

# Vocal/Choral Myth Busters

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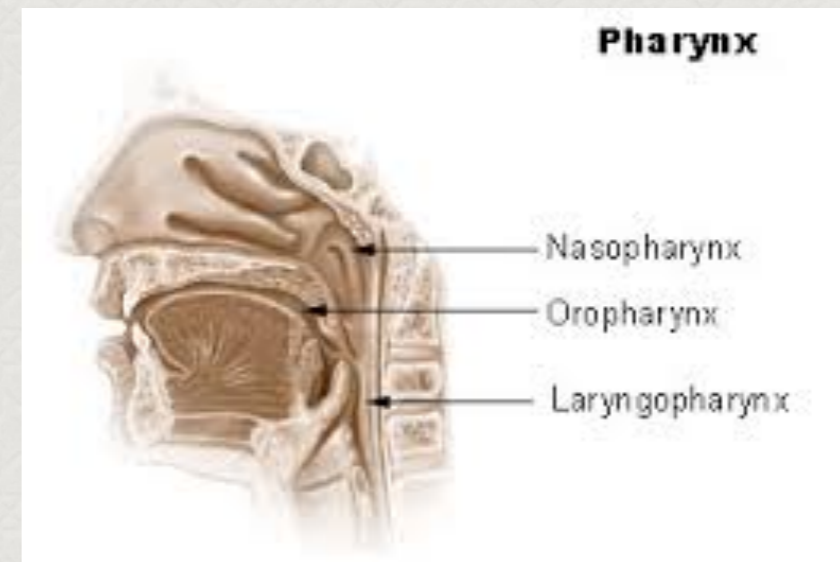
*The Pedagogical Truths  
Behind Common Choral Phrases:  
Fact or Fiction?*



# “Sing with an Open Throat” and "Sing with a Yawn"

- ✦ The “throat” is more accurately named the pharynx, and is comprised of three parts:

- ✦ **Nasopharynx**
- ✦ **Oropharynx**
- ✦ **Laryngopharynx**



- ✦ Conscious effort to “make space” could lead to muscular and palatal tension
- ✦ A yawn is a significant over extension. Approaching a yawn is closer but can still cause over extension

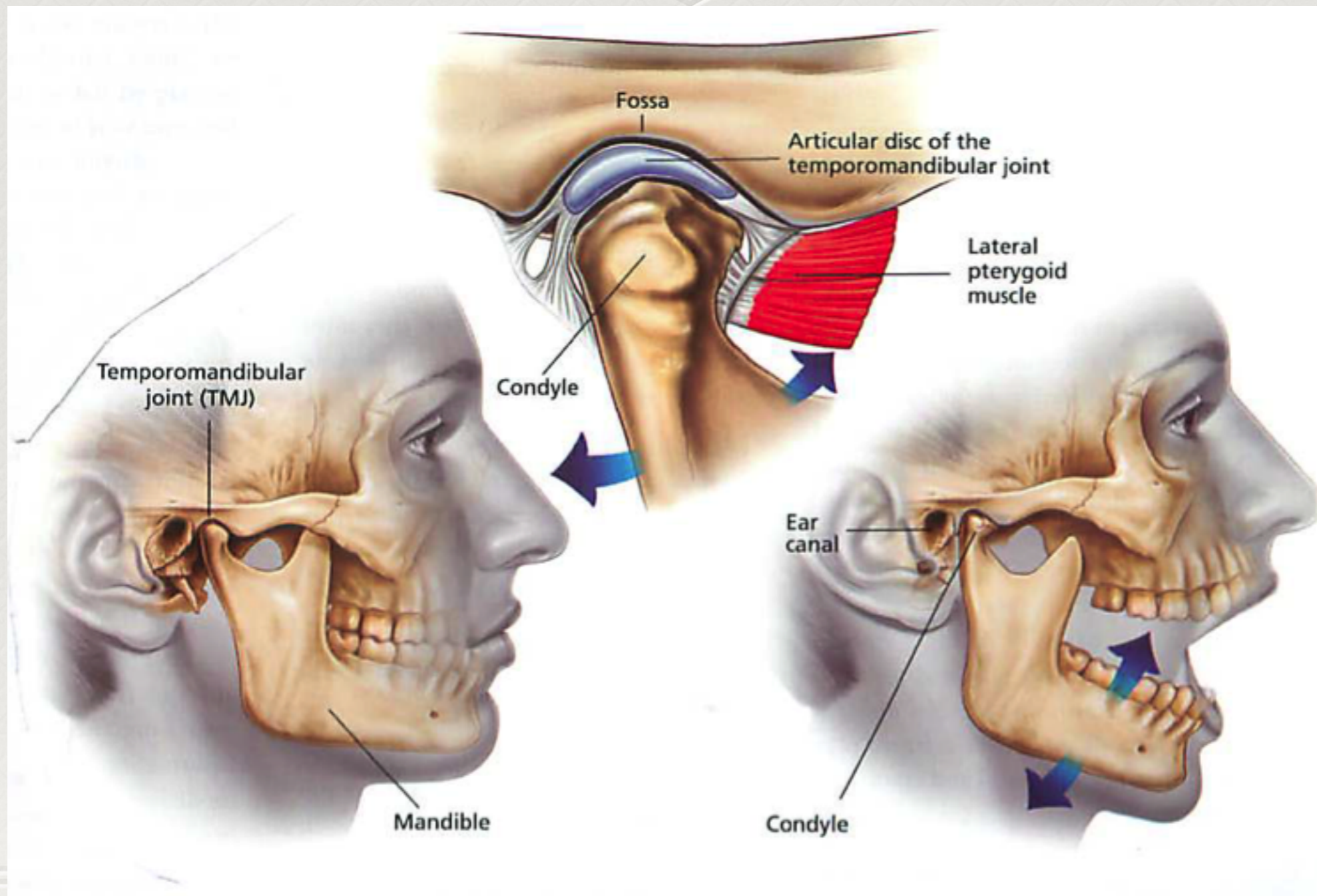


# "Drop the Jaw"

- ✦ **Overextension can cause significant tension; another common expressions is “three fingers between your teeth for proper space”**
  - ✦ **Can cause narrowed pharyngeal space, temporomandibular disorder, depressed larynx**
- **Internal vowel shape is more important than external shape**
  - ✦ **Open jaw at the back, emphasize palate lift, tongue placement, and relaxation to increase pharynx**
  - ✦ **Jaw actually should open more between [i] to [e] than between [e] to [a]**
  - ✦ **Jaw opening for [i] and [u] is the same!**
  - ✦ **Excessive jaw movement wastes energy, creates tension, alters the sound of the vowel as it's being sung, and distorts vowel uniformity**
  - ✦ **Over extended jaw is why many choirs sound too dark in general**
- ✦ **Singer's formant and resonators**
  - ✦ **Open pharynx and low larynx help create singer's formant**



# “Drop the Jaw”







# “Pucker your Lips”

- ✦ All vowels do NOT need to look uniform! "trumpet lips"
  - ✦ Jaw should be free for tongue and lip vowels
  - ✦ Again, focus on internal space and tongue position
  - ✦ Real culprit is often the tongue!
- ✦ Excessive forward lip puckering can create an opening that is too narrow, thus reducing interior space in the mouth as cheeks are pulled in due to tension.
  - ✦ This "covering" of the vowel creates an overly dark tone that lacks overtones and resonance
  - ✦ Over puckering [i] and [u] vowels creates a hooty sounding [i] that actually can create more intonation problems
  - ✦ Avoid asking them to sing [i] in the space of [u] ("covering the vowel")
- ✦ Practice transition from [o] to [u] by slightly closing jaw and slightly rounding lips.
  - ✦ Key is to maintain resonance of [o]



# "Sing with Your Diaphragm"

- ✦ **What is the diaphragm?**
- ✦ **Emphasis on intercostals and abdominal muscles**
- ✦ **Importance of sternum, shoulders, neck and spine**
- ✦ **Breath support vs. breath management/energy**
- ✦ **Higher & louder pitches require more breath pressure, but not more airflow**



# The Diaphragm



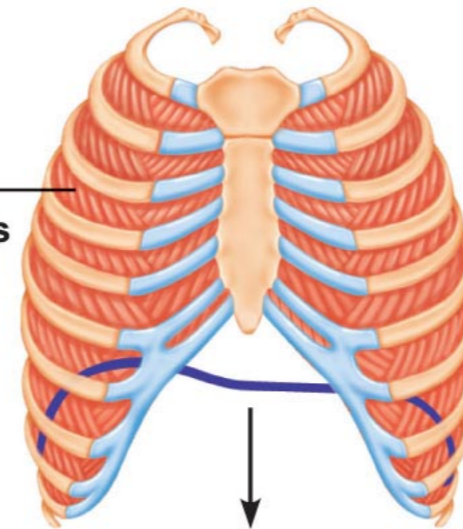
The diaphragm is shaped like a parachute



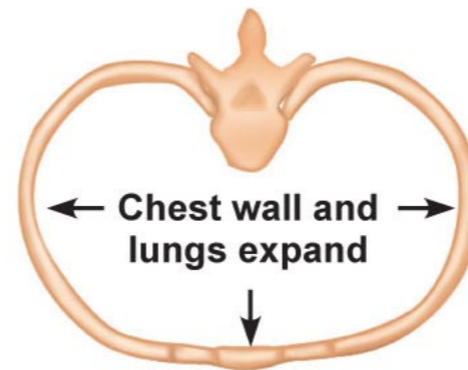
ADAM

## Inspiration

External intercostals contract



Diaphragm contracts

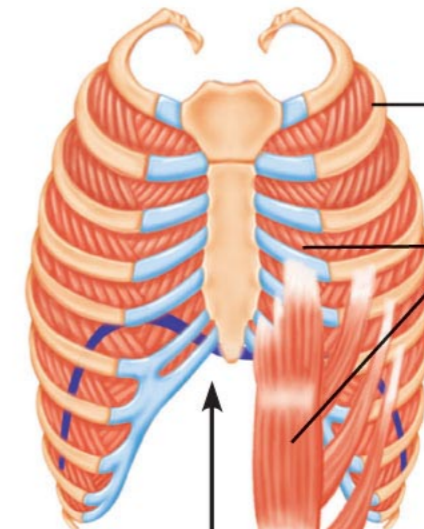


Expansion of ribs moves sternum upward and outward

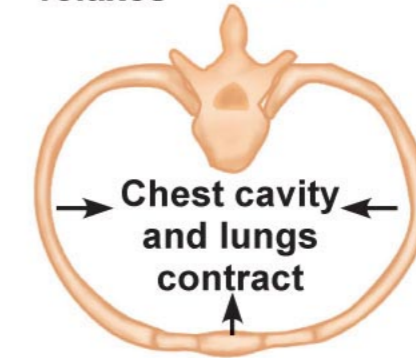
## Expiration

External intercostals relax

Internal intercostals and abdominals contract for active expiration only



Diaphragm relaxes

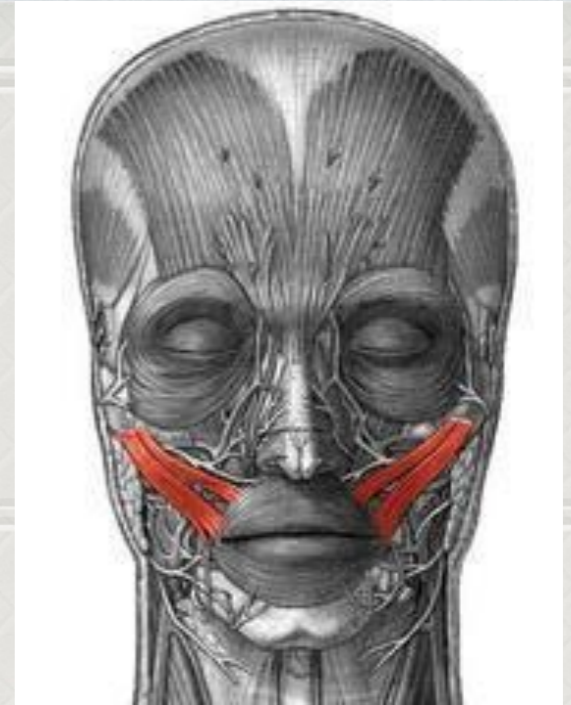


Ribs and sternum depress

(b)



# “Bite an Apple”



- ✦ **Zygomatic muscles**

- ✦ **“When a pleasant expression (not a smile) accompanies complete inspiration...the [soft palate] rises slightly, changing the shape of the resonator tract in the velopharyngeal area;” – Richard Miller, Solutions for Singers**
- ✦ **“Never drop the cheek area, regardless of the meaning of the text.” – Jussi Bjoerling**
- ✦ **A modest inner lift encourages an exterior pleasant expression, which brightens the tone and reduces absorption of higher frequencies**
- ✦ **An excessive exterior shape produces a harsh sound due to too many high harmonic frequencies**



# “Place the Tone in the Mask”



- ✦ **Individualized perception of resonance**
- ✦ **Sympathetic vibration**
- ✦ **Tone is not a thing, pitch is not a place**
- ✦ **Can cause tensions, inconsistent resonance, and overuse of nasal cavity as a resonator which diminishes amplitude of vocal formant**



# “Raise the Eyebrows”

- **Along with flaring the nostrils, raising the eyebrows has NO impact on resonance or tone quality because neither affect the pharyngeal space. (Nasal cavities are only considered resonators in nasal vowels)**
- ◆ **Intonation problems cannot be fixed by raising the eyebrows. They are more likely caused by tension in neck, larynx, or tongue, incorrect breath pressure, incorrect resonance space, or inability to hear or understand vertical intonation**
- **Psychological effects/communication with audience**





# “Always Modify Toward [a]”

- ✦ **Modifying to [a] can create excessive mouth opening in front**
  - ✦ **Men should avoid modifying to [a] or [ae] which require more jaw opening**
  - ✦ **Instead modify to mid vowels like [ɪ], [ɛ], [e], [ɔ], [o], [U]**
  - ✦ **Even sopranos only need to modify to [a] or [ae] in the very highest pitches (A5 and above)**
  - ✦ **Slight modification should occur in the first passaggio**
- ✦ **Modifying to [a] alters pronunciation and is often inappropriate in American English songs/texts (love becomes [lav], happy sounds more like hoppy, etc.)**
- ✦ **Always modifying [i] to [I] makes sound less resonant, more dull, and can make words more difficult to understand**
- ✦ **Modifying or "covering" vowels like the schwa, mixed vowels, and vowels like [ae] toward cardinal vowels limits color palate and unnaturally alters pronunciation**
- ✦ **BE NOT AFRAID OF [i], [ae], [ɔ], [ʌ], and [ə]**



# “BLEND!!!”

1. **Balance vs. Blend (particularly dynamic balance between section**
2. **Unify color**
  - ✦ **Voice positioning and acoustics - standing/seating arrangement**
  - ✦ **"Blend" problems often occur when some singers have a developed singer's formant and others do not**
  - ✦ **Unify Vibrato**
    - ✦ **Vibrato in adolescent voices**
    - ✦ **Change amplitude of vibrato**
    - ✦ **Change speed of vibrato**
3. **Intonation**
4. **Diction (vowels and consonants performed uniformly)**



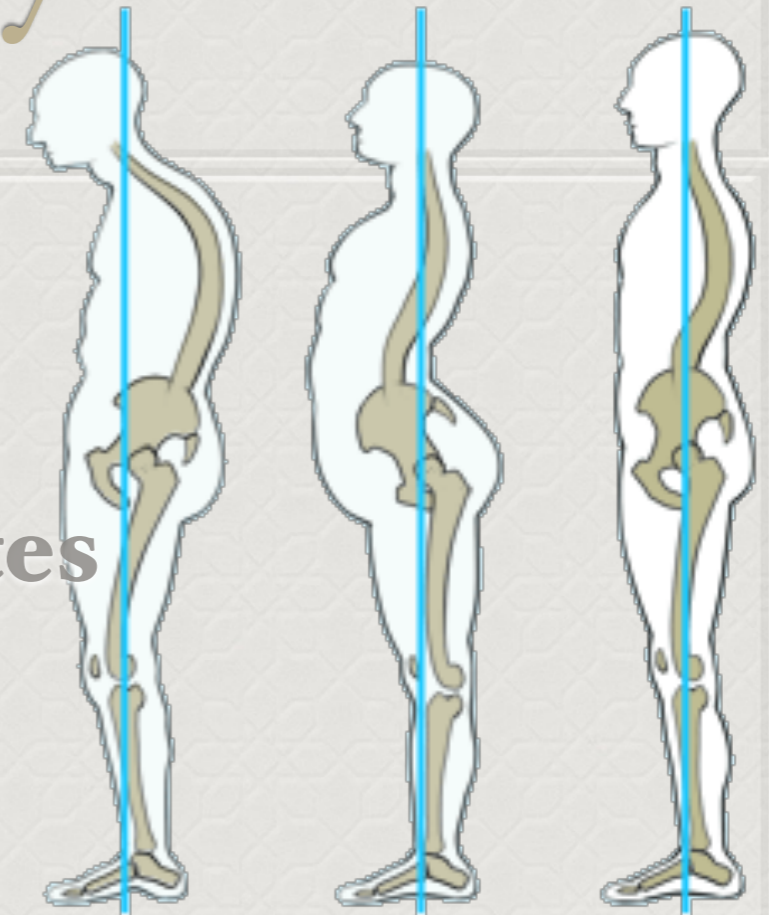
# “Straight Tone”

- ✦ **"Straight tone is easier to sing in tune"**
- ✦ **"Modern and Renaissance choral repertoire requires straight tone due to tone clusters, polyphony, close harmonies, etc."**
- ✦ **Organ stops called Vox Humana and Voce Umana (with vibrato) found in organs built as far back as 1537**
- ✦ **Quitschreiber - "...one sings best with a quivering voice" (1598)**
- ✦ **Friderici - "The students should, from the beginning, become accustomed to singing with a refined naturalness, and, where possible, with the voice trembling...or pulsating..." (1614)**
- ✦ **Michael Praetorius "...first, a singer must have a nice, pleasant vibrato..." (1619)**
- ✦ **Theorists and pedagogues also recommended that instrumentalists imitate human voice by using vibrato**
- ✦ **Studies with EGG found that when asked to sing without vibrato singers usually pressed folds together more firmly and increased airflow through glottis by decreasing vocal fold pressure**



# “Pinch a Penny”

- ✦ **Squeezing buttocks for high notes**
- ✦ **Contrary to correct alignment**
- ✦ **Breath becomes less efficient with the constriction of back muscles**





# Classification of Adolescent Singers

- **She/he can sing low so she/he must be an alto/bass**
- ◆ **Girls should experience singing alto & soprano**
  - ◆ **Need to develop both head and chest voices**
  - ◆ **Need to experience singing harmony and develop ear and reading skills**
- ◆ **Boys are rarely "true" tenors or basses until mid 20s and girls are rarely "true" altos until late teens or early 20s.**
- ◆ **Girls should NEVER be required to sing tenor**