Tension and Pain during Singing â€“ Causes and Solutions by Maria Gini

Article published on February 9th 2012 | Music

Many students, especially those just beginning, will express concerns about what is happening to their voices as they LEARN HOW TO SING. Throat, jaw, tongue and neck muscle tension, stiffness and pain are the most common source of their anxiety.

First and foremost, all students should be made to understand that the individual components of the voice mechanism, including breathing, laryngeal function, resonator tract shaping and articulation, must be combined and coordinated if optimal functioning and skill levels are to be achieved. This article will address many of the more frequent errors of coordination that singers make, specifically those that cause discomfort or pain in the throat, jaw, tongue or neck. Unfortunately, many of these problems are also caused by poor technical habits that have manifested themselves over a long period of time, therefore may take a considerable amount of time to correct.

There are solutions to most tension and pain problems encountered by singers. However, because every singer has a unique vocal instrument and approaches singing technique differently, these solutions cannot be guaranteed to work in all cases.

The root cause of many of these problems may be complex and thus difficult to pinpoint. Therefore, this article is intended to be informational in nature so as to help singers gain some awareness of their vocal habits and perhaps resolve some of the less complex issues. Itâ€™s important to note that this information as well as some of the recommendations should be used only as an overview in determining for some of the causes and possible solutions to the tension and pain issues facing the singer. To be certain the singer obtains the desired results, they should always seek out the help of a VOCAL TECHNIQUE INSTRUCTOR who will be able to diagnose each individualâ€™s problems, and thus provide a specific training program that will ensure greater success and optimal vocal health.

As is the case of finding a solution to any problem, the first step is identify whatâ€™s causing it. Many times the singerâ€™s vocal posture is the offender. One way to examine this posture is to take some time watching yourself in the mirror while you breathe, talk or sing, taking notice of the movement of your neck and jaw muscles. You may want to try reciting the words of a poem or the lyric of a song using normal speech inflection at a conversational volume. If there is a lot of movement detected in the neck muscles, itâ€™s possible you have developed incorrect and potentially harmful speaking practices or habits that have spilled over into your singing which can translate into tensions throughout the entire body. Fortunately, with the help of a vocal instructor and if one perseveres these muscles can usually â€œrelearnâ€• good habits and learn the correct and healthy approach to vocal technique.

Tension and its Relationship to Stress or Faulty Perception about Singing

In addition to physical behaviors, a singerâ€™s emotional or psychological health may also be a root cause as to why there is tension present in the throat, neck, jaw or tongue. As in any other type of stress or tension, the singer should determine the source and then take appropriate measures to reduce the stress level, which in turn will reduce the amount of their muscular tension and improve their singing.

Another major cause of tension along the vocal tract is how the singer perceives the difference between singing and speaking. If the individual believes singing is much more difficult and dramatically more involved in function and production than speaking, he or she is likely to put forth far more effort into their singing than is necessary. This usually occurs when the individual tries

singing in the upper range, and if they are untrained or poorly trained, they will tighten their muscles in an attempt to forcefully work their way up the scale.

Itâ€™s important to understand that singing is about eighty percent psychological and only about twenty percent physical. That is too say, while producing vocal sounds is entirely done by anatomical structures of the body the mind does play a significant role in determining what kinds of sounds we produce. There is no doubt that breath management and breath energy does play a much more prominent role in singing than when speaking, meaning the breath must be enhanced to allow the singer to accommodate extended duration and intensity, as well as higher pitches that are not generally used in ordinary conversation. If a singer perceives the act or technique of singing to be substantially different than that of speaking, he or she will begin to position the tongue, jaw and neck differently. Therefore, all unnatural adjustments of the vocal tract in singing within speech-inflection range should be avoided, as they can very easily lead to muscular tension, strain and potential injury, especially during more demanding singing tasks.

When singing, especially when just beginning VOCAL LESSONS, many individuals become self-conscious about singing in the company of others, fearing ridicule or criticism. Even performing in front of a vocal instructor can be intimidating at first, however a good teacher should not only have the skills to teach, but also the compassion to reassure the student and make them feel more at ease and comfortable.

In some other instances, a singerâ€™s lack of confidence in their ability to sing high notes can lead to tension. If this is the case it is recommended that they sing only within a comfortable range of pitches, at least until all of the fundamental aspects of healthy singing have been addressed. If these issues are not dealt with it may lead a singer to forcefully sing higher notes, and that can put excessive muscular tension on the vocal instrument, which could very well lead to vocal fatigue, strain or injury.

In this article we have provided you with some of the more common causes of tension and pain during singing, and also offered some solutions that may help eliminate their source, which in turn will help prevent the tension and accompanying pain. In an upcoming article, we will discuss in some depth how the lack of knowledge of the voice and singing anatomy as well as poor speech habits and vocal technique may create tension in specific areas, such as the throat, tongue and jaw.

Article Source:
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Article Keywords:
Learn How To Sing, Vocal lessons, vocal training, voice lessons online

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