

## How to warm up (and down)

Remember the basic sequence of warming up, & always stick to that. You can vary the activities that you do for each section, but the sections must follow in the right order. You will eventually find the warm ups that work best for you. It helps to think of these not only as warm ups, but also as voice development activities. If you continually support and develop your voice in this way, it will stay in good singing order as you get older.

The fixed order for warming up is :

### 1. Body

### 2. Breath

### 3. Voice

You should always spend a little time warming up before you sing. If you are singing for a longer time i.e. several songs, you should warm up for longer. Not doing so risks damaging your voice.

And only when you have warmed up in those three sections, should you then move to working on other aspects of singing, like articulation, pitch range, giving your voice carrying power etc.

There are hundreds of different activities that fit into the sections, and some may fit in more than one. However, the sequence will always be the same.

### 1. Body

### 2. Breath

### 3. Voice

I will give just a few basic suggestions of warm up activity for each section.

**Remember- for all these activities, you should not do anything that hurts you or threatens to hurt you.**

### Body

If you are standing up, have both feet connected fully with the floor, about a hip width apart & pointing comfortably forwards. Knees should be soft i.e. not locked back, shoulders & arms loose, belly loose, jaw unlocked, lips gently closed.

If you are sitting down, sit away from the back of the chair with both feet connected with the floor. You may need to find a chair that is the right height for you. All the angles you make e.g. ankles, knees, hips, chin should be about 90°. Arms can rest on your thighs; shoulders loose etc. as above. You will need to adapt the warm ups for your position.

Body activities are aimed at establishing good posture, stability, balance, relaxation, movement, stretching and flexion, and also to prevent injury. If any activity focuses on one side of the body, always do it a second time focusing on the opposite side.

Think – you are aiming for Relaxation & Readiness.

- Raise yourself a little on your toes. Then lower your heels, but leave your head occupying the space it was in before. Feel the stretch in your spine.
- Stretch like a sleepy cat – feel the stretch in every part of your body.
- Flop gradually downwards, from your head, thinking of one vertebra at a time, until your arms are dangling loose. Keep your knees soft. Then build gradually back up again, head last.
- Arms hanging loose, start gently twisting your shoulders so your arms swing out. Build the movement up until you have a good swing/twist that involves your whole body. Then let the movement subside.

- Put one shoulder up towards your ear, & let the arm on that side lower. Feel the stretch in the opposite side. Do the same starting with the other shoulder.
- Massage and warm the muscles in your face, chin, neck & shoulders.
- Loosen muscles that tend to go tight when we sing, especially jaw, neck, shoulders, belly.

## Breath

- Breathe normally and feel the passage of air, cooler as it goes in, warmer as it goes out. Feel the gentle movement of ribs & belly.
- Breathe out, feeling the belly pull inwards as it pushes the air out. Then relax & let air flow back in.
- Place one hand on your belly, thumb on navel, fingers below that. Breathe out, then breathe in, directing the breath to the palm of your hand.
- \*Breathe out, breathe in, then breathe out on a long /s/. Do the same using /f/, /sh/.  
\*\*Do the same, but put a pulse on the sound e.g. /ssSssSssSss/. Let the pulse come from your belly, not your neck.  
\*\*Do the same, but let the sound out in sections, all on one breath - /ss-ss-ss-ss/.  
Repeat the above asterisked sequence, but using the sounds /v/, /z/, /□/ (□ is the sound you make in the middle of the word 'treasure').
- Lip trills & tongue trills – these are the sounds you make by vibrating your lips together (like a child's motorbike noise) & rolling your 'r's. They are great for working on breath control and beginning to use your voice, as you cannot strain your voice while making the trill. Siren your voices up & down while doing the trills.

## Voice

- Do some gentle sighs and yawns. Try to fade out the yawn before you get to the end, as the end of a yawn can bring tension into the throat.
- Move seamlessly from the lip & tongue trills to a gentle /mmm/ sound, keeping jaw loose. Feel the vibration on the lips, in the mouth & nose, on the face.
- Breathe in, place a straw loosely between your lips & then make a long, gentle sound down the straw.
- Imagine a hilly landscape. Using an 'oar' sound, take your voice up & down over the hills. Imagine a mountainous landscape – continue as above.
- Sing the sound 'maw' and imagine the sound travelling down your body into the ground. Sing the sound 'ma' and imagine it filling your mouth and the back of your throat. Sing the sound 'mare' and imagine it filling your nose. Sing the sound 'me' and imagine it filling the spaces above your eyes & vibrating the top of your head.
- Begin to engage your 'articulators' – tongue, teeth, lips, jaw – by singing some tongue twister songs. You can make up your own tunes.
- You could end by singing a song that you know will exercise a particular aspect of singing e.g. breath control, crossing the bridge, decorating a note.

## Warm downs

If you have been using your voice for a while, either speaking or singing, it will tend to remain at a higher pitch than is normal for you. In order to bring it back down, hum gently downwards several times, taking time to loosen the body tensions that will have built up.

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](http://www.wrenmusic.co.uk)

For this information, and other freely downloadable handouts on aspects of voice & singing, go to [www.martinandshan.net](http://www.martinandshan.net)