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CHORAL CONSTRUCTION

Building Beautiful Voices in the Choral Setting

Introduction



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Today we hope to answer . . .

- What is “voice building”?
- Why is it important?
- What is the role of a choral conductor in building voices?
- What do I need to know as I adopt the “conductor as constructor” mentality?



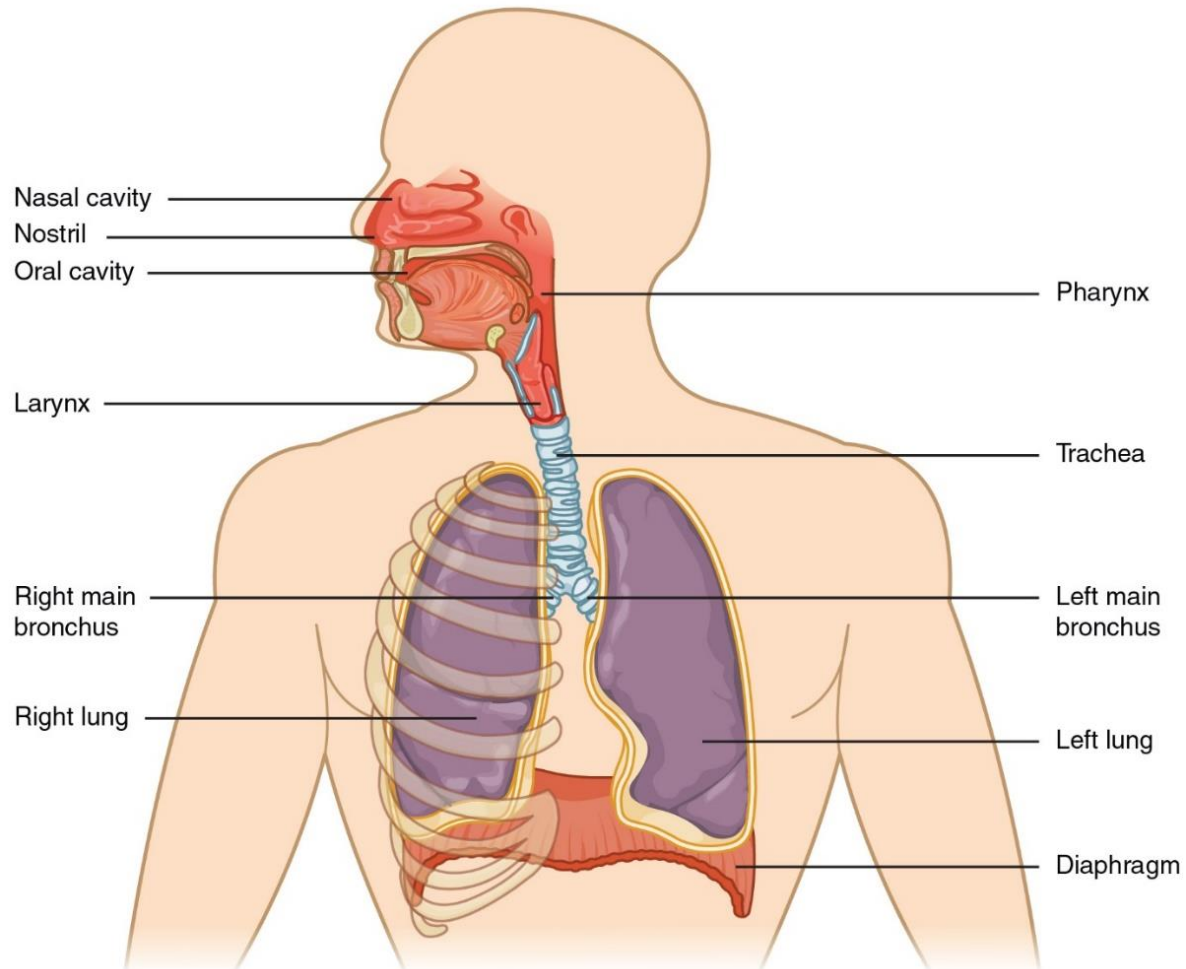
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“Voice Building”





"Voice Building"





“Voice Building”

- Increasing our students’ vocal ability (*technique*) by every measure:
 - Tone quality
 - Range
 - Stamina
 - Dynamic contrast
- And, yes, increasing the [perceived/actualized] *size* of our students’ instruments.
 - How often does a contractor get called to *remove* a room from someone’s home? ☺



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The Conductor-Constructor's Role





The Conductor-Constructor's Role

- What are we?
 - *Conductor-artist-teacher*
 - *Vocal “physician”*
 - *Coach-counselor-confidante!*
- And when it comes to voice building:

CONSTRUCTION WORKER
(and the architect who drew up the plans!)



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A Conductor-Teacher's Responsibilities





A Conductor-Teacher's Responsibilities (and the tools to achieve them)

- *Primum non nocere*
 - First, do no harm!
- Listening ears
- Watching eyes
- The “right” amount of positive pressure and motivation
- Knowing our singers' voices *individually* and our singers *as individuals*



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Why?





Why?

- We may be the only voice teachers our choristers will ever have.
- We have an educational responsibility to develop the skills of our singers.
- Better singers = better choirs.

An Approach for the First Rehearsal



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“Potter,” “Smith,” or “Jones” Singing

1. External posture
2. Internal posture
3. Deep, silent inhalation
4. “Athletic” breath support
5. Singer’s “embouchure”
6. *Chiaroscuro*
7. Two-step audiation



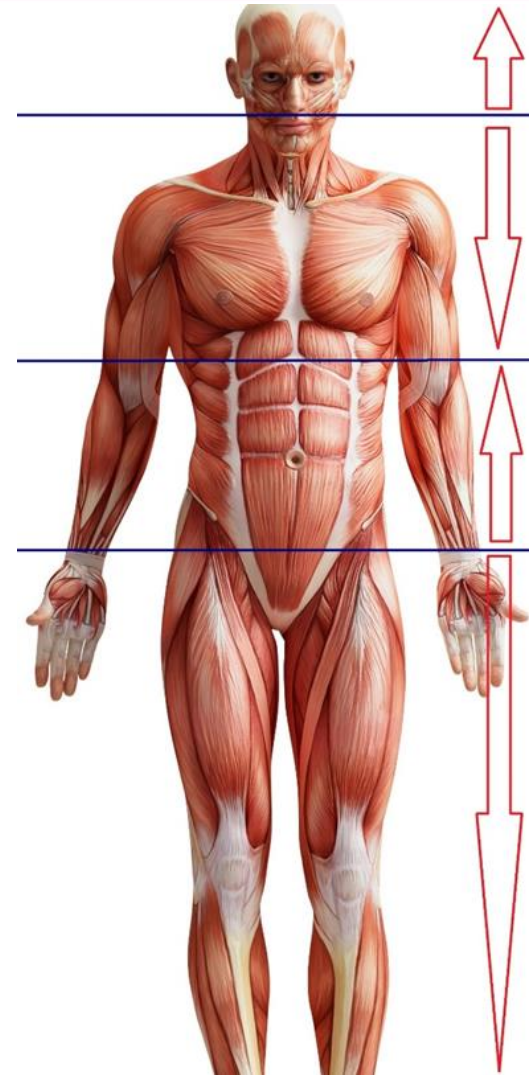
"Potter," "Smith," or "Jones" Singing

1. External posture



“Potter,” “Smith,” or “Jones” Singing

1. External posture
2. Internal posture





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“Potter,” “Smith,” or “Jones” Singing

1. External posture
2. Internal posture
3. Deep, silent inhalation



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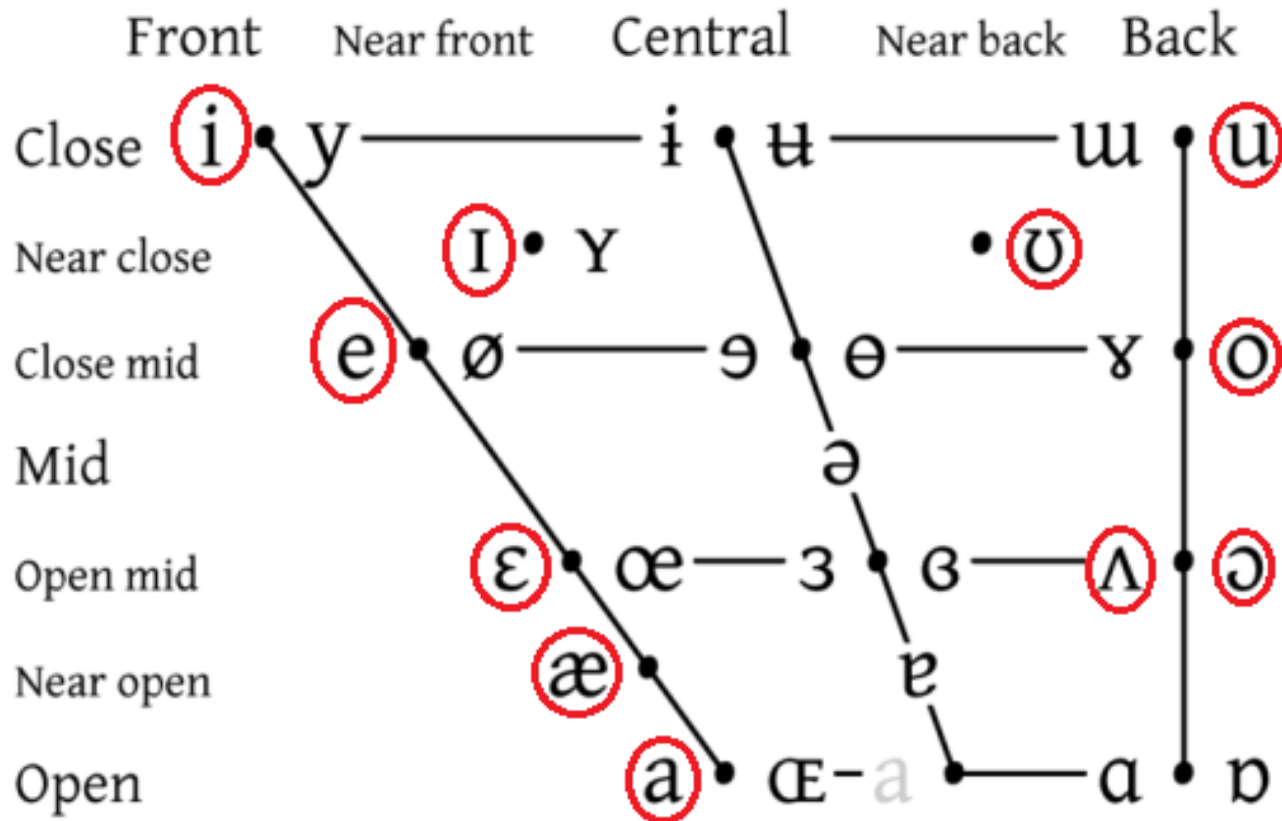


“Potter,” “Smith,” or “Jones” Singing

1. External posture
2. Internal posture
3. Deep, silent inhalation
4. “Athletic” breath support
5. Singer’s “embouchure”
6. *Chiaroscuro*
7. Two-step audiation:
 - Pitch (Kodály-Curwen-Glover solfège hand signs)
 - Vowel (vowel hand signals)



Vowel Hand Signals

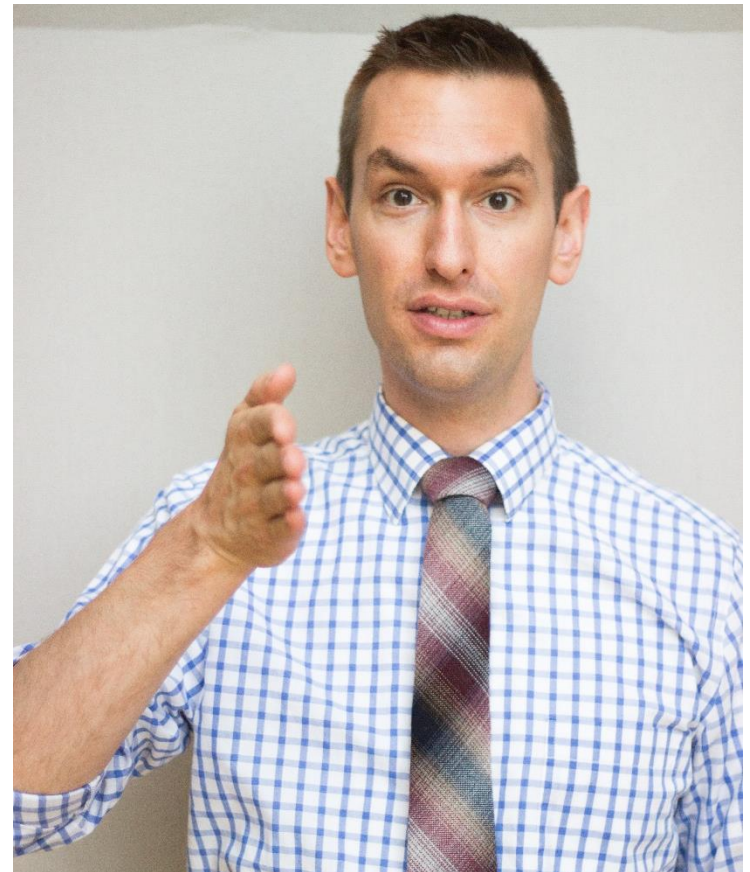


Vowels at right & left of bullets are rounded & unrounded.



Vowel Hand Signals

- [i] (“ee”) as in *keep*





Vowel Hand Signals

- [ɪ] (“ih”) as in *bit*





Vowel Hand Signals

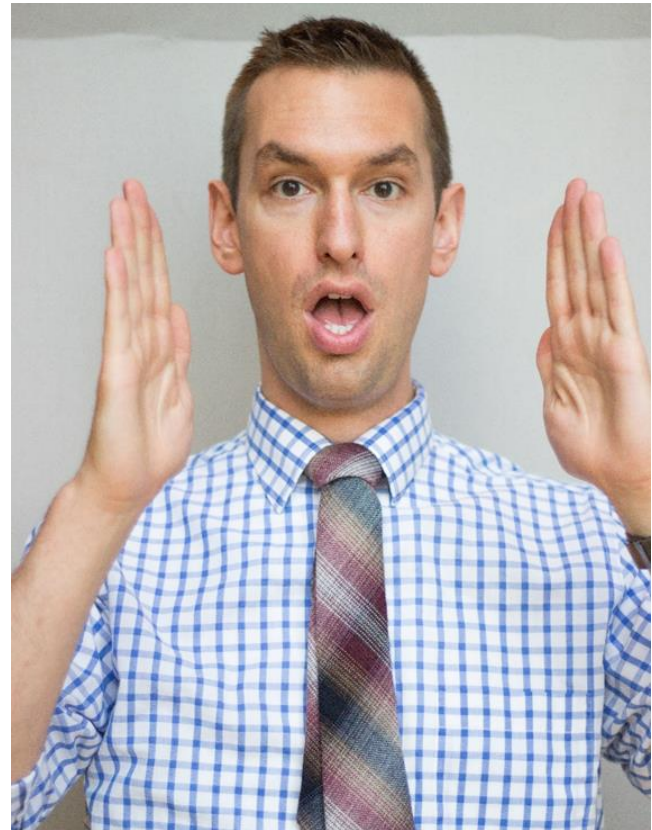
- [e] (“ay”) as in *cake*





Vowel Hand Signals

- [ɛ] (“eh”) as in *bed*



Vowel Hand Signals

- [æ] as in *cat*





Vowel Hand Signals

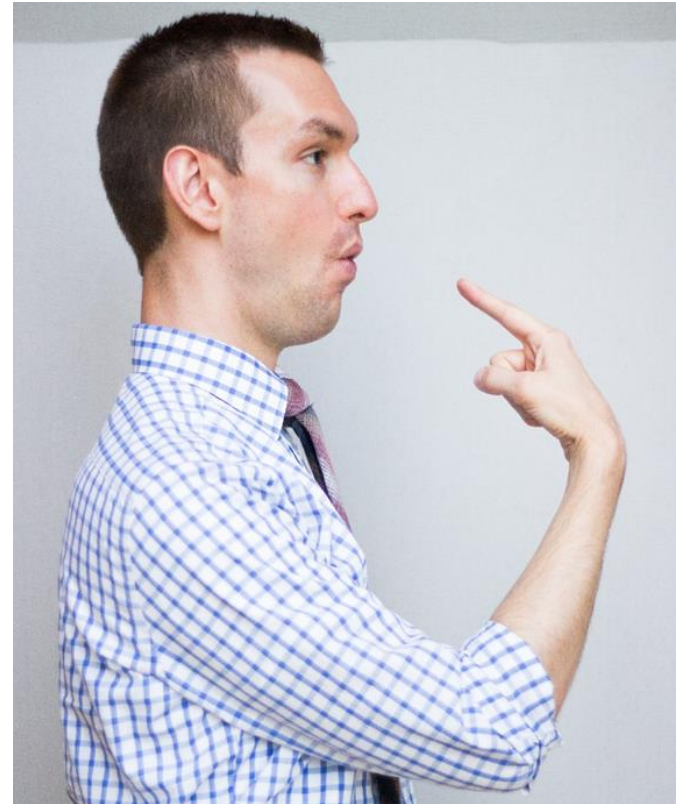
- [a] or [ɑ] (“ah”) as in *voila* or *father*





Vowel Hand Signals

- [u] (“oo”) as in *scoop*





Vowel Hand Signals

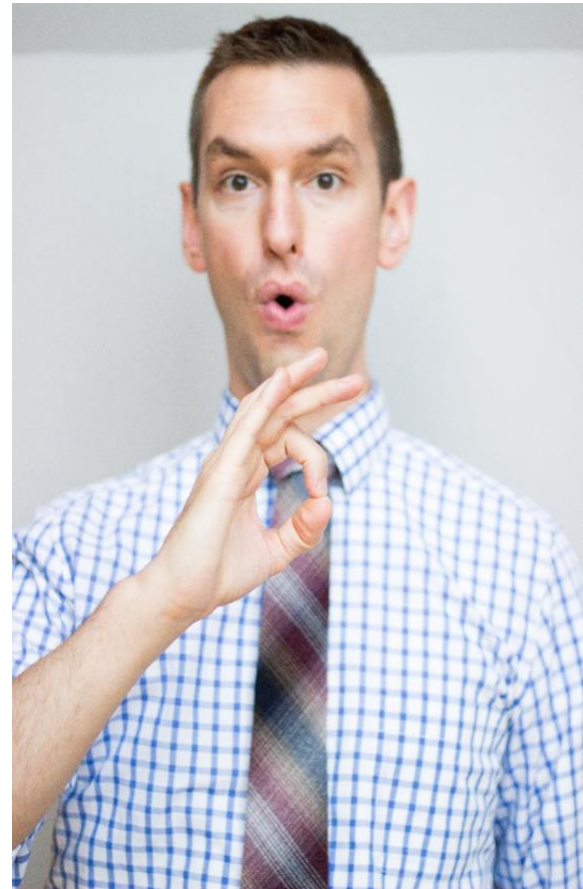
- [ʊ] as in *book*





Vowel Hand Signals

- [o] (“oh”) as in *boat*



Vowel Hand Signals

- [ʌ] or [ə] (“uh”) as in *bump*



A Long-Term Approach



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Long-Term Approach

THE VOCAL “PHYSICIAN”

symptoms → solutions

1. *Hear* the vocal/tone quality fault (symptom)
2. *Diagnose* the problem
3. *Prescribe* antidotes
4. *Practice* and *reinforce* the prescription (solution!)



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Long-Term Approach



Imagistic
Approach

Mechanistic
Approach



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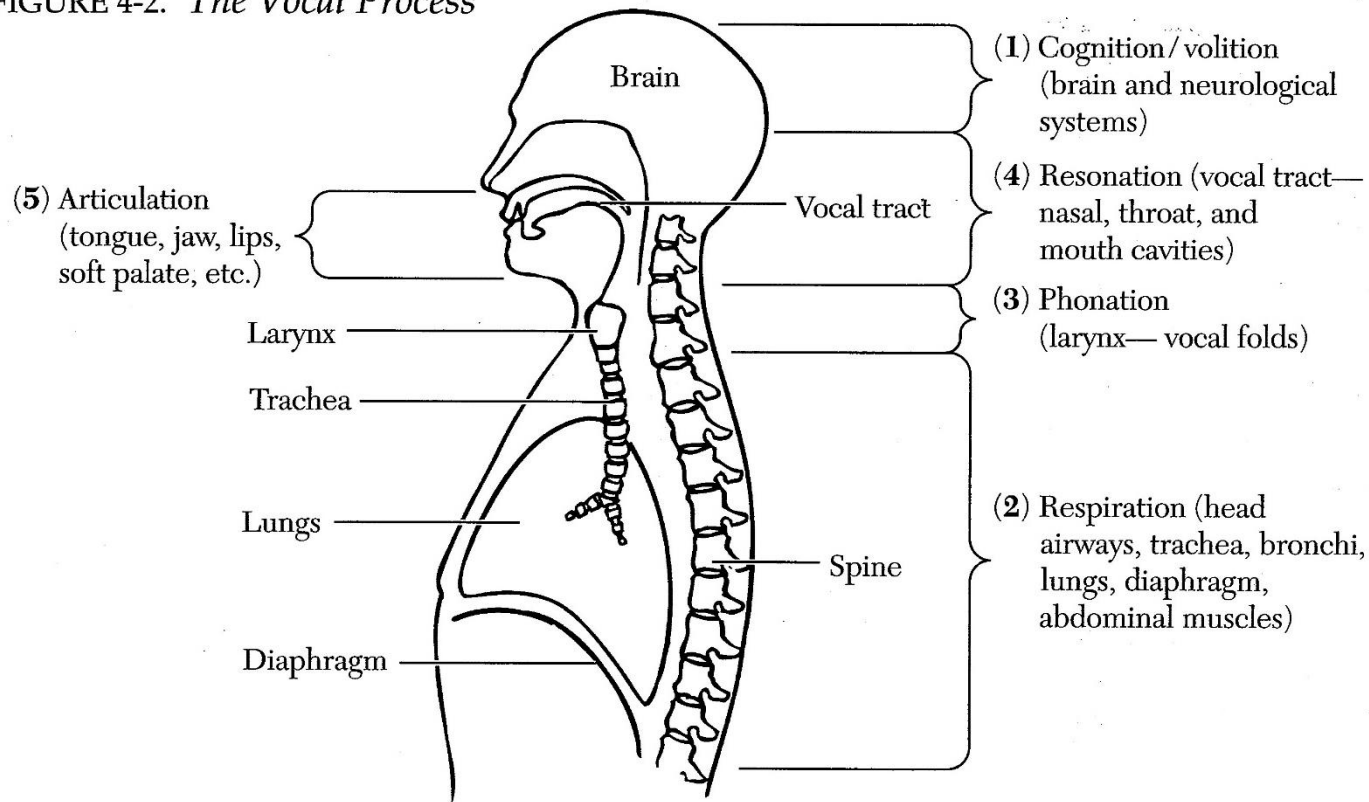
Vocal Skills Outline

- Phonation
- Respiration
- Resonation
- Registration
- Articulation
- Coordination



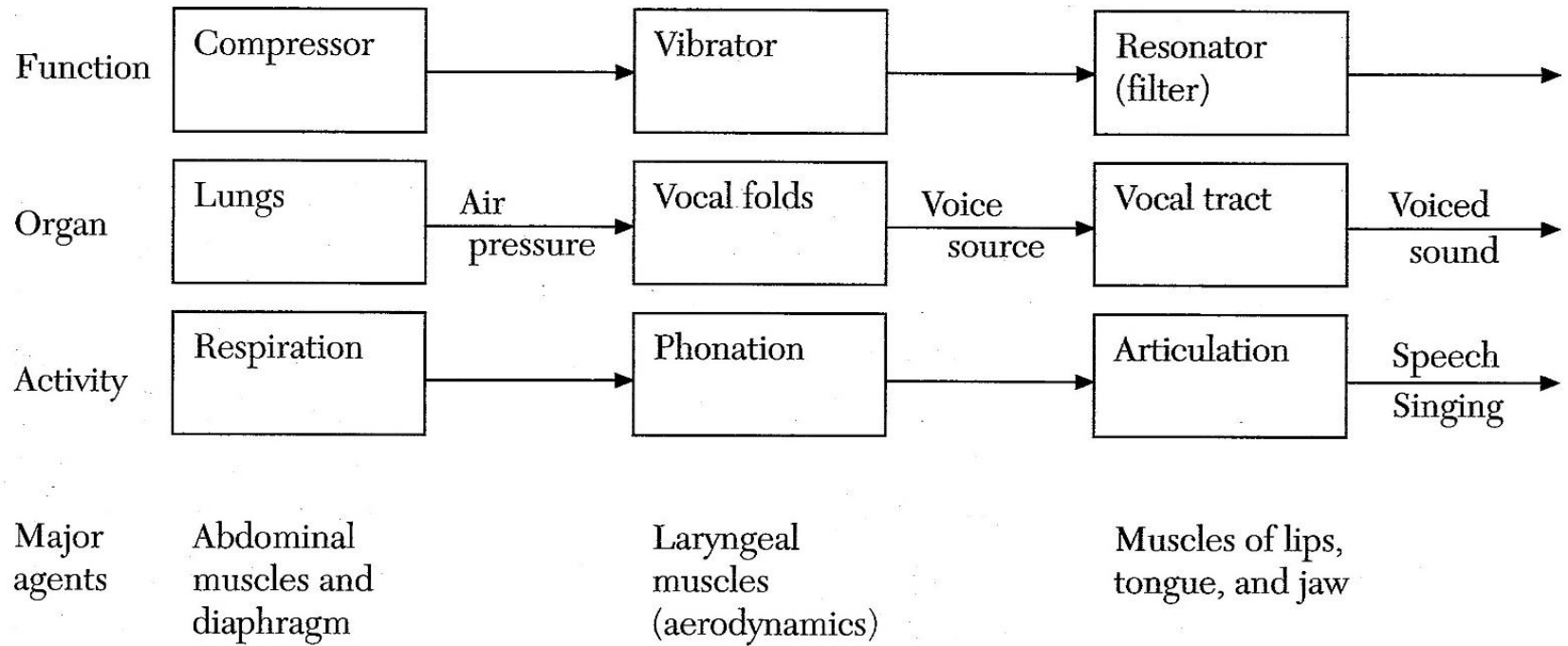
Vocal Skills Outline

FIGURE 4-2. *The Vocal Process*



(Ware, p. 55)

Vocal Skills Outline



(Ware, p. 54)

PHONATION

Producing Tone



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Phonation

- Producing tone before managing breath?
- —“Sing as you speak.”
 - *Sing as you should (could!) speak!*
 - “Speaking on steroids”
- The exercises that follow assume that students have already been taught to *house* their phonatory instrument (the larynx) properly—i.e., they are utilizing singer’s posture.



Phonation

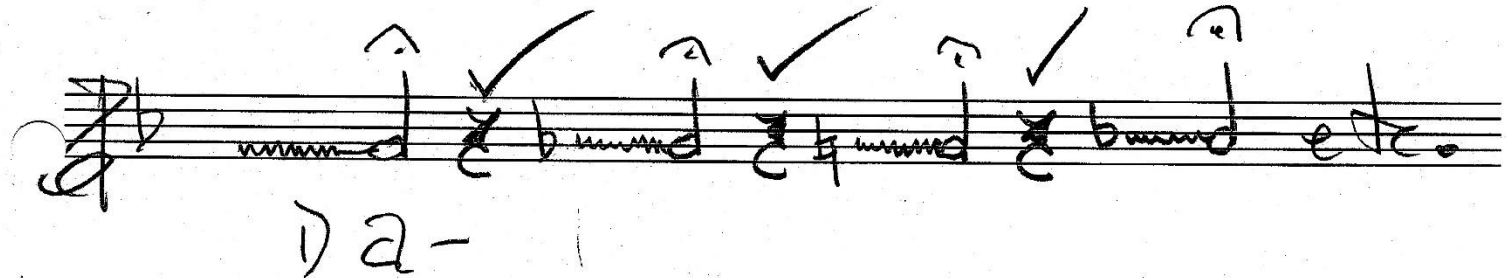
APPROACHES TO CONTROL

- Mental coordination
- Laryngeal position
- “Open throat”
- Oral cavity controls
- Palatal controls
- Linguistic elements
- The sum of above = total coordination!



Phonation

**Don't be afraid of the glottis;
It's where the sound starts!**



mmm = rattle / fry
sustain until / out of air

(Okerlund, chapter 5)



Phonation



(Okerlund, chapter 5)



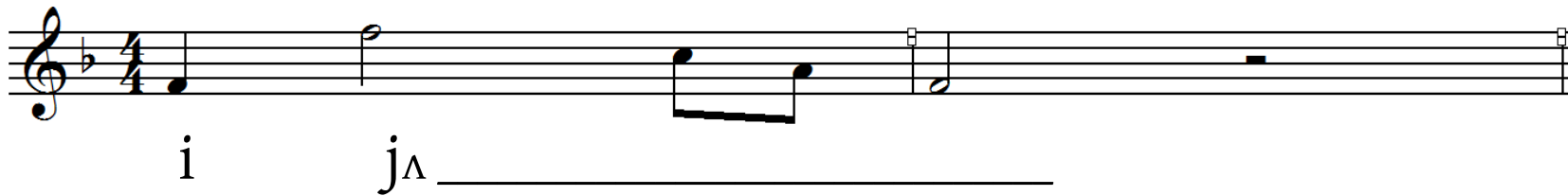
Phonation

Onset Exercises



Phonation

Laryngeal Position Exercises



- Fingers on Adam's apple
- Artificially high larynx on [i]
- Artificially low larynx on [ʌ]
- Goal is to consistently achieve a larynx “at or very slightly below its natural resting place” (McCoy, p. 122)

RESPIRATION

Supporting Sound with Air



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Respiration

PHILOSOPHIES OF BREATHING FOR SINGING

Italian vs. German

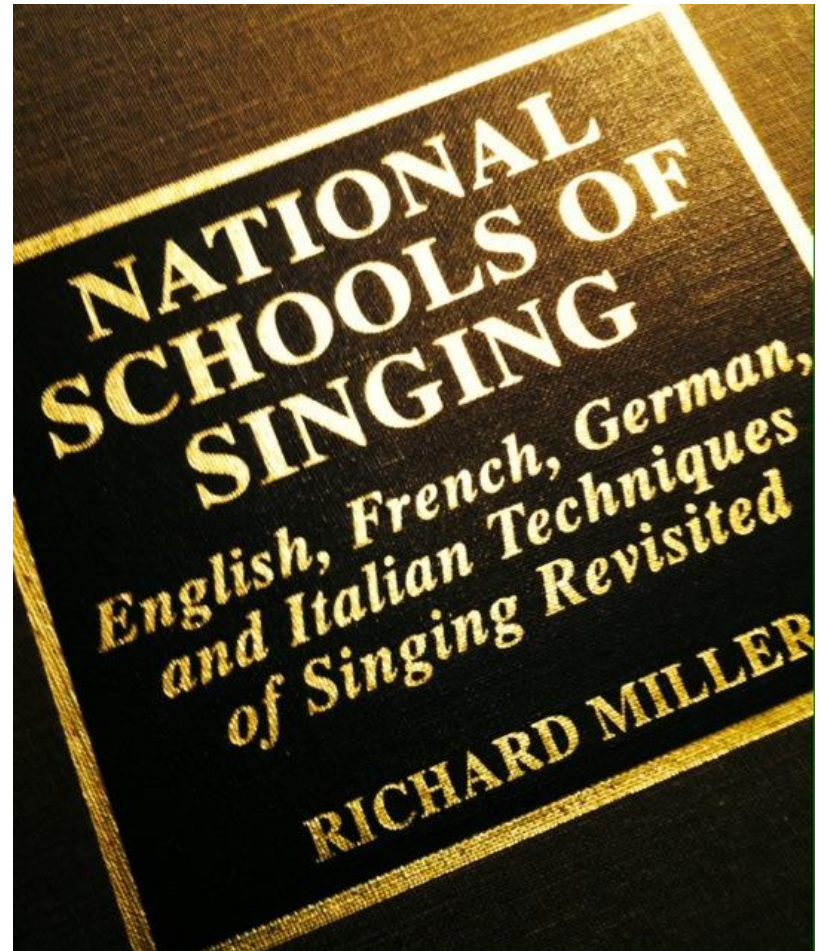




Respiration

The most helpful definition of breath “support”—Richard Miller’s description of *appoggio*:

1. Stable & stationary sternum (“noble” posture)
2. Expanded rib cage
3. Inhalation = outward motion b/t sternum & navel
4. Exhalation = imperceptible inward motion, internally resisted





Respiration

The “Breath Gauntlet”

1. Nose pant (1')
2. [p]/silent breath (1')
3. [b]/silent breath (1')
4. [p]/silent breath/[b]/silent breath (1')
5. [tʃ]/silent breath (1')
6. [tʃ]/silent breath in rhythm ♪♪♪ ♪ ♪ (30s)
7. [tʃ]/silent breath in rhythm ♪♪♪ ♪ ♪ (30s)

(Okerlund, chapter 1)



Respiration

A Voice Quality Continuum



RESONATION

Optimizing Tone Quality



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Resonation

- “Placement”—to use or not to use?
 - Forward/high/back/low
 - Ideas vs. behaviors—what are these instructions?
- It’s a fine shorthand, *if* all the singers in your choir share a common understanding of it (but they probably won’t).
- A humble idea: Perhaps we should use adjectives instead of verbs.
 - E.g., “Brighter, please!” instead of “You need to sing with a more forward placement.”
 - Why?
 - What is *placement* anyway?
 - The dangers of teaching for product (“make your ‘mask’ buzz!”) instead of process (*what* makes your “mask” buzz?)
 - If your students are studying voice privately, their studio definition may be different than your ensemble definition.
- An alternative definition of “good” placement or resonance: **The *absence of counterproductive tension* from any part of the vocal tract will cause desired resonation.**



Resonation

Exercises for Jaw Tension

mp

blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah
gah gah gah gah gah gah gah gah gah gah gah gah gah gah gah

etc.

blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah
gah gah gah gah gah gah gah gah gah gah gah gah gah gah gah

Exercise 3

mp

nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah
vah vah vah vah vah vah vah vah vah vah vah vah vah

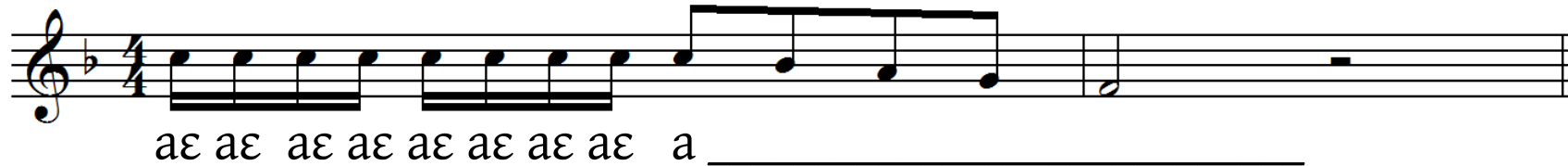
etc.

nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah
vah vah vah vah vah vah vah vah vah vah vah vah vah

Resonation

Exercises for Tongue Tension

“Mini Cobra”



“Big Cobra”

- Tip of tongue against back of bottom teeth
- Stick tongue out of mouth in the shape of the hood of a cobra
- Sing while retracting tongue flat in mouth and sticking it back out again repeatedly

(Okerlund, chapter 6)



Resonation

Exercises for Palatal Lift

ii. The high placement of brighter vowel formants will be transferred to darker vowel formants:

bien — bien — be — a —
[ɛ̃] — [ɛ̃] — [e] — [a]
main — mon — mu — o —
[ɛ̃] — [o] — [u] — [o]

(Ehmann & Haasemann, p. 36)

“The Nose Plug”

REGISTRATION

Integrating Voice Levels



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Registration

Moderato $\text{♩} = 108$

Intro. Opt.

Piano

Nee____ noh____ nee____

Rea Rea Rea * Rea *

5

Nee____ noh____ nee____ Nee____ noh____

Rea Rea Rea * Rea * Rea Rea

8

nee____ Nee____ noh____ nee____

Rea * Rea * Rea Rea Rea * Rea *

Jordan (2005),
p. 286

COORDINATION

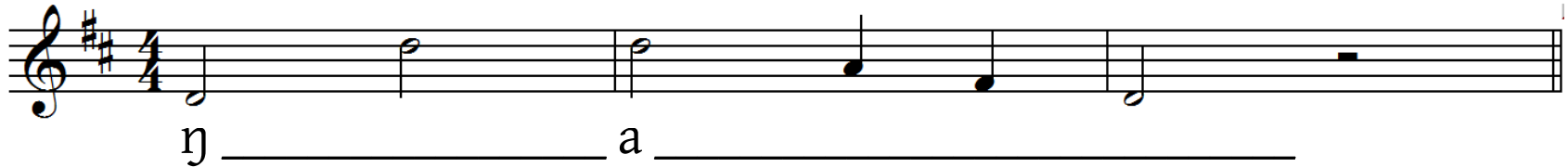
Synthesizing the Vocal Process



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Coordination



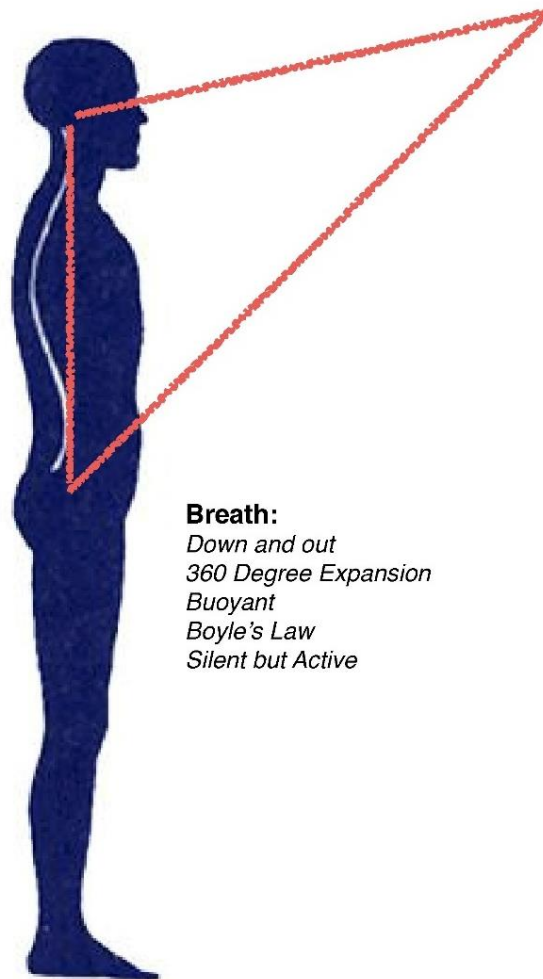
- Use exercises that teach more than one concept
- E.g., the exercise above teaches registration, resonance, and respiration simultaneously!



Coordination

Space:

Vaulted Soft Pallet
"Yawn Space"
Relaxed larynx
"Open throat"



Place: (Figurative)

Ring/Ping
Clear
High and Forward
Brilliant
Focused
Round and Warm

Breath:

Down and out
360 Degree Expansion
Buoyant
Boyle's Law
Silent but Active

Final Thoughts . . .



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Final Thoughts . . .

- To model or not to model, that is the question . . .
 - Model *vs.* mimic
- “Do it wrong/do it right”
- The role of exaggeration
- Description *vs.* instruction

References & Recommended Resources



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QUESTIONS?



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