

Breathe deeply

Health therapist mixes yoga and core training to achieve stress-based ailments

BY
SARAH HAYES
PHOTOGRAPHY
BY
CHRISTOPHER

When you're sitting on the floor for an hour, your posture is constantly in flux. You're constantly adjusting to the floor, the chair, the desk, the car seat, the airplane seat. As a result, you're constantly in a state of tension. And that tension is what causes stress.

The goal of yoga is to help you find a state of relaxation and calm. It's about breathing deeply and holding your breath for a long time. It's about stretching your muscles and holding them in a state of tension for a long time. It's about breathing deeply and holding your breath for a long time. It's about stretching your muscles and holding them in a state of tension for a long time.

The goal of yoga is to help you find a state of relaxation and calm. It's about breathing deeply and holding your breath for a long time. It's about stretching your muscles and holding them in a state of tension for a long time. It's about breathing deeply and holding your breath for a long time. It's about stretching your muscles and holding them in a state of tension for a long time.

*** In addition to yoga and meditation, we also offer Pilates and core training to help you achieve stress-based ailments.

www.yogaworks.com

Yoga is a form of exercise that combines physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation. It is a holistic practice that aims to improve physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Yoga is a form of exercise that combines physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation. It is a holistic practice that aims to improve physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Yoga is a form of exercise that combines physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation. It is a holistic practice that aims to improve physical, mental, and emotional well-being.



Health therapist mixes yoga and core training to help you achieve stress-based ailments.

Yoga is a form of exercise that combines physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation. It is a holistic practice that aims to improve physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Yoga is a form of exercise that combines physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation. It is a holistic practice that aims to improve physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Yoga is a form of exercise that combines physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation. It is a holistic practice that aims to improve physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Yoga is a form of exercise that combines physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation. It is a holistic practice that aims to improve physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Yoga is a form of exercise that combines physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation. It is a holistic practice that aims to improve physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Yoga is a form of exercise that combines physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation. It is a holistic practice that aims to improve physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Breathe deeply

Breath therapist mixes yoga and vocal training to relieve stress-based ailments

Chris Zdeb, *The Edmonton Journal*
Published: Monday, June 19, 2006



EDMONTON - Charlotte Rekken has taken a lot of medication, seen a psychiatrist and a lot of counsellors and alternative medicine therapists during her lifelong battle with anxiety and depression.

But it was singing instructor David Wilson who finally helped her, and he did it by teaching her how to help herself. Few people realize how much power they have to self-heal, says Wilson, a baritone, and choral music teacher at Concordia High School.

His three-step Body, Breath & Voice Integrative Therapy helps not only singers and musicians but people with health problems.

David Wilson talks Charlotte Rekken of Stony Plain through the first stage of his therapy, encouraging her to breathe into her lower abdomen and give voice to a sigh.
Photograph by: Shaughn Butts, the Journal

It's based on his own self-healing experience after he lost his voice while working on his first music degree. "The instant I would start singing, it would hurt my throat," he says, making him tense, anxious, and depressed.

Someone noticed and suggested Wilson take yoga, a system of postures and breathing exercises to attain control of the body and mind. He also studied qi gong, a traditional Chinese medicine that combines movement, meditation, and regulated breathing to enhance the flow of qi or energy in the body, improving blood circulation, and enhancing the immune system.

As he rolled around on yoga mats, learning how to breathe properly, Wilson says he noticed that when he did a certain movement, his voice would come back for an instant, setting off a little light bulb inside his head: he'd stumbled onto the mind-body connection of health.

Wilson continued the therapies for about five years and not only got his voice back, he got over his anxiety and depression as well as his food allergies, asthma, bronchitis and sinusitis. He incorporated everything he learned into Body, Breath & Voice Integrative Therapy (www.body-breath-voice.com) which he says can also help people with throat ailments, heartburn, acid reflux, spinal troubles, high blood pressure, colitis, aching muscles, repetitive strain injury and creative mental blocks.

The mind-body connection of health has always been recognized in the eastern world, and is finally beginning to be understood here in the west, says chartered psychologist Dr. Robyn Mott.

The culture here has long separated treatment of the head from the treatment of the body, but, "what we're thinking affects what happens in our body and what happens in our body affects how we think," Mott says.

This interaction is obvious in people who experience panic or anxiety attacks after thinking fearful thoughts, she says, which is why she often teams with Wilson when treating her patients.

"I would say the people we both work with have the best chance to really make a change in their lives because we've really pulled together the mind and body, instead of providing a partway or Band-Aid solution," Mott says.

"We live our lives through our bodies, everything that we've been through in our life is held in our body, so there's only so much I can do working with the psyche."

By teaching people to breathe, because most people don't breathe properly she says, Wilson helps them to stay grounded, which helps them deal better with whatever life throws their way.

"I think the beauty of it is that anybody can learn to do it, and they can find their way through the blocks in the body, enabling them to move more fully and confidently into their lives," Mott says.



Wilson starts by teaching people how to breathe naturally because so many people breathe fast and shallow. He wants them to breathe like babies again, their spines extending and contracting in a full body experience. They probably stopped breathing like that around the age of seven when they started to have to deal with the rigours of life.

Short and shallow breaths are the body's way of protecting us, the fight or flight response when we're under attack, Wilson says. But if it protects us too much we end up with troubles.

Position is very important in breathing therapy and clients feel most calm when lying down, says David Wilson.

Photograph by: Shaughn Butts, the Journal

For 20 different breathing habits and patterns there are 20 different reasons why people breathe that way.

"The depressed stay at the end of the exhale not wanting to take in a breath of life. Anxious people tend to have fast inhales and no exhales."

Inhales and exhales not only affect every system of the body, they're tied to the body's pH balance as well.

"Inhalations secrete acid, exhalations secrete alkaline. More acid in the body equals more yeast and more weight and more sugar and more stress," Wilson explains.

The sigh, a long audible breath, releases serotonin, a hormone that affects emotions, behaviour and thought and helps oxygenate the body, which is how he starts his breathing therapy.

To demonstrate, Wilson has client Charlotte Rekken recline on a yoga mat on the floor.

Lying down makes most people feel calm, he explains. As soon as they stand up, it usually means the start of a workday and the stress that involves.

"From a physiological standpoint when we're tense and we tighten, the abdominal muscles start tightening into the lungs and spine and that takes away the space the diaphragm is supposed to be able to descend into," Wilson says.

"If the diaphragm isn't descending, it's not giving the whooff! to the lungs to help them expand, and that's where you get asthma, bronchitis and sinusitis. It makes troubles like PMS, indigestion, and ulcers worse."

Traumas -- such as car accidents or incidents of abuse can create a memory of this type of response that can stay in the tissues of the body for years, Wilson says.

He tells Rekken to inhale deeply from down in her lower abdomen and exhale in a sigh. "The sigh should feel like safety, surrender and relief, but for some people it feels like despair, no hope and no choice," Wilson says.

He then instructs Rekken to add voice to her sighs by exhaling with a clear and strong aaahhhhhhhh!

People who are afraid of speaking their minds or who have been told most of their lives to keep quiet, bring the tongue up and the soft palette down which squeezes the space at the back of the throat, making their voice sound quiet and forced, Wilson says.

He now has Rekken stand up, take a deep breath, lift one leg and step forward while saying "hello" in a confident manner which is meant to boost her confidence.

The third step of the therapy involves yoga-type exercises (Wilson is also yoga instructor), aimed at releasing the trauma memory contained in the body's cells. The stretch that Rekken easily demonstrates, she says she wasn't able to do for the longest time, until she could engage her mind to her body.

She'd disengaged the two in response to the daily pressures of living next door and caring for senior parents with major medical issues, having a husband who works stressful 16-hour days, parenting a teenager and an autistic child, running a small business that employs two people and trying to do some semi-professional music training. It led her to sometimes having four or five anxiety attacks a day where she would suddenly freeze or black out, Rekken says.

She was skeptical about what Wilson could do for her, but two years later, her anxiety attacks have become infrequent, she no longer has asthma and she requires a fraction of the medications she used to take to keep functioning.

"I had to change my basic perspective on life, that I'm not going to get it figured out and then everything's going to run smoothly, because life is going to continue to happen. But I have learned skills, which regardless of what happens, I can pull on and that will enable me to deal better with whatever is thrown at me," she says.

Wilson says his ultimate goal as a breath therapist is to work himself out of a job.

BREATH SAMPLE

To experience what it feels like to breathe naturally, David Wilson says to sit in a chair and sigh 10 times -- inhaling and exhaling from your lower abdomen -- as if you've won the lottery.

"Feel for an instant that emotion that you don't have to worry about anything and see how you feel at the end of it." he says.

WEEKLY
BOOK SPECIAL
\$2.99

REAL LIFE

BODY & HEALTH

THIS WEEK
ON
REAL LIFE

Why you're not losing weight
No matter how hard you try
See Page 62

Can you lose weight
without counting calories?
See Page 68

How to get the most out of your workout
See Page 74

How to get the most out of your diet
See Page 80

ENTERTAINMENT



Super heroes
See Page 85

ALTERNATIVE HEALTH

Waiting to exhale

Breathing exercises release
the body's healing powers,
says therapist



Waiting to exhale

Breathing exercises release the self-healing process, says therapist



Using his three-step therapy program, David Wilson has helped Charlotte Rekken greatly reduce her daily anxiety.

Photograph by : Shaughn Butts

Chris Zdeb, CanWest News Service

Published: Thursday, June 22, 2006

Charlotte Rekken has seen a psychiatrist, counsellors and alternative medicine therapists during her lifelong battle with anxiety and depression.

But it was singing instructor David Wilson who finally helped her, and he did it by teaching her how to help herself.

Few people realize how much power they have to self-heal, says Wilson, choral music teacher at Concordia High School, both in Edmonton. His three-step Body, Breath & Voice Integrative Therapy helps not only singers and musicians, but people with health problems. It's based on his own self-healing experience after he lost his voice while working on his first music degree.

"The instant I would start singing, it would hurt my throat," he says, making him tense, anxious and depressed.

Someone noticed and suggested Wilson take yoga, a system of postures and breathing exercises to attain control of the body and mind. He also studied qi gong, a traditional Chinese medicine that combines movement, meditation and regulated breathing to enhance the flow of qi, or energy, in the body, thus improving blood circulation and enhancing the immune system.

As he rolled around on yoga mats, learning how to breathe properly, Wilson says he noticed that when he did a certain movement, his voice would come back for an instant, setting off a little light bulb inside his head: he'd stumbled onto the mind-body connection of health.

Wilson continued the therapies for about five years and not only got his voice back, he got over his anxiety and depression, as well as his food allergies, asthma, bronchitis and sinusitis.

He incorporated everything he learned into Body, Breath & Voice Integrative Therapy (www.body-breath-voice.com), which he says can also help people with throat ailments, heartburn, acid reflux, spinal troubles, high blood pressure, colitis, aching muscles, repetitive strain injury and creative mental blocks.

The mind-body connection of health has always been recognized in the eastern world, and is finally beginning to be understood here in the west, says chartered psychologist Dr. Robyn Mott.

The culture here has long separated treatment of the head from treatment of the body, but "what we're thinking affects what happens in our body, and what happens in our body affects how we think," Mott says.

This interaction is obvious in people who experience panic or anxiety attacks after thinking fearful thoughts, she says, which is why she often teams with Wilson when treating her patients.

"I would say the people we both work with have the best chance to really make a change in their lives because we've really pulled together the mind and body, instead of providing a partway or Band-Aid solution," Mott says.

"We live our lives through our bodies, everything that we've been through in our life is held in our body, so there's only so much I can do working with the psyche."

By teaching people to breathe, because most people don't breathe properly, she says, Wilson helps them to stay grounded, which helps them deal better with whatever life throws their way.

"I think the beauty of it is that anybody can learn to do it, and they can find their way through the blocks in the body, enabling them to move more fully and confidently into their lives," Mott says.

Wilson starts by teaching people how to breathe naturally, because so many people breathe fast and shallow. He wants them to breathe like babies again, their spines extending and contracting in a full body experience. They probably stopped breathing like that around age seven, when they started to have to deal with the rigours of life, he says.

Short and shallow breaths are the body's way of protecting us -- the fight or flight response when we're under attack, Wilson says. But if it protects us too much, we end up with troubles.

For 20 different breathing habits and patterns, there are 20 reasons why people breathe that way.

"The depressed stay at the end of the exhale, not wanting to take in a breath of life. Anxious people tend to have fast inhales and no exhales."

Inhales and exhales not only affect every system of the body, they're tied to the body's pH balance as well.

"Inhalations secrete acid, exhalations secrete alkaline. More acid in the body equals more yeast and more weight and more sugar and more stress," Wilson explains.

The sigh, a long audible breath, releases serotonin, a hormone that affects emotions, behaviour



and thought and helps oxygenate the body, which is how he starts his breathing therapy.

To demonstrate, Wilson has client Rekken recline on a yoga mat on the floor.

Lying down makes most people feel calm, he explains. As soon as they stand up, it usually means the start of a workday and the stress that involves.

"From a physiological standpoint, when we're tense and we tighten, the abdominal muscles start tightening into the lungs and spine and that takes away the space the diaphragm is supposed to be able to descend into," Wilson says.

"If the diaphragm isn't descending, it's not giving the 'whoof' to the lungs to help them expand, and that's where you get asthma, bronchitis and sinusitis. It makes troubles like PMS, indigestion and ulcers worse."

Traumas -- such as car accidents or incidents of abuse -- can create a memory of this type of response that can stay in the tissues of the body for years, Wilson says.

He tells Rekken to inhale deeply from down in her lower abdomen and exhale in a sigh.

"The sigh should feel like safety, surrender and relief, but for some people, it feels like despair, no hope and no choice," Wilson says.

He then instructs Rekken to add voice to her sighs by exhaling with a clear and strong aaahhhhhhh!

People who are afraid of speaking their minds or who have been told most of their lives to keep quiet, bring the tongue up and the soft palette down, which squeezes the space at the back of the throat, making their voice sound quiet and forced, Wilson says.

He now has Rekken stand up, take a deep breath, lift one leg and step forward while saying "hello" in a confident manner, which is meant to boost her confidence.

The third step of the therapy involves yoga-type exercises (Wilson is also a yoga instructor), aimed at releasing the trauma memory contained in the body's cells.

Rekken easily demonstrates a stretch -- a movement she says she wasn't able to perform until she could engage her mind to her body.

She'd disengaged mind and body in response to daily pressures that included caring for senior parents with major medical issues, having a husband who works stressful 16-hour days and parenting a teenager and an autistic child.

It led her to sometimes have four or five anxiety attacks a day, where she would suddenly freeze or black out, Rekken says.

She was skeptical about what Wilson could do for her, but two years later, her anxiety attacks have become infrequent.

"I had to change my basic perspective on life, that I'm not going to get it figured out and then everything's going to run smoothly, because life is going to continue to happen. But I have

learned skills, which regardless of what happens, I can pull on and that will enable me to deal better with whatever is thrown at me," she says.

© The Calgary Herald June, 2006

Flirting with Ecstasy: Yoga for the Voice

If one can focus one's heart on music,
it is just like warming something which has been frozen.
The music's beauty of rhythm regulates the beating of the heart,
which helps restore health of body, mind and soul, and bring them to their proper tuning.
The joy of life depends upon the perfect tuning of mind and body.

Inayat Khan

Breathing can be energizing and calming, singing can be full of surrender and ecstasy. Within the quality of our inhalations and exhalations are subtle signs hinting at how we live life, how we see ourselves, how we see others; it is also an excellent barometer for our emotional state at any given moment. Likewise, we can learn so much from singing – our voice will reflect back at us pretty much anything we want to know about ourselves; if we choose to listen.

One of the secrets of singing, as in life, is to get out of our own way, and let the body create our vocal support for us. This may sound easy, and for some people it is; others have to work at it. The trick is to neither force the air or hold it back, but to simply let the brain, ear and body do what it was designed to do – to express itself with power and confidence. Expression is release of what is inside us; this may be the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, or anger at being wronged –both are equally valuable.

Confusion about “The Core”.

Our daily lives of course, often encourage a confusion of force and power; the body is dragged down by gravity, and carrying too much on our shoulders; this in turn creates a lack of space in the solar plexus, and our breathing becomes shallow and laboured. Powerful, easy, joyful inhalations turn into “bracing for impact”. Surrendering, letting-go exhalations turn into straight-jacketed fear. We inhale too early in order to “get things done” and we exhale in a hesitant, shallow manner because we are “waiting for the next shoe to drop”.

Practicing unhealthy respiratory patterns and poor posture will create habitual tension in the torso, chest, middle/upper back, neck and throat, making it difficult to sing and express ourselves to our full potential.

But all is not lost.

If we can efficiently create a state of “readiness to sing” in the body and the breath, the voice will follow suit and our joy during the chanting group will multiply tenfold. We can save ourselves much angst during our Kirtan.

When singing effectively we call on our Primary Respiratory Muscles (PRMs). They are the Internal Obliques, External Intercostals and Diaphragm. A stressful day can cause our bodies to recruit Secondary Respiratory Muscles (SRMs) such as the Scalenes, Sternocleidomastoid, Trapezius, and Pectoralis Minor to sustain the “I’m under attack” pace. These SRMs are activated by the Sympathetic Nervous System, and exist to assist the PRMs during stressful, “flight or fight” situations that only last a few minutes. They are not designed to be used on a constant basis, and yet this is how many people breathe most of the time. Consistent over-use of the SRMs can lead to injury and weakness, especially in the lower back. Shallow, clavicular breathing, along with tightness in the solar plexus (clenching the Rectus Abdominus, which should be phasic and relaxed) leads to obstruction of the diaphragm’s natural descent into the abdominal cavity, hindering our inhalation. This creates a lack of connection to our “font of strength” in the lower belly and hips, decreasing the volume of air, and therefore efficacy, joy and self-confidence. As we gulp shallow inhalations and truncate our exhalations, we begin to feel as if we “can’t get a full breath,” and singing becomes a chore.

Decreasing physical tension while increasing awareness and strength restores the inherent calm of the mind, increasing the singer’s focus and concentration skills. The singing will be spacious, strong and centered. Strong hips and a stable lower back allow increased airflow and an open throat. The singer will be in a much better position to sing to full potential.

According to Master Great Nothing of Sung-Shan in the famous *Taoist Canon on Breathing*:

As for the proper inner breath, it is called the Embryonic breath.

Since it is naturally inside you, you do not have to seek outside for it.

STEP 1: Breath

Harmonizing the breath. A chanting group that breathes together sings together.

1. **Natural Breathing.** Inhale through the nose, using only the PRMs. The inhalation should occur easily and naturally, not as a heave or a gasp. Exhale through the mouth, releasing the air, like a sigh, then “drift” (without clenching any throat or belly muscles) lengthening the end of each exhalation. Just sigh. Do this 10 times, increasing the drift each time. The emphasis here is soft strength, fullness of inhalation, surrender and release of the exhalation. Then add voice to the sigh, encouraging the singers to safely release voice and breath at the same time.
2. **Full Body Breath.** 1- Breathe into belly. 2- Breath into solar plexus. 3- Breath into upper chest. 4- Breath into lower back. 5- Breath into middle back. 6- Breath into upper back, 7-Full body breath: all six spots from the bottom up. Then ask, where can you breathe, and where can't you?
3. **Birthday Cake.** Imagine a birthday cake 50 feet away; blow out the candles as hard as you can. Repeat x4. One of the major difficulties for amateur singers is that they hold their breath when they sing. The Birthday Cake encourages the release of air while vocalizing.

STEP 2: Breath & Body

Understanding the connection between breath and body

1. **Massage Chain.** Choir turns to one side, massages the back and neck of the person in front of them. Reverse. Each chorister then massages her own face, throat, and jaw. Encourages ensemble, and releases muscular tension.
2. **Chair Twist.** Sit with your body and legs facing to the left, flush with the back of the chair. Take hold of the two sides of the back of the chair. Twist the torso to the right (away from the legs), while exhaling – 5 breaths. Turn to other side and repeat. Assures spacious Intercostal muscles for increased lung capacity.
3. **Shoulder Roll.** Clasp hands behind back, gently and slowly roll the shoulders up while inhaling, and down, forward while exhaling. Opens the upper and middle back.
4. **Necking.** Lengthen and lift the back of neck. Slowly and carefully tilt head to side; once there, pull down on the opposite shoulder for 5 breaths. Reverse. Singers, in a misguided attempt to conserve air and/or “sing

loudly”, will clench a plethora of neck muscles that need to be soft to encourage a relaxed vocal mechanism. Together with releasing these neck muscles (Trapezius, Sternocleidomastoid, Omohyoid, Thyrohyoid, Mylohyoid, Stylohyoid, Levator scapulae, Scalenus anterior, Sternothyroid and Arytenoids), this is an instant calmer of rambunctious choirs. It activates the phrenic nerve (the only motor supply to the diaphragm), which floods the body with relaxation hormones.

5. **Samson.** Sitting or standing. Arms out to sides (palms facing down), shoulders relaxed down; try to get the hands/fingers completely vertical, then gently attempt to roll the shoulders. This will open the upper back (this is also optimal for relieving the symptoms associated with Carpal Tunnel Syndrome).
6. **PalmTree 1.** Place left hand on hip, right arm straight up in air, and inhale. Exhale, bend from hip to the left, reaching diagonally to the left with right hand. Keep hips and legs grounded. Inhale back to center. Reverse.

PalmTree 2. Same, but slide hand down leg during the stretch.

PalmTree 3. Same, both arms up, left hand holds right wrist, exhale, bend to the left. Reverse. For Intercostals, Latissimus dorsi and Scalenes; singers will notice a massive improvement in their “singing carriage”.

STEP 3: Breath & Body & Voice

Movement as metaphor for the forward momentum and strength required for singing.

1. **Resonance and Relaxation.** Closed-lip *hmmm*, on Soh-fa-mi-re-do. Ask: Is it placed forward or back? Is the air like a laser through the nose, or is it swirling around in the back of the throat? If it is the latter, the breathing is being hindered by a tight jaw and lifted tongue. When the *hmmm* tickles the lips or the front of the face, they have it right. Then, work with *zzz*, tongue trill (*rrr*) and lip trill (*brrr*), also on Soh-fa-mi-re-do. These sounds are safe starters, as they use only a portion of the chords, encouraging airflow and discouraging tension.
2. **Sumo Wrestler.** Make a Neanderthal-like relaxed-throat *HUH* while simultaneously bending the knees. Find chest resonance as low as possible;

is the throat relaxed? Does the impetus and momentum of the breath feel connected to the “font of strength” in the belly? Once the chest voice is set, have the ladies repeat in head voice; does it feel as connected and supported? Repeat back and forth between chest and head until it does. Then vowels that emphasize free breath, such as “ha-ha ha-ha ha-ha ha-ha- haaa. (pairs on soh-fa-mi-re-do) with the knee-bend on the soh. This movement facilitates the release of all neck, back and chest muscles that interfere with the exhalation, therefore encouraging throat and chest resonance.

3. **Valkyrie.** Vowel is *ooo* or *oh*, first on Do-mi-soh-mi-do. On soh, take a big, confident step forward with one foot, pumping the arms forward as well. Feel the heel press into the floor; the high note should feel easier, and the choir should be able to reach higher pitches with greater ease. Inhale and pull back to standing between each repetition. Repeat with Do-mi-soh-upper do. This encourages the release of high notes, eradicating the fear and effort associated with them.
4. **I’m Ready to Sing.** Imagine the energetic excitement of the moment on stage just before something happens. Stand with feet under hip bones. Bend knees slightly. Tuck tailbone down slightly. Tuck front ribs toward spine while lifting the chest. Roll shoulders forward, up, back, down, and let them settle. Lengthen back of neck up. Repeat numbers 2 and 3, in this energized posture, while *feeling* as if you are moving. Inhale with excitement, exhale with release. Ask the singers, “does your support feel the same as when you are moving?” If it doesn’t, repeat the Sumo Wrestler and Valkyrie until it does.
5. Revisit the **Full Body Breath** from Step 1. If it feels different, success!

David Wilson (B.Mus, M.Mus) is a Singer, Conductor, Voice Teacher, Yoga Instructor, and Breath Therapist, centered in Edmonton. He is the founder of Body, Breath, & Voice Integrative Therapy, and has been teaching “Yoga for Breath & Voice” since receiving his Certification from the Yoga Centre of Calgary in 1995. In addition to his busy vocal and conducting studio, and singing with Edmonton Opera, he facilitates over fifty “Yoga for Breath & Voice” Workshops a year throughout Western Canada. David is currently working on his first book. His website is body-breath-voice.com.

Body, Breath & Voice for Choral Singers

Breathing is a pre-requisite to singing. It will come as no surprise to readers of Quires that the way we breathe can affect the success of our singing. The following list of choral challenges can be ameliorated through improved breathing:

- Poor posture: tension in upper back, neck, chest, jaw, tongue, and throat
- Running out of breath during a phrase
- Lack of ability to sing true legato
- Lack of flexibility during runs
- Incorrect or muddy vowels
- Poorly articulated consonants / late cutoffs
- Vocal placement too far back
- Using air and throat to change pitch
- Pitch and tuning issues
- Poor sight-reading
- Inability to sing musically
- Inability to concentrate

The singing breath should be energized and effortless. Our daily lives often encourage the opposite; the body is dragged down by gravity, inhalations are too fast, too soon, and too shallow, while exhalations are truncated and hesitant. Days, weeks, or years practicing unhealthy respiratory patterns and poor posture will eventually create habitual tension in the torso, chest, middle/upper back, neck and throat, making it difficult to sing to full potential. If we can efficiently create a state of “readiness to sing” in the body and the breath, we can save ourselves much time and energy during the rehearsal process.

While concepts of breathing are best communicated with physical demonstration, it is hoped that the following written descriptions will be useful. Try viewing diagrams of the anatomy described by googling “respiratory muscles” (such as the one at <http://www.colorado.edu/intphys/Class/IPHY3430-200/image/17-1.jpg>)

When singing effectively we call on our Primary Respiratory Muscles (PRMs). They are the Internal Obliques, External Intercostals and Diaphragm. A stressful day can cause our bodies to recruit Secondary Respiratory Muscles (SRMs) such as the Scalenes, Sternocleidomastoid, Trapezius, and Pectoralis Minor to sustain the “I’m under attack” pace. These SRMs are activated by the Sympathetic Nervous System, and exist to assist the PRMs during stressful, “flight or fight” situations that only last a few minutes. They are not designed to be used on a constant basis, and yet this is how many people breathe most of the time. Consistent over-use of the SRMs can lead to injury and weakness, especially in the lower back. Shallow, clavicular breathing, along with tightness in the solar plexus (clenching the Rectus Abdominus, which should be phasic and relaxed) leads to obstruction of the diaphragm’s natural descent into the abdominal cavity, hindering our inhalation. This creates a lack of connection to our “font of strength” in the lower belly and hips, decreasing the volume of air, and therefore efficacy, joy and self-confidence. As we gulp shallow inhalations and truncate our exhalations, we begin to feel as if we “can’t get a full breath,” and singing becomes a chore.

Decreasing physical tension while increasing awareness and strength restores the inherent calm of the mind, increasing the singer's focus and concentration skills. The singing will be spacious, strong and centered. Strong hips and a stable lower back allow increased airflow and an open throat. The singer will be in a much better position to sing to full potential.

The following exercises are designed to lengthen and strengthen the PRM and Postural Support muscles, while relaxing and softening the SRMs. This series also frees the breath and grounds the body, thereby energizing the voice. This takes around 15-20 minutes.

STEP 1: Breath

Harmonizing the breath. A choir that breathes together sings together.

1. **Natural Breathing.** Inhale through the nose, using only the PRMs. The inhalation should occur easily and naturally, not as a heave or a gasp. Exhale through the mouth, releasing the air, like a sigh, then "drift" (without clenching any throat or belly muscles) lengthening the end of each exhalation. Just sigh. Do this 10 times, increasing the drift each time. The emphasis here is soft strength, fullness of inhalation, surrender and release of the exhalation. Then add voice to the sigh, encouraging the singers to safely release voice and breath at the same time.
2. **Full Body Breath.** 1- Breathe into belly. 2- Breath into solar plexus. 3- Breath into upper chest. 4- Breath into lower back. 5- Breath into middle back. 6- Breath into upper back, 7-Full body breath: all six spots from the bottom up. Then ask, where can you breathe, and where can't you?
3. **Birthday Cake.** Imagine a birthday cake 50 feet away; blow out the candles as hard as you can. Repeat x4. One of the major difficulties for amateur singers is that they hold their breath when they sing. The Birthday Cake encourages the release of air while vocalizing.

STEP 2: Breath & Body

Understanding the connection between breath and body

1. **Massage Chain.** Choir turns to one side, massages the back and neck of the person in front of them. Reverse. Each chorister then massages her own face, throat, and jaw. Encourages ensemble, and releases muscular tension.
2. **Chair Twist.** Sit with your body and legs facing to the left, flush with the back of the chair. Take hold of the two sides of the back of the chair. Twist the torso to the right (away from the legs), while exhaling – 5 breaths. Turn to other side and repeat. Assures spacious Intercostal muscles for increased lung capacity.
3. **Shoulder Roll.** Clasp hands behind back, gently and slowly roll the shoulders up while inhaling, and down, forward while exhaling. Opens the upper and middle back.

4. **Necking.** Lengthen and lift the back of neck. Slowly and carefully tilt head to side; once there, pull down on the opposite shoulder for 5 breaths. Reverse. Singers, in a misguided attempt to conserve air and/or “sing loudly”, will clench a plethora of neck muscles that need to be soft to encourage a relaxed vocal mechanism. Together with releasing these neck muscles (Trapezius, Sternocleidomastoid, Omohyoid, Thyrohyoid, Mylohyoid, Stylohyoid, Levator scapulae, Scalenus anterior, Sternothyroid and Arytenoids), this is an instant calmer of rambunctious choirs. It activates the phrenic nerve (the only motor supply to the diaphragm), which floods the body with relaxation hormones.
5. **Samson.** Sitting or standing. Arms out to sides (palms facing down), shoulders relaxed down; try to get the hands/fingers completely vertical, then gently attempt to roll the shoulders. This will open the upper back (this is also optimal for relieving the symptoms associated with Carpal Tunnel Syndrome).
6. **PalmTree 1.** Place left hand on hip, right arm straight up in air, and inhale. Exhale, bend from hip to the left, reaching diagonally to the left with right hand. Keep hips and legs grounded. Inhale back to center. Reverse.
PalmTree 2. Same, but slide hand down leg during the stretch.
PalmTree 3. Same, both arms up, left hand holds right wrist, exhale, bend to the left. Reverse. For Intercostals, Latissimus dorsi and Scalenes; singers will notice a massive improvement in their “singing carriage”.

STEP 3: Breath & Body & Voice

Movement as metaphor for the forward momentum and strength required for singing.

1. **Resonance and Relaxation.** Closed-lip *hmmm*, on Soh-fa-mi-re-do. Ask: Is it placed forward or back? Is the air like a laser through the nose, or is it swirling around in the back of the throat? If it is the latter, the breathing is being hindered by a tight jaw and lifted tongue. When the *hmmm* tickles the lips or the front of the face, they have it right. Then, work with *zzz*, tongue trill (*rrr*) and lip trill (*brrr*), also on Soh-fa-mi-re-do. These sounds are safe starters, as they use only a portion of the chords, encouraging airflow and discouraging tension.
2. **Sumo Wrestler.** Make a Neanderthal-like relaxed-throat *HUH* while simultaneously bending the knees. Find chest resonance as low as possible; is the throat relaxed? Does the impetus and momentum of the breath feel connected to the “font of strength” in the belly? Once the chest voice is set, have the ladies repeat in head voice; does it feel as connected and supported? Repeat back and forth between chest and head until it does. Then vowels that emphasize free breath, such as “ha-ha ha-ha ha-ha ha-ha- haaa. (pairs on soh-fa-mi-re-do) with the knee-bend on the soh. This movement facilitates the release of all neck, back and chest muscles that interfere with the exhalation, therefore encouraging throat and chest resonance.
3. **Valkyrie.** Vowel is *ooo* or *oh*, first on Do-mi-soh-mi-do. On soh, take a big, confident step forward with one foot, pumping the arms forward as well. Feel the heel press into the floor; the high note should feel easier, and the choir should be able to reach higher pitches with greater ease. Inhale and pull back to standing between each repetition.

- Repeat with Do-mi-soh-upper do. This encourages the release of high notes, eradicating the fear and effort associated with them.
4. **I'm Ready to Sing.** Imagine the energetic excitement of the moment on stage just before something happens. Stand with feet under hip bones. Bend knees slightly. Tuck tailbone down slightly. Tuck front ribs toward spine while lifting the chest. Roll shoulders forward, up, back, down, and let them settle. Lengthen back of neck up. Repeat numbers 2 and 3, in this energized posture, while *feeling* as if you are moving. Inhale with excitement, exhale with release. Ask the singers, “does your support feel the same as when you are moving?” If it doesn't, repeat the Sumo Wrestler and Valkyrie until it does.
 5. Revisit the **Full Body Breath** from Step 1. If it feels different, success!

David Wilson (B.Mus, M.Mus) is a Singer, Conductor, Voice Teacher, Yoga Instructor, and Respiratory Therapist, centered in Edmonton. He has served as Artistic Director for the Calgary Renaissance Singers & Players, Spiritus Chamber Choir, Debut Opera Society, Edmonton Recorder Orchestra, and Vocal Alchemy. He was the recipient of the the ACF's *Con Spirito Award* and the *International Contemporary Acappella Recording Award* for Spiritus' CD "Crossing Bridges". In October 2004, David was invited to the Évora Cathedral Music School to present his Master's Thesis, "Manuel Cardoso of Portugal". In addition to his busy vocal studio, and singing with the Edmonton Opera, the 2008-'09 season included the presentation of 55 choral conducting workshops, breath seminars and vocal masterclasses throughout Western Canada. His website is body-breath-voice.com.

The Authentic Voice: Yoga for Chanting

If one can focus one's heart on music,
it is just like warming something which has been frozen.
The music's beauty of rhythm regulates the beating of the heart,
which helps restore health of body, mind and soul, and bring them to their proper tuning.
The joy of life depends upon the perfect tuning of mind and body.

Inayat Khan

Western society claims an encouragement of individual expression, yet the practice of assertion is often met with anything but positive reinforcement. As a result, many people are unable to speak (much less chant) with their "true voice". Instead of the sound being ideally focussed at the front of the face, resonating in the sinuses, throat and chest, many people have lived much of their lives speaking from a soft-spoken "retreat point" at the back of their throats. Their voices are therefore based upon foundations of uncertainty and fear. It is unrealistic to expect these ingrained habits to change upon entering a chant circle. Ask yourself the following questions:

Have you ever felt uncomfortable participating in a chant, your throat hurting, running out of breath, or unable to match pitch?
Have you ever had people say to you; "I can't hear you"?
Were you told to "mouth the words" in grade 3 choir?
Were you part of "a child is better seen, not heard," upbringing?
Have you ever felt uncomfortable "speaking your mind"?
Does your voice feel fearful, sound hidden in the back of your throat, or gravely and scratchy?

In a chant circle, the already historically overwhelmed student is asked to learn and provide the following, often *all at the same time*.

- the melody
- the rhythm
- the sanskrit (!)
- the support of the people on either side
- the support of the teacher
- the completion of each phrase without taking an 'extra' breath
- the sustaining of the group momentum and energy
- the "proper" posture

For many, this is simply too much, too fast; the chant also becomes equated with uncertainty and fear, and often, the starting pitch given is perfect for the teacher's voice, but not for many others in the class; the discomfort levels rise. Even accomplished singers require a warm-up for the physical, mental and spiritual voice. Three Ohms, if they are centered at the back of the throat, do not provide the necessary preparation. For many, jumping into chanting in this manner is akin to choosing Urdhva Dhanurasana as the first pose of a Hatha I class.

Asking our students to sing "cold" will often result in the following: "The Singers Heave" comes from the assumption that singing is "difficult; they assume a need for more air and effort. They will inhale too fast, clench the abdomen inwards, thrust the lower ribs forward, lift the shoulders, and sing from their larynx, pushing air past the chords. This causes them to run out of breath, which makes them think they need more air... The voice sounds hard and inflexible. The second I call "The Retreat into the Cave". This manifests through holding the exhale back, ignoring the diaphragm completely; the impetus of the breath and voice abandons its proper "font of strength" position in the lower belly, and the voice sounds foggy and weak. In both

cases, the secondary respiratory muscles (scalenes, sternocleidomastoid, trapezius, and pectoralis minor) will overwork to sustain the group pace, and the primary respiratory muscles (the abdominals, intercostals and diaphragm), will either be constricted or asleep. Tension in the upper thoracic, neck, jaw, tongue and throat will follow; there will be little joy; the chant will feel constricted and fearful, instead of flexible and ecstatic. The following Five Steps for Vocal Freedom may be of some help.

1) Warm up the Breath: The Sigh, and Getting in Touch with your Inner Neanderthal

According to Master Great Nothing of Sung-Shan in the famous *Taoist Canon on Breathing*:

As for the proper inner breath, it is called the Embryonic breath.
Since it is naturally inside you, you do not have to seek outside for it.

In other words, the inhalation must be *natural* and sparked by the body (not the “outer” Will), and the exhale must be *released*, not held back, truncated, or forced. We make sound on the exhalation, which is the Yin side of the breath, however many equate “power” with “male or yang anger” and therefore shy away from accessing their own internal, righteous strength of the exhalation. To sing properly, a balance of masculine and feminine energies are needed. Notice; is the exhalation being truly released, or is it distorted, as if “bumping down the stairs”? Is the exhale drifting all the way to the bottom, or is it being truncated? Does the timing of the inhale feel chosen by the body, or are you using Will to decide when to inhale? Is the diaphragm working naturally, or is it asleep? Feel the instant softness and strength (!) that accompanies a true sigh. Drift into the end of the exhale, and wait for the internal spark of an inhale – let the body breathe you. Be aware though, many vulnerable emotions are hidden at the end of the exhalation; emotional releases may occur.

2) Warm up the Voice: The ‘hummm’ the ‘brrrrr’, the ‘rrrrr’ and the bumblebee

Here we learn to manage our air, create a free vocal mechanism, and place the voice forward. Hum with lips closed: the back of the tongue should be down, and a steady stream of powerful air should be coming through your nose. Intend the sound into your sinuses and sixth chakra; do not force, but *release* it there. Then, make a ‘brrrr’ with the lips or a ‘rrrrr’ with the tongue. Check to see if the jaw is soft, and the throat is open. How long can you make it last? The bumblebee is made with a ‘sssszz’. If your nose itches or tickles, you’ve got it!

3) Warm up the Body: Connecting breath, voice and body

For those with throaty voices and constricted ribcages (the so-called asthma-band; really “fear armour”), lots of moon salutations and twists, while releasing ‘oo’ or ‘ohh’ vowels along with the sigh exhale. This will eventually free up the diaphragm. For those who are vocally retreating, and not accessing their internal breath power, lots of Sun salutations and standing poses, while releasing ‘oo’ or ‘ohh’ vowels along with the sigh exhale. This will link ‘power’ to ‘voice and breath’.

4) Sound Circle: One Thing at a Time

Now we are ready to sit in a circle and vibrate. To start, stay away from “singing”; first inspire “vocal play”, this is much less threatening. Allow everyone to become comfortable simply making sound. Upward-motion singing for many is a metaphor for “having to try harder in life”, so we begin with exploring our voices with downward spiraling ‘oo’ or ‘ohm’ sirens, owl hoots, deep Neanderthal grunts, all the time listening for open throats. Gradually create a soundscape full of every sound or rhythm imaginable; offer creative suggestions, then let them loose. You

might then suggest that “any movements that grow organically out of the rhythm or sound can be expressed”. Dancing may ensue; we are looking for joy and ecstasy here. They are now re-programming their brains to understand that there are no negative repercussions to come out of “speaking their minds” or expressing themselves openly.

5) Learning the Chant

The students are now vocally and mentally ready to learn a chant. Be aware that each time you add a new component (melody, words) many of the chanters may drop back into their throats if they feel less comfortable, more exposed or vulnerable. If it is a foreign language, teach text first, by itself. Then sing the melody on ‘oo’ or ‘Ohm’. Then put the two together, using each single phrase of the chant as a mantra. Be patient; play until a phrase is past their heads and feeling grounded in their body. When all of this turns to Joy, Confidence and Freedom, the rewards, both in chanting and in their daily lives, will be immeasurable.

Published in “Yoga Bridge”, Jan 2005

Community
Well-Being
Fun

TWIST & Shout!

Issue 8

July 2004

TAKE A LOOK INSIDE!

I&S People	1
Be Our Guest	2
Wellness	2
Spotlight	3
TWISTivities	3
I&S Neighborhood	4
Breathing	6
Naturopathy	6

I&S People

Tom's Travels

By Tom Ness

When I think back over my life and all the places I've visited, I realize how much I love to travel. I don't know if you can say the travel bug is genetic, but for me it began with my parents, Alex and Mary Ness. They gave up their lives in Scotland to move to South Africa after the war, where my father was offered a position with the South African Air Force. Thus began a life of traveling for me. I was born in South Africa, but we moved to Zambia, which at that time was known as Northern Rhodesia, when I was two and a half years old. I loved living in Africa; the amazing wildlife, the beautiful flowing bushes, the awesome scenery, plentiful tropical fruit, and the outdoor life. It was hard to leave when I was eleven, but things were very unsettled and my parents decided it was time. We had made several trips to the coast of Africa as well as back to Britain to visit relatives.

On one eventful trip, we sailed from Africa bound for England. As we were nearing a scheduled stop, there was an explosion in the engine room. Several of the ship's crew members were killed, but all the passengers were evacuated safely by lifeboat to the nearest port. This gave us a few unplanned days to visit the Canary Islands.

Eventually my parents settled on the island of Jersey in the Channel Islands between England and France. This was an ideal location for a traveling enthusiast. I remember taking family trips to France, Monte Carlo, Italy, Spain and Portugal. I really enjoyed one trip I took with some family friends. We were on our way to a wedding in Germany, which was a great excuse to do some touring around Europe. We began our driving trip from England, with a car ferry to Holland then on to Germany for the wedding. After the wedding we headed south through Switzerland to Italy. After a few days there, we went back through France to England. We covered a lot of miles in a relatively short time, but what a wonderful way to experience Europe!

A couple of years after finishing college, I received a job offer, a great opportunity, to manage a beachside hotel in the Seychelles Islands, (located in the Indian Ocean). On route, I'll never forget getting off the plane after we touched down in Nairobi, Kenya and being enveloped in the welcoming heat and sweet smells distinctive to Africa. After the Seychelles I took the opportunity to visit Africa again, driving through Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa before returning by plane to Britain. ...4



Tom at the age of 6

at the top of Table Mountain in Cape Town, South Africa



Breathing for a Healthier Life!

By David Wilson

The use of effective breathing to improve mental and physical health goes back many thousands of years. Natural, full body breathing powered by the diaphragm is our birthright. As infants our bones, muscles, organs and entire spinal column undulated with the pulse of our breath.

In "*The Breathing Book*", Donna Farhi states:

"Breathing affects your respiratory, cardiovascular, neurological, gastrointestinal, muscular, and psychic systems, and also has a general affect on your sleep, memory, ability to concentrate, and your energy levels."

As we are challenged by the rigors of life, we begin to tense our body and breath in order to "hold firm", just as we would hold onto a tree during a hurricane. Dealing with increased levels of psychological stress increases the tempo of our internal metronomes, and our chemical, cellular and neurological paces quicken. In an effort to sustain this hurried rate, our muscles often learn to remain tense, expending valuable energy. Eventually, we begin to constrict our primary respiratory muscles (the abdominals, intercostals and diaphragm), flooding the body with adrenaline in order to cope with the situation. The body then relies on the secondary respiratory muscles (scalenes, sternocleidomastoid, trapezius, and pectoralis minor) to sustain the pace. However, the secondary system exists only to assist with stressful situations; it is not designed to power our cardiovascular system on a constant basis. Furthermore, the continual tensing of these muscles weakens their strength, inducing other muscles to overwork in order to pick up the slack; this often leads to injury.

Society's ideal of the "flat, rock-hard stomach" also encourages shallow breathing, as we obstruct the diaphragm's natural descent into the abdominal cavity. This creates a lack of connection to our "font of strength" in our lower belly, decreasing our efficacy and self-confidence. As we gulp shallow inhalations and truncate our exhalations, we begin to feel as if we can't get a full breath. These harmful events eventually lead to the PH balance of the body shifting, favouring acids over alkaloids, which in turn creates more stress, and further weakens the immune system. Naturopaths, breath therapists and homeopaths have identified this vicious cycle with asthma, sinusitis, bronchitis, ulcers, high blood pressure, depression, anxiety, indigestion, hyperventilation, PMS, headaches and chronic fatigue. There is an alternative to ingesting sugar, caffeine, or other stimulants to artificially increase our energy levels. Consciously returning to natural, unhindered breathing allows us to release physical tension and revitalize our body and mind.

Breathing Exercises

Font of Strength Breath 1. Sit on a chair, eyes closed for inward concentration, with hand just below belly button. Breathe into this area for 10 breaths, quiet and focused. Belly expands outward on the inhale, relaxes in toward the spine on the exhale. Check that the impetus of the breath begins low, then expands outward and upward to the top of the lungs.

Font of Strength Breath 2. Same, but inhale with hands on side ribs (like an accordion), then move hands to belly, exhale by gently drawing the belly toward the spine. Repeat a minimum of 10 times. Over time, this will help train healthy breathing habits.

Folding Exhale. Encourages a full exhale from the abdomen. Seated, bend over slowly from hips as you exhale. Allow inhale to occur naturally as you sit up. Repeat for no more than 5 breaths. This is excellent for asthmatics, but only under controlled circumstances. Avoid if asthma is acute. Those with migraines or eye troubles should not do this exercise.

Lower Back Expansion. Good to do right after massage. Alone or in partners, depending on your comfort level. Seated, hands on lower back around the kidneys. Breathe, expanding this area. Partners can check for improper raising of shoulders on the inhalation, and that they fully, vocally sigh on the exhalation. Awareness here will lessen the chance of lower back injuries.

cont'd on page 8

Breathing cont'd

Stretches for Healthy Breathing and Softening the Mind

Neck Stretch. Calms mind, relaxes jaw, neck and tongue. Tilt neck gently to the left shoulder, lifting both sides of the face, as if bending around an imaginary grapefruit lodged between shoulder and neck. Reach diagonally up and out with the head, while stretching down with the right deltoid (shoulder muscle). Hold, sigh through the stretch for five breaths minimum. Come back to center on an exhale. Reverse. Secondly, turn to either side, chin parallel to the floor, pulling back on the opposite shoulder.

Field Goal. Arms reaching straight up past ears, shoulders relaxed. Hold for 5-10 breaths, set the ribcage, then bring arms down on the exhalation, keeping the ribcage lifted and expanded. This helps to discourage the "heave and collapse" ribcage breathing.

Shoulder Rotation. Hands clasped behind back, palms facing forward, lift as high as comfortable, gently roll shoulders. Breathe. Repeat with palms facing back.

Samson. Arms straight out to sides, attempt to point fingers toward ceiling, pushing through the heels of the hands. This is not as easy as it sounds.

Chair Twist. For ribcage awareness and expansion. Sit in a chair sideways. Place right thigh firmly against the back of the chair, feet and knees together. Exhale, put hands on either side of the back of the chair. Each exhale, you turn and twist farther around to right. Breathe into ribcage. Neck, jaw, shoulders are relaxed, only forearms work. Reverse.

Breathing is effortless, but after many years of ingraining unhealthy habits of tension, the breath becomes effortful; conscious relaxation techniques become necessary.

We should not force the body to breathe, but instead, learn how to get out of the way, allowing the body to breathe naturally. This restores the inherent calm of the mind, enabling us to better cope with the frenzied activity of the day.

Our lives today often lack equilibrium and poise, as we seem to rush headlong from activity to activity, living in pacified agitation. This makes life more of a chore.

These "full of repose" techniques offer an opportunity to deepen one's connection with one's own breath, voice, and body; slowing down and sensing our own inner world gives us an opportunity to balance our emotions, support our overall health, and to live life with more enjoyment.

David Wilson is a conductor, singer, vocal instructor, yoga teacher and breath therapist. He is currently a professor of music at Concordia High School, and co-director of the Da Camera Singers.

He can be contacted at (780) 455-0318 or wilsonrd@shaw.ca.

Have an idea you want to share? Some suggestions, concerns, etc?

Contact Lee Segall
Lee.Segall@gov.ab.ca
Phone: 415-5824

Or, visit the TWI ST website and drop something into our Suggestion Box!

TWIST's mission

To help make Innovation and Science a workplace that is inclusive, supportive, happy and healthy.

TWIST's vision

A workplace whose culture regularly celebrates and benefits from individuality and community, where creativity and imagination can flow freely, and people can connect with their personal values and interests, as well as those of the Ministry.

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Every body will likely be in full swing with courses, classes, vocal activities and performances. I hope this issue of Voice Talk will support and enlighten you in your vocal activities and endeavours.

Between the last Voice Talk and this issue, you have a complete overview of Body Therapy Techniques.

After the G8 Summit in June, Calgary remained a busy city, staging concerts and festivals. One of the highlights this year was the Calgary International Organ Festival and its associated Speaker Series. Two speakers of particular note were Dr. Mitchel Gaynor and Dr. Samuel Wong. Both spoke on very similar topics, the healing power of music.

Dr. Mitchell Gaynor, Director of Medical Oncology and Integrative Medicine at the Stang-Cornell Cancer Prevention Center, discussed the effects of music and breathing on the cellular and sub-cellular level. He described this through his observations of treating cancer patients whose immunoglobulin levels were significantly increased after listening to certain forms of music. Of particular interest was his use of Tibetan drums and crystal bowls to produce sound therapy to complement his patient's regular treatments to induce a relaxed and calming state. Dr. Gaynor expressed that the "voice is nothing more than audible breath. Your voice is one of the most powerful healing tools that I know of, the human voice. That is why...chanting (and) why singing is so powerful. It's able to get you breathing deeply again."

Dr. Samuel Wong, Ophthalmologist and Music Director of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra and the Honolulu Symphony Orchestra, discussed at length the effects of music on clinical results. Of particular note was his explanation and observations around stroke patients where by using the singing voice enables the patient's level of

communication to strengthen more quickly, thus boosting confidence to continue all rehabilitation.

The presentations and discussions were very inspiring and reaffirmed our beliefs and observations. For more information and a transcript of the lectures, please visit the Royal Bank Calgary International Organ Festival web-site: <http://www.triumphent.com/rbcSymposium/>

Donna Kay, a friend and assistant of mine, stepped in for me in September to give two presentations at the Prairie Music Week in Winnipeg. She did an excellent job in both workshops. The conference coordinator, Lee Ann Peluk, reported about much positive feedback from the attendants. In October I gave a presentation and workshop at the Alberta Music Conference which took place at the Telus Convention Centre in Calgary. It was followed a week later by the Vocal Fitness seminar I held with Donna Kay at the Rozsa Centre on the campus of the University of Calgary. It ran on two Saturdays and continued the seminars I have been conducting in early spring and fall since 1996 through the University's Continuing Education Program.

Despite financial difficulties we intend to proceed with our preparations for the 5th International Voice Care Symposium, likely to take place in Toronto or Banff, Alberta. Your Input will help us to decide on the location. Please give us your thoughts and feedback by Dec 22, 2002. Send us your suggestions by mail, fax or e-mail. All as noted on the last page.

INSIDE...

Yoga and Breathing	2
Vocal Definitions	9
Calendar of Events	10

Yoga and Breath for Musicians 1

By David Wilson

Time is Breath, G.I. Gurdjieff

BREATH, BODY, MIND AND LIFE

The use of effective breathing to improve mental and physical health goes back many thousands of years. Natural, full-body breathing powered by the lower belly is essentially our birthright. As infants our bones, muscles, organs and entire spinal column would undulate with the pulse of our breath. In *The Breathing Book*, Donna Farhi states:

Breathing affects your respiratory, cardiovascular, neurological, gastrointestinal, muscular, and psychic systems, and also has a general affect on your sleep, memory, ability to concentrate, and your energy levels.

As we are challenged by the rigors of life, we begin to tense our body and breath in order to “hold firm”, just as we would hold onto a tree during a strong wind. Dealing with increased levels of psychological stress increases the tempo of our internal metronomes, and our chemical, cellular and neurological paces quicken. In an effort to sustain this hurried rate, our muscles often learn to remain tense, expending valuable energy. Eventually, we begin to constrict our primary respiratory muscles (the abdominals, intercostals and diaphragm), flooding the body with adrenaline in order to cope with the situation. The body then relies on the secondary respiratory muscles (scalenes, sternocleidomastoid, trapezius, and pectoralis minor) to sustain the pace. However, the secondary system exists only to assist with stressful situations; it is not designed to power our cardiovascular system on a constant basis. Furthermore, the continual tensing of these muscles weakens their strength, inducing other

Society’s ideal of the “flat, rock-hard stomach” also encourages shallow breathing

muscles to overwork in order to pick up the slack; this often leads to injury. Society’s ideal of the “flat, rock-hard stomach” also encourages shallow breathing, as we obstruct the diaphragm’s natural descent into the abdominal cavity. This creates a lack of connection to our “font of strength” in our lower belly, decreasing our efficacy and self-confidence. As we gulp shallow inhalations and truncate our exhalations, we begin to feel as if we “can’t get a full breath”. These harmful events eventually lead to the pH balance of the body shifting, favouring acids over alkaloids, which in turn creates more stress, and further weakens the immune system. Naturopaths, Breath therapists and Homeopaths have identified this vicious cycle with Asthma, Sinusitis, Bronchitis, Ulcers, High Blood Pressure, Depression, Anxiety, Indigestion, Hyperventilation, PMS, Headaches, and Chronic Fatigue. There is an alternative to ingesting sugar, caffeine, or other stimulants to artificially increase our energy levels. Consciously returning to natural,

unhindered breathing allows us to release physical tension and re-vitalize our body and mind.

Breathing is effortless, but after many years of ingraining unhealthy habits of tension, the breath becomes effortful; conscious relaxation techniques become necessary. We should not be forcing the body to breathe, but instead, learning how to get out of the way, allowing the body to breathe naturally. This restores the inherent calm of the mind, enabling us to better cope with the frenzied activity of daily life.

BREATH, BODY, MIND AND REHEARSAL

Western society encourages individual expression, yet the practice of assertion often lacks positive reinforcement. As a result, many people are not speaking (much less singing) with their true voice. Amateur singers may have spent days, weeks, or even years breathing shallow, and nervously speaking from their throat; “using the voice” equals stress. It is unrealistic to expect the amateur singer to magically change these ingrained habits exclusively for weekly rehearsals. Kenny Werner, in his book *Effortless Mastery* writes:

A person might give up music for reasons of insufficient talent, when upon closer inspection it becomes clear that... many people are crippled by an inability to focus and by a sense of being overwhelmed. These problems are often mistaken for laziness or lethargy.

The already overwhelmed singer, with her concentration levels pushed to the maximum, and worried about letting down her conductor or fellow choristers, works hard to achieve the correct pitches, rhythms and text. On some level, singing and music has been equated with fear. If this continues, the singer will exhibit ungrounded behavior. Flighty giggling, lack of concentration, anger, an overly rigid or slouched sitting posture may all be attempts by the singer to deal with anxiety. The sound will be inflexible, as many singers (especially men) will clench their abdominal muscles inward, take too much breath too high in the chest, and push from their larynx in order to “lead the section” and create a “full sound”. Legato singing will be impossible. As the secondary respiratory muscles strain, the singer will begin to feel chronic tension in his upper back and neck. The impetus of the breath will leave its proper “font of strength” position, rise higher in the chest, create improper airflow, and lead to over-singing. As breathing becomes impaired, the singer will feel they have less sustaining power. Incorrectly assuming they need more air, they will inhale with great effort, move the abdomen strongly upwards, thrust the chest forward, and lift the shoulders. Proper support and breath management has now been abandoned. According to Master Great Nothing of Sung-Shan in the famous *Taoist Canon on Breathing*:

As for the proper inner breath, it is called the Embryonic breath. Since it is naturally inside you, you do not have to seek outside for it.

Standing rigidly during warm-ups will not help release these difficulties, as they are already tight from the inside-out. Releasing this tension will facilitate a smoother rehearsal. A method to combat this rigidity is to have the singers move and stretch before and during vocalizations. Throw the arms in the air on high notes, stomp the foot to encourage uninhibited entrances, vocalize with sirens and laughter: anything to activate their

Yoga and Breath

energy, release their physical and mental tension, and bring them back into a calm, joyful, grounded sense of themselves. The improved tranquility, happiness and confidence of the singers will allow the focus, concentration and togetherness of the ensemble to escalate accordingly.

WHAT IS YOGA?

Yoga is many things to many people. For our purposes it is a system of stretching and breathing for increased flexibility and strength. While each pose has specific physical, mental and vocal health benefits (too numerous to discuss here), what makes Yoga different from standard exercises is patience. Our muscles have a natural inclination to remain in their given state; this is known as the "recoil response." In Yoga one remains gently in a stretch, attempting to relax more each moment, until the "recoil response" subsides and the tension eases, thereby lengthening and strengthening the muscles. This can be a good example for how we can adjust to difficult situations in our daily lives. One puts oneself in an unusual pose (asana in Sanskrit) that at first seems tight, tense and difficult, but with patience begins to soften. Once you have found repose, the body has learned to turn a stressful situation into a relaxing one. The implications are innumerable. As the renowned yogi B.K.S. Iyengar writes in *Yoga: The Path to Holistic Health*:

The practice of *asanas* have a beneficial impact on the whole body. *Asanas* not only tone the muscles, tissues, ligaments, joints and nerves, but also maintain the smooth functioning and health of all the body's systems. They relax the body and mind, allowing both to recover from fatigue or weakness and the stress of daily life. *Asanas* also boost metabolism, lymphatic circulation and hormonal secretions, and bring about a chemical balance in the body.

When one is relaxed, time expands. Every moment spent on relaxing the singers will save you double or triple the time during the music practice, as the time wasted with repetition due to unfocused singers will diminish. So many musical "problems" disappear when we sing in a healthy and joyful manner. You will be tuning the bodies, minds and ears of the singers, just as instrumentalists tune their instruments.

BREATH MANAGEMENT FOR SINGERS

Inhalation

- Inhale deeply through the nose (when possible). This grounds the diaphragm, fostering confidence (Anxiety causes pitch to sharpen). This insures the breath pressure will be in the belly, alleviating air pressure in the throat, allowing for a lower larynx, more open throat, and therefore rounder sound. Avoid the quick upper-chest "snatch breath" which causes flat pitch.
- Inhale less air. Breath into your lower back and pelvis only. Many singers take more breath than is required, and create shoulder or abdominal tension in the process. The "pushing of the voice" or "blowing out the cords" is caused by the stacking up of tension-filled breath pressure (which also causes flat pitch), while the "unsupported voice" is that which has too much loose, unfocused air moving through the larynx.
- The inhalation (especially between phrases, where this is most difficult) should occur naturally of its own accord, and not be forced as a gasp through the use of external muscles.

Exhalation / Singing

- Release dead air between phrases. In rehearsal this can be achieved with the sigh, the Neanderthal "HUH", the "cough-off", or laughter. The 'HUH' is not about singing low, but speaking/singing with connection, with undertones, and with confidence (it works with high voices as well - the more connected they are to their low, center-of-gravity singing energy, the higher they will be able to sing). Once they are using their "font of strength" of support, the task of tone placement will be more successful.
- Conserve air. Learn to manage the breath; do not blow it through the cords at the beginning of the phrase.
- Sustaining Power. Fear impairs proper breathing. Practice releasing the sound gently when your breath is done. Do not push past the natural end of your air, tightening the abdominals and shoulders in order to sing to the end of the line. Releasing the exhale without tension will improve your ability to sing longer phrases, because it takes away the fear. You have more air than you think you do.

Proper Support for Singers

- Support is the lengthening and expansion of the Neanderthal, or vocal sigh.
- The ribcage is lifted and solid (not rigid) and expanded side to side, like an accordion. Resist the inclination to drop the lift and side-to-side expansion as you sing.
- Inhale a tablespoon of air into your lower back.
- Breath, diaphragm, larynx, tailbone and feet are all grounded down.
- The head is centered over the spine.
- The lower back (lumbar muscles) is expanded.
- The throat, jaw, tongue and abdominal muscles are relaxed.
- Music doesn't sell, heart sells. The more the singer is aroused by musical inspiration, the more effective the support will be. Focussing exclusively on technical detail is discouraging and therefore harmful to the vocal mechanism.

This is who we are

I do not suggest that one can effect a permanent psychological change in all your choristers in a few rehearsals. This takes time, and is facilitated primarily by the carriage and attitude of the conductor, who will only help himself by reducing those things that block music-making, such as physical tension, and mental anxiety. Is our fear of imperfection obstructing our joy of making music? Is our aim of excellence based on avoiding "mistakes"? It is sometimes too easy to forget about the humanity in front of us; you never know what a person can bring to the table. Above all, we must remember that music is not simply about music; music is about humanity.

David Wilson is a conductor, singer, certified Yoga instructor, and breath therapist. He is currently heading into his second year of a Masters of Music in Choral Conducting at the University of Alberta. (780) 455-0318 wilsonrd@telusplanet.net.

(Part two of this article, outlining specific poses and exercises for the facilitation the concepts expressed above, will appear in the Fall issue of 2002)

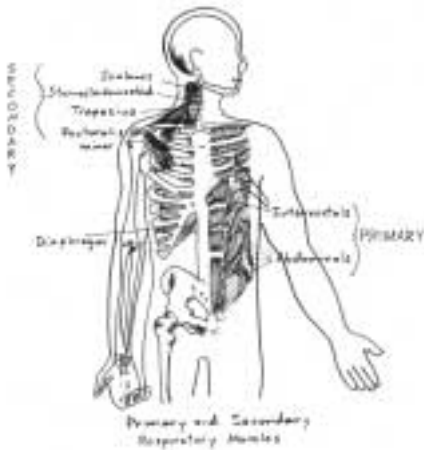
Yoga and Breath for Musicians 2

David Wilson

*If one can focus one's heart on music,
it is just like warming something which has been frozen.*

*The music's beauty of rhythm regulates the beating of the heart,
which helps restore health of body, mind and soul,
and bring them to their proper tuning.*

The joy of life depends upon the perfect tuning of mind and body.



Inayat Khan

The muscle responsible for most of our natural respiratory effort is the diaphragm (in combination with the intercostal muscles between the ribs, and the four layers of abdominals). When unhealthy, stressed, fearful or confused, our

body transfers the bulk of the work to the secondary (supporting) respiratory muscles, in readiness for our fight, flight, freeze, or faint responses. However, we often use these upper muscles unnecessarily, as our muscle-memory fools our brains into believing we are in jeopardy. As our respiration quickens, so does our heart rate, making reposeful performing difficult. Clavicular breathing will eventually cause these four muscles to ache, as they are being asked to do a job for which they were not intended.

The following postures are selected for ease of use during a normal rehearsal. The exhalation is the impetus for all movement in and out of poses; this connects the relaxation response to the poses, convincing the body that the goals are easy and enjoyable. (Holding the breath convinces the body that the exercise is difficult; the health benefits then diminish accordingly). We are often unaware of our breathing patterns. For instance, when you get out of your car, or when you pick up a heavy object, are you holding your breath? If the answer is yes, you may be heading toward injury. Instead, try exhaling to propel your body through the "effort". You will find that you get out of your car with more ease, and that the heavy object is lighter. This concept of consciously altering our breathing patterns is exactly the same when dealing with stressful mental/emotional circumstances such as performance anxiety.

A final note: There is a difference between "a good stretch" (a broad, lengthening sensation in the middle of muscles that focused breathing will alleviate) and "pain" (a sharp twinge around tendons or ligaments that breathing will not soften). All of these postures should be done slowly, with attentive thought and breath awareness; rushing causes injury. The ideas below are only guidelines; any pose can (and should) be modified for those who require a gentler stretch. These are also not intended as replacements for other time-honoured activities, only as supplemental methods for reaching the goal for which we all strive: Beautiful Music.

PHYSICAL WARM-UPS: STANDING

Massage Chain Turn to one side and massage the back and neck of whomever is in front of you. Not only does this feel great, but while relaxing your singers it will also encourage a close and more connected ensemble. Afterwards, each person can massage their own face, throat, and jaw.

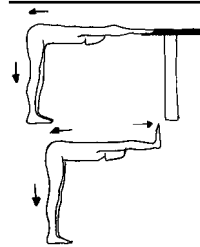
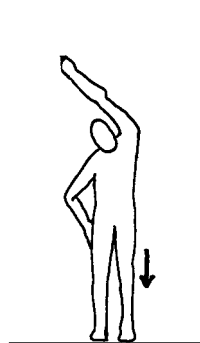
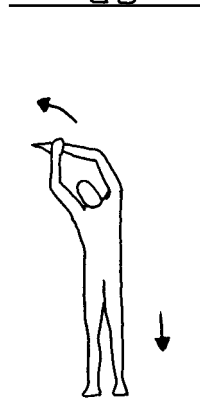


Table Stretch Place your hands (shoulder width and height) flat on wall, table, or back of a stable chair. Ensure that your feet are squarely positioned under your pelvis. Lengthen your spine, and exhale your chest towards the floor. You should feel the stretch in your shoulders, upper back, and armpit areas. Heels grounded.



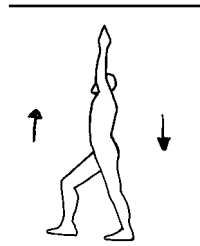
Palmtree 1 This exercise is for intercostal and abdominal awareness and expansion. Place your left hand on your left hip, right arm straight up in air. Inhale, do nothing, exhale, bend from hip to the left, reaching diagonally up and out with right hand. Keep sighing through the sensation for five breaths. Exhale back to center. Keep outer hip and leg grounded. Reverse.

Palmtree 2 Same, but slide hand down from hip as bending to the side. Reverse.

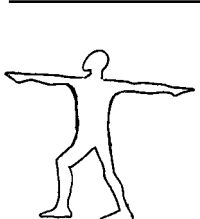


Palmtree 3 Same, both arms up, left hand holds right wrist, exhale, bend to the left. Reverse.

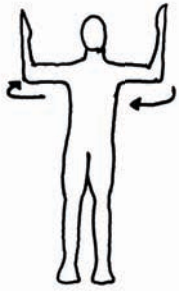
The next two poses are about holding music folders properly. Improper breathing and stance leads to heavy and stiff arms, inducing hunched shoulders, tight leg muscles, and bracing the neck, hip and knee joints. The jaws and tongues then tighten and our singing soon deteriorates. Relaxed breathing in these poses increases our leg and torso stability, training our arms to be light and strong.



Warrior 1 Place your left leg two to four feet in front of the right, with your feet stable and grounded. Bend front knee. In final position, your knee is over your heel, so adjust accordingly. Arms in "fieldgoal position", belly button facing straight ahead through feet. Exhale, back of the body drops, front of the body lifts. Come out on exhale, reverse.



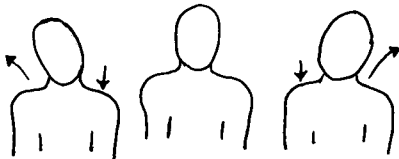
Warrior 2 Same feet position, front leg bent, but torso now faces to the right. Arms and hands are parallel to floor, head facing out over left arm. Come out on exhale, reverse.



Cyclone or Washing Machine This energizer opens the breathing mechanism. Feet a few inches apart, so the leg bones are straight under the outer edges of the pelvis. Hips steady; pelvis always faces forward, or the torque of this pose goes into the knees. Arms at right angles. Turn back and forth from your waist, raising the arms a few inches every 5-10 breaths, then come back down slowly. The whole exercise should take about a minute. Again, the hips do not move. (A word of caution to those with lower back problems. These twists are excellent for lower back-aches, but they are done lying down, with less movement).

Hippy Shake Many of you know this fun activity. This is a tension breaker, laughter creator, and energizer; it also aids in body awareness. In order, shake each body part, counting out loud to 8: left hand, right hand, left forearm, right forearm, left entire arm, right entire arm, left foot, right foot, left calf, right calf, left entire leg, right entire leg, whole body. Then count to 4, do the same thing, then to 2!

PHYSICAL WARM-UPS: SEATED



Neck Stretch These poses calm the mind, and relaxes the jaw, neck and tongue. Tilt your neck gently to the left shoulder, lifting both sides of the face, as if bending around an imaginary grapefruit lodged between shoulder and neck. Reach diagonally up and out with the head, while stretching down with the right deltoid (shoulder muscle). Hold, and sigh through the stretch for five breaths minimum. Come back to center on an exhale. Reverse. Secondly, turn to either side, chin parallel to the floor, pulling back on the opposite shoulder. Watch for clavicular breathing and for "Chicken Neck" (esp. in high school males), as both inhibit healthy, free singing.



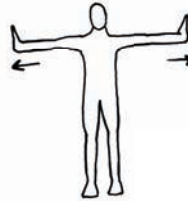
Fieldgoal Arms reaching straight up past ears, shoulders relaxed. Hold for five to ten breaths, set the ribcage, then bring arms down on the exhalation, keeping the ribcage lifted and expanded. This helps to discourage the "heave and collapse" ribcage breathing.



Shoulder Rotation Clasp your hands behind your back, palms facing forward, lift as high as comfortable, gently roll shoulders. Breathe. Repeat with palms facing back.



Double Helix Stretch your arms straight out to the sides, bring forward, cross elbows, bend at elbows and see if you can get palms to touch. If comfortable, gently roll shoulders.



Samson Reach arms straight out to the sides again, but this time attempt to point your fingers toward the ceiling, pushing through the heels of the hands. This is not as easy as it sounds. This loosens up the muscles that become constricted due to holding music. This posture is also excellent for pianists.



Chair Twist This favorite aids ribcage awareness and expansion. Sit in a chair sideways. Place right thigh firmly against the back of the chair, feet and knees together. Exhale and place your hands on either side of the back of the chair. With each exhalation, turn and twist farther around to right. Breath into ribcage. Neck, jaw, shoulders are relaxed, only forearms work. Reverse.

BREATH DEVELOPERS

Breath Comparison Ask your choir to purposefully breath high in the chest, then change to low in the belly, and ask for comments. Do they feel more "in their head", or connected to their "gut feelings"? Which method makes them feel more grounded, which makes them anxious or flighty?

Font of Strength Breath 1 Sit on a chair, eyes closed for inward concentration, with hand just below belly button. Breathe into this area for ten breaths, quiet and focused. Check that the impetus of the breath begins low, then expands outward.

Font of Strength Breath 2 Same, but inhale with hands on side ribs (like an accordion), then move hands to belly, exhale a 'tss' by gently drawing the belly toward the spine. Repeat a minimum of ten times. Over time, this will help train healthy breathing habits.

Folding Exhale This movement encourages a full exhale from the abdomen. Seated, bend over slowly from hips as you exhale. Allow inhale to occur naturally as you sit up. Repeat for no more than five breaths. (This is excellent for asthmatics, but only under controlled circumstances - avoid if asthma is acute. Those with migraines or eye troubles should not do this exercise, as there is increased blood pressure to the head).

Lower Back Expansion Good to do right after massage, alone, or in partners, depending on the comfort level of your singers. This is done seated, your hands on your lower back around the kidneys and lower lumbar muscles. Breathe and expand into this area. Partners can check for improper raising of shoulders on the inhalation, and that they fully, vocally sigh on the exhalation.

ENERGETIC PLACEMENT

Vocal Sigh This exercise is for finding a complete, connected, and relaxed vocal exhalation. This takes consistent practice outside of the rehearsal. Is the voice connected to the breath, or riding on top? Is the exhalation smooth and complete, or has it got bumps in it, as if it is falling down stairs? If so, this is stress held in the cardiovascular system. Sigh until smooth, noticing where the exhalation is centered in the body, high or low. Adding voice will speed up the process. The singers should feel more peaceful, relaxed and centered almost immediately. The health benefits are innumerable.

Larynx Awareness Have your singers yawn - Do they feel the throat open? Place hand on throat. Do they feel something drop? Hold the jaw open for a few breaths with the forefinger. Is there immediate pain? These people need to relax their jaws, or their larynxes will never normalize. We want the larynx to be halfway between the two extremes of too closed or too open. Most of us will have at least a few singers whose larynxes have become frozen in an abnormally high position. Too much breath (pressure) forced through the vocal folds will contribute to this phenomenon.

Neanderthal 'Huh' The point here is to train the exhalation to arise from lower abdominal and back muscle energy, not from the throat. Listen - where is it centered? Is the belly activated, making the sound full of undertones and breath energy and body connection? Do it with each chorister - they will learn from each other. Is the sound coming from the "font of strength" below the ribs? Where in the body in the 'aw' focussed - high or low? This works especially well with teenage boys, but also helps females connect their head-voice to their support.

VOCAL PLACEMENT

Sirens Play in the upper register with freedom; move, walk around, stretch, whatever it takes to free their minds and bodies, reaching the high notes joyfully and freely. Allow the singers to be creative.

Breath Management Take a thimbleful of air in the lower back, and then vocalize on 'ng', 'vv', 'ss', or tongue trills. Listen for evenness of tone. Ask them to experience what a steady, focussed, small stream of air feels like. Have them notice how long they can sing on a tiny bit of air, and that "heaving" a massive inhalation actually hinders a long phrase, and a legato line. Then, when singing words, the trick is to maintain constant and invariable breath pressure while managing both vowels and consonants.

Slack Jaw "Blah" or "Plah" vocal exercises will help achieve the healthy, relaxed slack-jaw effect of a correctly positioned jaw.

Head Resonance Puppy whine, open-mouthed hum, 'oo', or tiny siren. Descending vocalizes are usually best. However, these exercises will simply turn into improperly produced sinus-tone if the singer's energy is not first centered in the abdominal region.

Free first, Soft later Encourage full, confident, nourishing vocalizing before asking them to sing "piano". They will want to please you at soft passages, often sacrificing proper technique. Otherwise we run the risk of unhealthy, unsupported and throaty "half-singing", thereby winning the battle of dynamic contrast but losing the war of a fully expressive, well-blended choral tone.

CONFIDENCE: CONNECTING BREATH, IMAGINATION AND BODY

Valkyrie Entrance This expressive and powerful movement is especially good for timid teenage singers who yell and scream in the playground, but clam up upon entering rehearsal. They are almost always breathing at around 25% of capacity. I've found it is best to have all the singers take part; the beginners will learn from the more confident. Ask them, one by one, to take a substantial, full-footed step forward, throw their arms wide and sing a vowel. Sometimes asking for "playground voice" works. (This assumes an environment where the singers feel safe, free from criticism or judgement). Let them laugh, not at each other, but via the joy of breaking through inhibitions. This will take some time, but will pay huge dividends, as they develop into a confident team of joyful singers.

Phrasal Arm Sweep As the singers sing a long phrase have them draw their arm from across their chests to open position, (i.e. right arm starts pointing left and comes across to the right) feeling the music in their arm. The idea here is to feel a phrase as a kinesthetic reality. Then sing same phrase, take the arm away, and ask them, "did it feel the same? What changed?" They will respond by moving away from the short, choppy phrases, feeling the larger musical structure more intuitively.

This two-part article has been about repose. In our age, nervous activity has increased to the extent that we rarely sit and listen to our selves. Listening is not only at the core of true music-making, but is also at the foundation of our harmony (or disharmony) with each other. Our lives today often lack equilibrium and poise. These "full of repose" techniques offer an opportunity to deepen one's connection with one's own breath, voice, and body - in short, our total selves. Slowing down and sensing my inner world has certainly assisted me in experiencing both life and music on a more intimate and profoundly personal level.

*What makes us feel drawn to music is that our whole being is music;
our mind and our body, the nature in which we live,
the nature which has made us,
all that is beneath and around us, it is all music;
and we are close to all this music,
and we live and move and have our being in music.*

Inayat Khan

David Wilson is a conductor, singer, certified yoga instructor, and breath therapist. He is currently in his second year of his Masters of Music in Choral Conducting at the University of Alberta. He can be contacted at (780) 455-0318 or wilsonrd@telusplanet.net.

Drawings by C.S. Zelmer



Yoga and Breath for Musicians 1

Time is Breath

G.I Gurdjieff

Breath, Body, Mind and Life

The use of effective breathing to improve mental and physical health goes back many thousands of years. Natural, full-body breathing powered by the lower belly is essentially our birthright. As infants our bones, muscles, organs and entire spinal column would undulate with the pulse of our breath. In *The Breathing Book*, Donna Farhi states:

Breathing affects your respiratory, cardiovascular, neurological, gastrointestinal, muscular, and psychic systems, and also has a general affect on your sleep, memory, ability to concentrate, and your energy levels.

As we are challenged by the rigors of life, we begin to tense our body and breath in order to “hold firm”, just as we would hold onto a tree during a strong wind. Dealing with increased levels of psychological stress increases the tempo of our internal metronomes, and our chemical, cellular and neurological paces quicken. In an effort to sustain this hurried rate, our muscles often learn to remain tense, expending valuable energy. Eventually, we begin to constrict our primary respiratory muscles (the abdominals, intercostals and diaphragm), flooding the body with adrenaline in order to cope with the situation. The body then relies on the secondary respiratory muscles (scalenes, sternocleidomastoid, trapezius, and pectoralis minor) to sustain the pace. However, the secondary system exists only to assist with stressful situations; it is not designed to power our cardiovascular system on a constant basis. Furthermore, the continual tensing of these muscles weakens their strength, inducing other muscles to overwork in order to pick up the slack; this often leads to injury. Society’s ideal of the “flat, rock-hard stomach” also encourages shallow breathing, as we obstruct the diaphragm’s natural descent into the abdominal cavity. This creates a lack of connection to our “font of strength” in our lower belly, decreasing our efficacy and self-confidence. As we gulp shallow inhalations and truncate our exhalations, we begin to feel as if we “can’t get a full breath”. These harmful events eventually lead to the pH balance of the body shifting, favouring acids over alkaloids, which in turn creates more stress, and further weakens the immune system. Naturopaths, Breath therapists and Homeopaths have identified this vicious cycle with Asthma, Sinusitis, Bronchitis, Ulcers, High Blood Pressure, Depression, Anxiety, Indigestion, Hyperventilation, PMS, Headaches, and Chronic Fatigue. There is an alternative to ingesting sugar, caffeine, or other stimulants to artificially increase our energy levels. Consciously returning to natural, unhindered breathing allows us to release physical tension and re-vitalize our body and mind.

Breathing is effortless, but after many years of ingraining unhealthy habits of tension, the breath becomes effortful; conscious relaxation techniques become necessary. We should not be forcing the body to breathe, but instead, learning how to get out of the way, allowing the body to breathe naturally. This restores the inherent calm of the mind, enabling us to better cope with the frenzied activity of daily life.

Breath, Body, Mind and Rehearsal

Western society encourages individual expression, yet the practice of assertion often lacks positive reinforcement. As a result, many people are not speaking (much less singing) with their true voice. Amateur singers may have spent days, weeks, or even years breathing shallow, and nervously speaking from their throat; “using the voice” equals stress. It is unrealistic to expect the amateur singer to magically change these ingrained habits exclusively for weekly rehearsals. Kenny Werner, in his book *Effortless Mastery* writes:

A person might give up music for reasons of insufficient talent, when upon closer inspection it becomes clear that... many people are crippled by an inability to focus and by a sense of being overwhelmed. These problems are often mistaken for laziness or lethargy.

The already overwhelmed singer, with her concentration levels pushed to the maximum, and worried about letting down her conductor or fellow choristers, works hard to achieve the correct pitches, rhythms and text. On some level, singing and music has been equated with fear. If this continues, the singer will exhibit ungrounded behavior. Flighty giggling, lack of concentration, anger, an overly rigid or slouched sitting posture may all be attempts by the singer to deal with anxiety. The sound will be inflexible, as many singers (especially men) will clench their abdominal muscles inward, take too much breath too high in the chest, and push from their larynx in order to “lead the section” and create a “full sound”. Legato singing will be impossible. As the secondary respiratory muscles strain, the singer will begin to feel chronic tension in his upper back and neck. The impetus of the breath will leave its proper “font of strength” position, rise higher in the chest, create improper airflow, and lead to over-singing. As breathing becomes impaired, the singer will feel they have less sustaining power. Incorrectly assuming they need more air, they will inhale with great effort, move the abdomen strongly upwards, thrust the chest forward, and lift the shoulders. Proper support and breath management has now been abandoned. According to Master Great Nothing of Sung-Shan in the famous *Taoist Canon on Breathing*:

As for the proper inner breath, it is called the Embryonic breath.
Since it is naturally inside you, you do not have to seek outside for it.

Standing rigidly during warm-ups will not help release these difficulties, as they are already tight from the inside-out. Releasing this tension will facilitate a smoother rehearsal. A method to combat this rigidity is to have the singers move and stretch before and during vocalizations. Throw the arms in the air on high notes, stomp the foot to encourage uninhibited entrances, vocalize with sirens and laughter: anything to activate their energy, release their physical and mental tension, and bring them back into a calm, joyful, grounded sense of themselves. The improved tranquility, happiness and confidence of the singers will allow the focus, concentration and togetherness of the ensemble to escalate accordingly.

What is Yoga?

Yoga is many things to many people. For our purposes it is a system of stretching and breathing for increased flexibility and strength. While each pose has specific physical, mental and vocal health benefits (too numerous to discuss here), what makes Yoga different from standard exercises is patience. Our muscles have a natural inclination to remain in their given state; this is known as the “recoil response.” In Yoga one remains gently in a stretch, attempting to relax more each moment, until the “recoil response” subsides and the tension eases, thereby lengthening and strengthening the muscles. This can be a good example for how we can adjust to difficult situations in our daily lives. One puts oneself in an unusual pose (*asana* in Sanskrit) that at first seems tight, tense and difficult, but with patience begins to soften. Once you have found repose, the body has learned to turn a stressful situation into a relaxing one. The implications are innumerable. As the renowned yogi B.K.S. Iyengar writes in *Yoga: The Path to Holistic Health*:

The practice of *asanas* have a beneficial impact on the whole body. *Asanas* not only tone the muscles, tissues, ligaments, joints and nerves, but also maintain the smooth functioning and health of all the body’s systems. They relax the body and mind, allowing both to recover from fatigue or weakness and the stress of daily life. *Asanas* also boost metabolism, lymphatic circulation and hormonal secretions, and bring about a chemical balance in the body.

When one is relaxed, time expands. Every moment spent on relaxing the singers will save you double or triple the time during the music practice, as the time wasted with repetition due to unfocused singers will diminish. So many musical “problems” disappear when we sing in a healthy and joyful manner. You will be tuning the bodies, minds and ears of the singers, just as instrumentalists tune their instruments.

Breath Management for Singers

Inhalation

- Inhale deeply through the nose (when possible). This grounds the diaphragm, fostering confidence (Anxiety causes pitch to sharpen). This insures the breath pressure will be in the belly, alleviating air pressure in the throat, allowing for a lower larynx, more open throat, and therefore rounder sound. Avoid the quick upper-chest “snatch breath” which causes flat pitch.
- Inhale less air. Breath into your lower back and pelvis only. Many singers take more breath than is required, and create shoulder or abdominal tension in the process. The “pushing of the voice” or “blowing out the cords” is caused by the stacking up of tension-filled breath pressure (which also causes flat pitch), while the “unsupported voice” is that which has too much loose, unfocused air moving through the larynx.
- The inhalation (especially between phrases, where this is most difficult) should occur naturally of its own accord, and not be forced as a gasp through the use of external muscles.

Exhalation / Singing

- Release dead air between phrases. In rehearsal this can be achieved with the sigh, the Neanderthal “HUH”, the “cough-off”, or laughter. The ‘HUH’ is not about singing low, but speaking/singing with connection, with undertones, and with confidence (it works with high voices as well – the more connected they are to their low, center-of-gravity

singing energy, the higher they will be able to sing). Once they are using their “font of strength” of support, the task of tone placement will be more successful.

- Conserve air. Learn to manage the breath; do not blow it through the cords at the beginning of the phrase.
- Sustaining Power. Fear impairs proper breathing. Practice releasing the sound gently when your breath is done. Do not push past the natural end of your air, tightening the abdominals and shoulders in order to sing to the end of the line. Releasing the exhale without tension will improve your ability to sing longer phrases, because it takes away the fear. You have more air than you think you do.

Proper Support for Singers

- Support is the lengthening and expansion of the Neanderthal, or vocal sigh.
- The ribcage is lifted and solid (not rigid) and expanded side to side, like an accordion. Resist the inclination to drop the lift and side-to-side expansion as you sing.
- Inhale a tablespoon of air into your lower back.
- Breath, diaphragm, larynx, tailbone and feet are all grounded down.
- The head is centered over the spine.
- The lower back (lumbar muscles) is expanded.
- The throat, jaw, tongue and abdominal muscles are relaxed.
- Music doesn't sell, heart sells. The more the singer is aroused by musical inspiration, the more effective the support will be. Focussing exclusively on technical detail is discouraging and therefore harmful to the vocal mechanism.

This is who we are

I do not suggest that one can effect a permanent psychological change in all your choristers in a few rehearsals. This takes time, and is facilitated primarily by the carriage and attitude of the conductor, who will only help himself by reducing those things that block music-making, such as physical tension, and mental anxiety. Is our fear of imperfection obstructing our joy of making music? Is our aim of excellence based on avoiding “mistakes”? It is sometimes too easy to forget about the humanity in front of us; you never know what a person can bring to the table. Above all, we must remember that music is not simply about music; music is about humanity.

Bio

David Wilson is a conductor, singer, certified Yoga instructor, and breath therapist. He is currently heading into his second year of a Masters of Music in Choral Conducting at the University of Alberta. (780) 455-0318 wilsonrd@telusplanet.net.

Yoga and Breath for Musicians 2

by David Wilson

If one can focus one's heart on music,
it is just like warming something which has been frozen.
The music's beauty of rhythm regulates the beating of the heart,
which helps restore health of body, mind and soul, and bring them to their proper tuning.
The joy of life depends upon the perfect tuning of mind and body.
Inayat Khan

(drawing of "Primary and Secondary Respiratory Muscle here, with this paragraph.)
The muscle responsible for most of our natural respiratory effort is the diaphragm (in combination with the intercostal muscles between the ribs, and the four layers of abdominals). When unhealthy, stressed, fearful or confused, our body transfers the bulk of the work to the secondary (supporting) respiratory muscles, in readiness for our fight, flight, freeze or faint responses. However, we often use these upper muscles unnecessarily, our muscle memory fooling our brains into believing we are in jeopardy. As our respiration quickens, so does our heart rate, making reposeful performing difficult. Clavicular breathing will eventually cause these four muscles to ache, as they are being asked to do a job for which they were not intended.

The following postures are selected for ease of use during a normal rehearsal. The exhalation is the impetus for all movement in and out of poses; this connects the relaxation response to the poses, convincing the body that the goals are easy and enjoyable. (Holding the breath convinces the body that the exercise is "hard; the health benefits then diminish accordingly). We are often unaware of our breath patterns. When you get out of your car, or when you pick up a heavy object, are you holding your breath? If the answer is yes, you may be heading toward injury. Instead, try exhaling to propel your body through the "effort". You will find you get out of your car with more ease, and that the heavy object is lighter. This concept of consciously altering our breath patterns is exactly the same when dealing stressful mental/emotional circumstances such as performance anxiety.

A final note: There is a difference between "A Good Stretch" (a broad, lengthening sensation in the middle of muscle, that focussed breathing alleviates) and "Pain" (a sharp twinge around tendons or ligaments that breathing will not soften). All of these postures should be done slowly, with great thought and breath awareness; rushing causes injury. The ideas below are only guidelines, any pose can (and should) be modified for those who require a gentler stretch. These are also not intended as replacements for other time-honoured activities, only as alternative methods for reaching the goal for which we all strive: Beautiful Music.

Physical Warm-ups: Standing

Massage Chain Turn to one side, massage the back and neck of whoever is in front of you. This also encourages a close and more connected ensemble. After, each person massages their own face, throat, and jaw.

Table Stretch Hands (shoulder width and height) flat on wall, table, or back of a stable chair. Position feet under pelvis. Lengthen spine, exhale chest toward floor, stretch into shoulders, upper back and armpit area. Heels grounded.

Palmtree 1 For intercostal and abdominal awareness and expansion. Place left hand on hip, right arm straight up in air. Inhale do nothing, exhale, bend from hip to the left, reaching diagonally up and out with right hand. Keep sighing through the sensation for five breaths. Exhale back to center. Keep outer hip and leg grounded. Reverse.

Palmtree 2 Same, but slide hand down from hip as bending to the side. Reverse.

Palmtree 3 Same, both arms up, left hand holds right wrist, exhale, bend to the left. Reverse.

Warrior 1 Left leg two to four feet in front of the right, feet stable and grounded. Bend front knee. In final position, knee is over heel, so adjust accordingly. Arms in “fieldgoal position”, belly button facing straight ahead through feet. Exhale, back of the body drops, front of the body lifts. Come out on exhale, reverse.

Warrior 2 Same feet position, front leg bent, but torso now faces to the right. Arms and hands are parallel to floor, head facing out over left arm. Come out on exhale, reverse.

The Warriors are about holding music folders properly. Improper breathing and stance leads to heavy and stiff arms, inducing hunched shoulders, tight leg muscles, and bracing the neck, hip and knee joints. The jaws and tongues then tighten and our singing soon deteriorates. Relaxed breathing in these poses increases our leg and torso stability, training our arms to be light and strong.

Cyclone or Washing Machine This energizer opens the breathing mechanism. Feet a few inches apart, so the leg bones are straight under the outer edges of the pelvis. Hips steady; pelvis always faces forward, or the torque of this pose goes into the knees. Arms at right angles. Turn back and forth from your waist, raising the arms a few inches every 5-10 breaths, then come back down slowly. The whole exercise should take about a minute. Again, hips do not move. (Careful with anyone with lower back problems. These twists are excellent for lower back-aches, but they are done lying down, with less movement).

Hippy Shake Many of you know this fun activity. This is a tension breaker, laughter creator, and energizer; it also aids body awareness. In order, shake each body part, counting out loud to 8: left hand, right hand, left forearm, right forearm, left entire arm, right entire arm, left foot, right foot, left calf, right calf, left entire leg, right entire leg, whole body. Then count to 4, do the same thing, then to 2!

Physical Warm-ups: Seated

Neck Stretch Calms mind, relaxes jaw, neck and tongue. Tilt neck gently to the left shoulder, lifting *both* sides of the face, as if bending around an imaginary grapefruit lodged between shoulder and neck. Reach diagonally up and out with the head, while stretching down with the right deltoid (shoulder muscle). Hold, sigh through the stretch

for five breaths minimum. Come back to center on an exhale. Reverse. Secondly, turn to either side, chin parallel to the floor, pulling back on the opposite shoulder. Watch for clavicular breathing and for “Chicken Neck” (esp. in high school males), as both inhibit healthy, free singing.

Fieldgoal Arms reaching straight up past ears, shoulders relaxed. Hold for 5-10 breaths, set the ribcage, then bring arms down on the exhalation, keeping the ribcage lifted and expanded. This helps to discourage the “heave and collapse” ribcage breathing.

Shoulder Rotation Hands clasped behind back, palms facing forward, lift as high as comfortable, gently roll shoulders. Breathe. Repeat with palms facing back.

Double Helix Arms straight out to sides, bring forward, cross elbows, bend at elbows and see if you can get palms to touch. If comfortable, gently roll shoulders.

Samson Arms straight out to sides, attempt to point fingers toward ceiling, pushing through the heels of the hands. This is not as easy as it sounds. This loosens up the muscles that become constricted due to holding music. Also excellent for pianists.

Chair Twist For ribcage awareness and expansion. Sit in a chair sideways. Place right thigh firmly against the back of the chair, feet and knees together. Exhale, put hands on either side of the back of the chair. Each exhale, you turn and twist farther around to right. Breathe into ribcage. Neck, jaw, shoulders are relaxed, only forearms work. Reverse.

Breath Developers

Breath Comparison Ask your choir to purposefully breathe high in the chest, then change to low in the belly, and ask for comments. Do they feel more “in their head”, or connected to their “gut feelings”? Which method makes them feel more grounded, which makes them anxious or flighty?

Font of Strength Breath 1 Sit on a chair, eyes closed for inward concentration, with hand just below belly button. Breathe into this area for 10 breaths, quiet and focused. Check that the impetus of the breath begins low, then expands outward.

Font of Strength Breath 2 Same, but inhale with hands on side ribs (like an accordion), then move hands to belly, exhale by gently drawing the belly toward the spine. Repeat a minimum of 10 times. Over time, this will help train healthy breathing habits.

Folding Exhale Encourages a full exhale from the abdomen. Seated, bend over slowly from hips as you exhale. Allow inhale to occur naturally as you sit up. Repeat for no more than 5 breaths. (This is excellent for asthmatics, but only under controlled circumstances – avoid if asthma is acute. Those with migraines or eye troubles do not do this exercise).

Lower Back Expansion Good to do right after massage. Alone or in partners, depending on the comfort level of your singers. Seated, hands on lower back around the kidneys.

Breathe, expanding this area. Partners can check for improper raising of shoulders on the inhalation, and that they fully, vocally sigh on the exhalation.

Energetic Placement

Vocal Sigh A full, connected, relaxed vocal exhalation. This sometimes takes time. Is the voice connected to the breath, or riding on top? Is the exhalation smooth and complete, or has it got bumps in it, like it is falling down stairs? If so, this is stress held in the cardiovascular system. Sigh until smooth, noticing where the exhalation is centered in the body, high or low. Adding voice will speed up the process. The singers should feel more peaceful, relaxed and centered almost immediately.

Larynx Awareness Yawn - Do they feel the throat open? Place hand on throat. Do they feel something drop? Hold the jaw open for a few breaths with the forefinger. Is there immediate pain? These people need to relax their jaws, or their larynx with never normalize. We want the larynx to be halfway between the two extremes of too closed or too open. Some larynxes have been virtually squeezed shut for years.

Neanderthal ‘Huh’ Driven by lower abdominal and back muscle energy, not by the throat. Listen – where is it centered? Is the belly activated, making the sound full of undertones and breath energy and body connection? Do it with each chorister – they will learn from each other. Is the sound coming from the “font of strength”? Where in the body in the ‘aw’ focussed – high or low? Works especially well with teenage boys, but also helps females connect their head-voice to their support.

Vocal Placement

Sirens Play in the upper register with freedom; move, walk around, stretch, whatever it takes to free their minds and bodies, reaching the high notes joyfully and freely. Allow the singers to be creative.

Breath Management Take a thimbleful of air in the lower back, and then vocalize on ‘ng’, ‘vv’, ‘ss’ or tongue trills. Listen for evenness of tone. Experience what a steady, focussed stream of air feels like. Have them notice how long they can sing on a tiny bit of air, and that heaving a huge inhalation actually hinders a long phrase.

Slack Jaw “Blah” or “Plah” vocal exercises will help achieve the healthy, slack-jaw effect.

Head Resonance Puppy whine, open-mouthed hum, ‘oo’, or tiny siren. Descending vocalizes are usually best. However, these exercises will simply turn into sinus-tone if their energy is not first centered low in their core.

Free first, Soft later Encourage full, confident, nourishing vocalizing before asking them to sing “*piano*”. They will want to please you at soft passages, often sacrificing proper technique. Otherwise we run the risk of unhealthy, unsupported and throaty “half-

singing”, thereby barely winning the battle (dynamic contrast!?) but certainly losing the war. Voice is the expression of our living spirit – attend it mindfully.

Confidence: Connecting breath, imagination and body

Valkyrie Entrance Especially good for timid teenage singers who yell and scream in the playground, but clam up upon entering rehearsal. They are almost always breathing at around 25% of capacity. I’ve found it is best to have all the singers take part; the beginners will learn from the more confident. Ask them, one by one, to take a substantial, full-footed step forward, throw their arms wide and sing a vowel. Sometimes asking for “playground voice” works. (This assumes an environment where the singers feel safe, free from criticism or judgement). Let them laugh, not at each other, but via the joy of breaking through inhibitions. This will take some time, but will pay huge dividends, as they develop into a confident team of joyful singers.

Phrasal Arm Sweep As the singers sing a long phrase have them draw their arm from across their chests to open position, (i.e. right arm starts pointing left and comes across to the right) feeling the music in their arm. The idea here is to feel a phrase as a kinesthetic reality. Then sing same phrase, take the arm away, ask them, did it feel the same? What changed? They will respond by moving away from the short, choppy phrases, feeling the larger musical structure more intuitively.

This two-part article has been about repose. In our age, nervous activity has increased to the extent that we rarely sit and listen to our selves. Listening is not only at the core of true music-making, but is also at the foundation of our harmony (or disharmony) with each other. Our lives today often lack equilibrium and poise. These “full of repose” techniques offer an opportunity to deepen one’s connection with one’s own breath, voice, and body. Slowing down and sensing the inner world has certainly assisted me in experiencing both life and music on a more intimate and profound level.

What makes us feel drawn to music is that our whole being is music;
our mind and our body, the nature in which we live, the nature which has made us,
all that is beneath and around us, it is all music; and we are close to all this music,
and we live and move and have our being in music.

Inayat Khan

David Wilson is a conductor, singer, certified yoga instructor, and breath therapist. He is currently in his second year of his Masters of Music in Choral Conducting at the University of Alberta. He can be contacted at (780) 455-0318 or wilsonrd@shaw.ca.

Published in Quires, by the Alberta Choral Federation, 2002