breathe in preparation for long phrases.

In the final section, students will sing vocal exercises that allow them to experiment with different vocal tones. Students will continue to practice their diaphragm breathing until it becomes second nature. By training the voice and body in these ways, students

will gain control over their vocal technique and be able to sing more difficult musical pieces without harming their voices.

In the modern country or bluegrass music industry, singing styles and abilities come in all shapes and forms. Don't be stressed if you don't have the greatest singing ability in the world. What's more important is matching your ability to a song's range and delivering that song to touch people's hearts in a sincere way. That's what people will remember.

So, if you don't have a 3-octave voice, don't sing or select songs that require your voice to reach those heights. Identify what you can do, master your pitch and basic vocal techniques, and focus on preparing and protecting your voice through training and warm ups.

(The following objective outline and curriculum is based on Kristen Barrett, www.musiclessonsbykristen.com)

SELECTING A SONG

It all begins with a song. Selecting the right song for you may be one of the most important decisions you make for your performance. Not everyone is a songwriter, however. Some of the greatest songs in music history were the result of writing collaborations between artists and songwriters or brought to life by an artist who created great relationships with talented songwriters.

Whatever your path to finding a song, one thing has remained the same: a great song needs to have relatability, have great melody, and have memorable lyrics. Think about the people you know in your life or the potential audience you hope to reach with your music. What's going on in their lives? What kinds of stories, situations, and feelings would they relate to if described in a song? Do the lyrics in a potential song paint a vivid picture, and does the melody stick in your brain? These are the ingredients to a great song.

When listening to songs, focus on finding songs that make an impact in the first verse and chorus. Take into account your own personal moods when assessing a song. It never hurts to get another opinion on a song, but ultimately trust your gut instinct.

“When you hear a song and you get the gut feeling that that’s the song I want to record, that’s a good indicator to me. I go with my gut.”—Reba McEntire

ASSIGNMENT

Be a diagnostician for your favorite songs to understand why you like them. Compile three lists: songs that have your favorite melodies, songs that have your favorite lyrics, and songs that have relatability to your own life or touch your heart (you can mention a song more than once for each list). As you compile each list, start to look for patterns. What commonalities do your favorite lyrics have? What kinds of stories within songs resonate the most with you? Use Spotify to create and share your lists with your fellow classmates to discover other themes that work well for great songs. Keep these themes in mind when you begin to write or select songs for yourself.

PHRASING A SONG

Phrasing a song can make all of the difference in the world! Students will learn how to phrase a song so that it is delivered with emotion and feeling. Each student will sing a few phrases of their song, and will learn how to change the phrasing.

BLUEGRASS HARMONY

We will discuss the different harmonies in bluegrass (based on an article written by Fred Bartenstein.

A hand-out will be given to each student.

We will all sing selected songs in the following harmony configurations:

- 1. Solo**
- 2. Duet**
- 3. Trio**
- 4. Quartet**