

Singing tips

Immediately before you start to sing (& after you have tuned or played any instruments) breathe gently out, then breathe in through your nose to take your first 'singing breath'. Use the pause after you have breathed out to focus on the song. Then continue to breathe through your mouth as normal in singing.

Guessing the note? Buy a chromatic pitch pipe. Keep a list of the songs you sing with each start note (or 2 or 3 notes) that will place the song in the right pitch for you (some people prefer to know the key that they sing in.)

Pitch a song in right place for the singer. The band/accompanist must play in a key that suits the singer. Do experiment with pitches – a semitone up or down can make a big difference.

Do you ever 'lose' the first line? Write it on your list of songs. It is good to add information such as where the song is from, name of the singer &c.

If you make a mistake during the song, try not to react with your face or interrupt the song with speech. Leave the mistake where it is and carry on, with your full focus on the song.

Practise how you handle forgetting words. You could try humming through the forgotten portion, and then pick the next line up, without interrupting the flow of the song.

Imagine a spotlight just in front of your feet & feel that the song is placed there. The focus of the audience is not on you, but on the song just in front of you.

When you sing a high note, think low. When you sing a low note, think high. But do not lift or lower your head or eyes; just think. Opening your mouth a little more helps get high notes.

Keep a loose jaw & an open mouth, so the sound can come out.

Face forward when you sing – do not twist, stretch or bend your neck & voice box. It is OK to move your head & neck as you look around the audience or the band, but avoid postures like twisting your head to look at your guitar fingering.

Learn a few songs that will be appropriate for different contexts e.g. a chorus song that everyone will know, one that is suitable if children are present & want to join in, a humorous song, a ballad.

Ask advice. Find an experienced singer, and ask them to listen to your song & the way you sing it, & to make positive suggestions, e.g. how the words fit, how you might change the words/tune to suit you. This works best when you have a separate time to sing & talk about the song – it is also very interesting for both parties. But make sure you choose a sympathetic person, who understands that it must be a positive time. Even professional & very experienced singers need this kind of feedback. The 'Friendly Circles' at the Baring Gould Song School are ideal.

These notes were developed for participants at the annual Baring Gould Song School, which takes place in Devon, U.K. each October half term, but I would be delighted if other singers found them helpful. For more details about the Song School, please contact www.wrenmusic.co.uk

For this information, and other freely downloadable handouts on aspects of voice & singing, go to www.martinandshan.net