

# The Vocal Athlete

## Application and Technique for the Hybrid Singer

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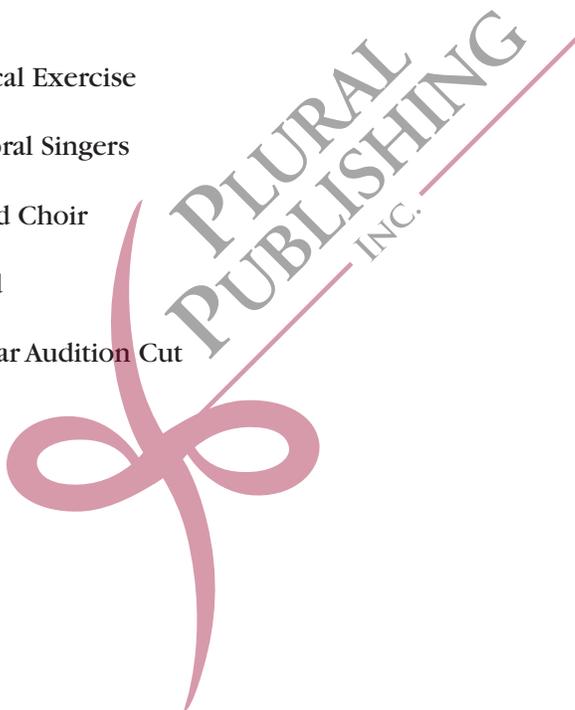
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# Preface

hy•brid sing•er- (n). refers to the vocal athlete who is highly skilled performing in multiple vocal styles possessing a solid vocal technique that is responsive, adaptable, and agile in order to meet demands of current and ever-evolving vocal music industry genres.

Voice teachers today are often expected to be skilled in teaching and cultivating multiple vocal styles encompassing classical to pop, musical theater, and more. Yet, many vocal pedagogy training programs do not fully prepare the voice pedagogue to teach multiple vocal styles despite the continued growing need for competent contemporary commercial music (CCM) voice teachers. We conceptualized this book to help bridge a gap in the vocal pedagogy world by compiling a collection of CCM voice exercises for voice teachers of all levels to use as a resource in their studios/practices. Designed to dovetail with its companion singing science, pedagogy, and vocal health textbook, *The Vocal Athlete* (LeBorgne and Rosenberg, 2014), this book contains over 60 CCM voice exercises from some of the most well-respected and sought-after CCM voice experts internationally. Contributors' backgrounds and experiences draw from a variety of arenas from performance psychology and physical therapy to prestigious voice teachers and speech pathologists/singing voice specialists.

## How to Use This Book

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The exercises presented in this book represent numerous techniques shared by the contributors. We have divided the book into two primary sections. Section I encompasses exercises for the mind, and body including mental focus, breathing, alignment and jaw/tongue relaxation exercises. Section II focuses on technical

vocal work including vocal warm up and cool down, registration, and style-specific exercises. Readers will note that some exercises are applicable in multiple chapters. Although several of the exercises contained are similar to singing voice rehabilitation techniques, the intent of the exercises included in this book is for the *vocally healthy* singer, and none of the exercises should cause vocal strain or discomfort. Further, if a singer or teacher notes onset of new voice difficulties such as voice fatigue, change in quality or loss of range in the absence of an obvious illness, he should seek laryngeal examination from a laryngologist.

Most vocal exercises stem from experiences, personal training, and input from multiple teachers, and many of the exercises are modifications and adaptations from former voice teachers or other methods. Although some exercises included in this workbook may seem similar, each contributor brings his or her own unique perspective to their exercise. As with all vocal pedagogy techniques, none of the exercises included have been rigorously scientifically studied for efficacy, but they are based on sound principals and have proven to be effective empirically through years of experience of the pedagogues who have used them.

It is the present authors' belief that there are many ways to approach the same vocal problem or issue. However, a vocal exercise is only effective if the teacher has firmly established the intent and purpose of that exercise for a given student's vocal needs/development/growth. It is at this level of understanding that vocal pedagogy becomes an art form in addition to a science. Several of the exercises include either photographs, or audio clips to help augment understanding of how to execute that exercise. Readers are encouraged to continue to explore these exercises beyond what is written on the page or provided on the CD.

☉ We have taken care to relate exercises back to the textbook when applicable to provide the reader with a broader framework for reference and consideration. With a broader context and understanding, teachers are encouraged to play, experiment, modify, and adapt exercises and techniques to suit the specific needs of their student with the physiological knowledge of

intended vocal outcome. Additionally, if the exercise ultimately does not yield the intended outcome, it is incumbent upon the teacher to reassess and modify in order to suit the specific needs of the student.

We are endlessly grateful for the contributions of these voice pedagogues, speech pathologists/singing

voice specialists, performance psychologists, physical therapists, vocal coaches, and body movement specialists to this book, for without their commitment to CCM pedagogy and willingness to share some of their techniques and methods, this book would not have become a reality.



# A Word About the Accompanying CD

A CD accompanies this book, containing recordings of 36 of the exercises. The purpose of the CD is to provide an aural model for those exercises that may be difficult to interpret from the written text alone. Many of the exercises do not require a recording for comprehension of the exercise, whereas others may leave

a reader uncertain as to how a task should sound without a recording for guidance. Several of the exercises have provided a note range or key. Those exercises included on the CD, many of which were recorded by the contributing authors, have a CD icon next to the title. 



# SECTION I

## Preparing the Singer's Mind and Body

### Introduction and Overview

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Given the physical demands of many Contemporary Commercial Music CCM styles, this section includes exercises that help provide the foundation for efficient performance. The exercises included in this section address the singer (mentally and physically) as a whole. We have included exercises to promote mental focus and centering, exercises for posture, alignment, and breathing. Additionally, stretch and relaxation exercises for jaw and tongue are also provided in this section.

### Exercises for Mental Focus

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Chapter 1 begins with a variety of exercises designed to promote mental focus and centering. Dr. Barbara Walker (performance psychologist) provides a guided meditation to center the breath and clear the mind. This exercise can be useful to increase mental focus and reduce performance anxiety allowing the performer to reduce apprehension and feel mentally prepared for performance. Robert Sussuma takes the reader through a voice scan exercise in order to increase the singer's awareness and kinesthetic feedback of his or her instrument prior to active voice use or performance. This exercise may be useful for singers who are kinesthetically "blocked" with reduced

awareness of what they are sensing and experiencing when singing. He also describes a three-part contemplation exercise designed to center the mind and connect with oneself as a singer and performer. Joanna Cazden's exercise also promotes self-discovery of the voice, but with a unique intention. Her exercise encourages creation of a dialogue with your voice to explore feelings and emotions about your vocal history with the intention of moving past vocal negativity and frustration, allowing the singer to move toward a healthier vocal viewpoint. This type of exercise can be useful for singers who currently have or are having vocal issues or injury, as it gives the singer a method to verbalize and express fears and emotions associated with singing, while facilitating a process of reestablishing a level of trust with the vocal instrument. Jeremy Mossman's vocal exploration exercise provides an enjoyable arena for a singer to explore various qualities of vocal sounds outside of the context of singing. This exercise has usefulness from a cross-training perspective allowing for the exploration of a variety of vocal colors and nuances that can be drawn upon for performance. Martin Spencer introduces several variations of a mental focus and breathing exercise including a group mental focus exercise to connect and synchronize multiple people through movement and breath. He encourages this exercise as a means to unify and optimize the ensemble dynamic. Finally, the Scale of Vocal Effort (SoVE) rating scale described by Marci Rosenberg is designed to heighten the singer's awareness of the level of baseline perceived vocal

effort expended for various vocal tasks. The intention of this exercise is to increase awareness of vocal effort and establish a consistent internal scale allowing the singer to self-monitor for subtle changes in vocal effort. Given the variety of settings and environments the vocal athlete performs in, this is a useful tool for singers to internally gauge possible vocal issues before they become problematic over a longer period of time.

## Physical Stretches and Alignment

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As singing is a task involving the entire body, Chapter 2 includes a collection of exercises designed to stretch, release, and align the body. This chapter begins with Sarah Schneider's exercise using body movement to draw attention away from areas of tension creating a "constructive distraction" in order to free vocal sound. Marya Cordes has provided an Alexander-based stretch, movement, and vocalization exercise to promote fluidity throughout the body in preparation for singing. Marina Gilman's two Feldenkrais-based exercises dovetail nicely to balance the head and release the neck and shoulders while singing. Dr. Caroline Helton's "Climbing the Ladder" exercise is used to open the torso and rib cage. Physical therapist Jill Nader's exercise provides a set of stretches and myofascial release techniques for the upper body, serving to both improve posture, and increase mobility and range of motion of the rib cage, chest, and upper back. Dr. Sarah Maines adds to these by providing an exercise promoting stretch and freedom in the lower back designed specifically for vocal athletes.

## Stretches and Exercises for Breathing

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Although breathing is incorporated into several of the exercises throughout this book, Chapter 3 includes a handful of specific breathing exercises for the vocal

athlete. Erin Donahue and Dr. Wendy LeBorgne provide a set of exercises designed to prepare the respiratory system through chest and abdominal stretches and contractions of the respiratory muscles. Dr. Joan Melton describes two techniques to free the abdominal muscles and connect the voice to the body. Dr. Bari Hoffman and Adam Lloyd provide a stylized breathing exercise for vocalists who engage in vocal percussion. This exercise trains coordination and agility needed for this unique CCM skill.

## Stretching and Relaxation for Jaw and Tongue

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Because the jaw and tongue can be problematic with various CCM vocal styles, we have included a chapter specifically addressing issues related to jaw and tongue tension release. The first two exercises are provided by Dr. Miriam van Mersbergen. Exercise one is composed of four individual exercises to stretch and relax the four primary muscles of the jaw. Her second exercise addresses the relationship between the back of the tongue and the jaw. Dr. van Mersbergen has also provided guidelines to promote a healthy jaw. Dr. Christina Jackson-Menaldi provides an exercise combining phonation with base of tongue release. Finally, Tracy Bourne adds another base of tongue release exercise with vocalizations on both staccato and legato patterns.

The exercises provided in this section have relevance for numerous singing styles. They can be used as part of an initial preparation to sing, and also during active training to relax muscles, realign posture, and recalibrate as needed. Singers may discover that what is needed for their body will vary from day to day and role to role. Furthermore, alignment and posture, and general musculoskeletal integrity, can be impacted by a variety of factors such as physicality of a role or even a cumbersome headpiece. The importance of tuning into one's body and psyche to determine what is needed is a vital component of the vocal training regimen, and this practice should be established early in the vocal training regimen.



# Exercises for Mental Focus

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## Centering the Breath

*Barbara J. Walker*

### *Purpose of Exercise*

- To encourage relaxation of the vocal tract
- To create whole body relaxation and clear the mind from performance anxiety on cue
- To allow one to feel in control of their body and mind before and during their performance, allowing for optimal performance

### *Origin of Exercise*

This exercise is based on diaphragmatic breathing, which is a well-known exercise that Zen masters and spiritual leaders have been using for centuries, and psychologists and yoga instructors for decades. Focusing on the breath allows one to be aware of and have the capacity to take control of their mind and body. Utilizing cue words and phrases is based in cognitive psychology.

### *Overview of Exercise*

When a singer is experiencing stress or performance anxiety, it is usually as a result of negative or anxious thoughts or images about their performance rather than an actual threat or emergency. This reaction may occur after there has been an error at a previous performance or if they have just recovered from an injury, and now they may be feeling anxious that they will not be able to perform optimally. Regardless, their body reacts from these thoughts as if a true emergency were occurring, a fight or flight response. From this reaction, which is driven from a conscious or subconscious thought or image in their mind, their breathing may naturally become shallow and rapid. A vicious cycle then begins, and the singer may also experience the physiological symptoms of an increased heart rate, sweating, muscle tension, decreased oxygen intake, dry mouth, and/or a sudden loss of energy/feelings of fatigue. Mentally, they may experience worry, feeling overwhelmed and out of control, as well as a loss of concentration (sometimes losing track of where they were in a song or forgetting words). Behaviorally, this may cause them to sing more quickly and/or have a disrupted/broken voice. All of these symptoms can be triggered from a single anxious thought or image.

To ward off any anxiety, in addition to being prepared, mentally and physically for their performance, visualizing themselves performing well is also very helpful. Implementing this simple-centered breathing technique at the right time will keep the stress symptoms at bay and will also allow one to recover quickly if any of the above anxiety symptoms develop.

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### *Exercise*

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When first learning this exercise, it is best to find a quiet environment and a place where you feel comfortable closing your eyes. After the exercise is mastered, it can be accomplished in any environment.

1. You can begin learning this exercise either lying down on your back or simply sitting up in a chair. Begin by placing one hand on your upper chest and the other just below the rib cage. This will allow you to feel the diaphragm move as you breathe.
2. Breathe in slowly through the nose (if possible), so that the stomach moves out against the hand. The hand on the chest should remain as still as possible.
3. Tighten the stomach muscles, letting them fall inward as you exhale through the mouth.
4. As you feel comfortable with the rhythm of the breath, visualize your chest and heart muscles loosening and opening up and visualize your breath coming up and down your chest smoothly and easily.
5. Silently to yourself, count the number of seconds it takes you to inhale, and then make it equal with

your exhale. Example: Inhale 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and then Exhale 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. If you find yourself having any thoughts other than counting going through your mind, count as loudly as you need to inside your mind, allowing any other thoughts to dissipate.

6. After you have become fluid with your breathing and counting, you will experience a specific feeling state. What words best describe how you feel: Peaceful? Calm? Relaxed? Quiet? Clear? Ready? Energized? Identify two words that you feel when you breathe and relate that to how you feel when you perform (for example: Confident and Clear; Focused and Relaxed).
7. Whenever a performance is drawing near or if you begin to experience any anxiety symptoms, I suggest repeating these cue words to yourself along with the breath or simply begin the breath along with the counting. With practice, even with just a couple of breaths, this technique will allow you to override and avert any stressful or anxious feelings you may have.

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## The Voice Scan

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*Robert C. Sussuma*

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### *Purpose of Exercise*

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The purpose of this scan is to bring one's awareness to the sensations of the vocal mechanism at rest in preparation for sound and movement. By paying close attention to these sensations before and after singing, we are better able to know our instrument and track the many changes that occur allowing us to move and sing with more accuracy and clarity of intention.

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### *Origin of Exercise*

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In the Feldenkrais Method®, almost every lesson begins with a body scan. The purpose of the scan is to notice how we find ourselves and what we are aware of *before* we do a lesson (or exercise), so that when we do, and things change, we can compare the changes with what we sensed in the beginning of the lesson.

#### **How Often Should I Practice This Exercise?**

At first, practice this exercise 5 to 10 minutes about 3 to 4 times per day to master the breath. A great time to practice this exercise is at nighttime just as you are going to bed. Once the breath is mastered, implement the breath about 30 minutes prior to a performance or just before you typically begin to feel any anxiety symptoms.

One of Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais's most famous utterances was: "When you know what you are doing, you can do what you want!" This is a provocative statement. Do we really know what we are doing as singers, or otherwise? And, if we don't really know what we are doing, how can we do what we want—especially with our voice?

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### *Overview of the Exercise*

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The Voice Scan will systematically guide you through sensing your vocal apparatus, so that you can become more and more aware of the background sensations connected to your voice. This will form the sensory foundation for all of the intricate movements associated with each sound you can and will make. As this sense grows, one can more easily move away from just listening to the sound or relying on others to know what one is doing!

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### *The Exercise*

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Lie on your back. Sense your contact with the floor. Notice: your heels, your legs, your pelvis, your lower and upper back, your ribs, your shoulders and arms, your neck and head. Where do you feel heavier and lighter? How is your right side different from your left?

Bring your awareness to your face. Notice the expression. How soft are your eyes, your cheeks, your lips?

Bring your awareness to your jaw. How heavy is your jaw? How big is it? How does your jaw connect to your skull?

I have found that most people have a clear sense of the air passing through their nostrils and may even clearly feel the air in the back of the mouth, but cannot sense anything from the back of the tongue to the lungs.

Leave that and begin to pay attention to your breathing: the timing, the shape, the movement as you inhale and exhale, naturally, without doing anything special.

Now, with your mouth closed, breathe through your nose and ask yourself, how does the air get from your nostrils to your lungs?

How much of your airway can you actually sense as you inhale and exhale?

Which parts are clear to you, which parts are murky or confusing?

Which parts don't even seem to be there at all?

Using your sensory imagination, spend several minutes attending to your sensations in the following areas:

1. *The nostrils to the back of the nasal cavity:* How deep is the cavity? How wide? How quickly is the air moving? What is the temperature of the air? What do your nasal passages look and feel like?
2. *The soft palate:* Sense how the air goes over and behind the soft palate to reach to the back of the mouth. What does the soft palate look like?
3. *Behind the tongue:* Sense how the air passes behind the tongue on its way to your throat. How much space is there behind your tongue? Where is the root of your tongue?
4. *Into the throat and larynx:* As the air passes through your larynx, it passes through your vocal folds. Where are your vocal folds? What is your sense of your throat as the air passes through it. Notice how it changes shape as you inhale and exhale.
5. *Down to the lungs:* Where does the larynx end and the trachea begin? How does the air get from the single tube of the trachea to both lungs?

When you have finished sensing the areas above, return to the original question: How does the air get from your nostrils to your lungs? What is your sense now?

Notice your contact with the floor now. How may it have changed as a result of this scanning process?