

The Singer's and Speaker's Handbook

*Scientific Gymnastics
for the Voice*

by

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Preface

Improving Your Voice

Everyone realizes that speaking and singing are means of self-expression and communication, but few people realize that their voice can give enjoyment and pleasure to others as well as be a constant source of self-gratification. A good voice does **not** have to be a rarity bestowed only upon a fortunate few. It can be developed with care through study and application. Many potentially fine voices go to waste through lack of understanding and development, and through misuse. As singer or speaker you must know what you are doing, how your body produces sound, and what your voice communicates to others. You must achieve some sensible technique for voice production, if you are to avoid the unhappy sounds that issue from a tortured throat and frustrated mind, and if you are to sing or speak with charm, facility, and pleasure to your listeners.

If you accept some simple disciplines, there is no reason why you cannot fulfill your desire to sing and speak well. All learning requires large doses of patience, discipline, repetition, and fun. The trite saying is that art is 10 percent inspiration and 90 percent determination.

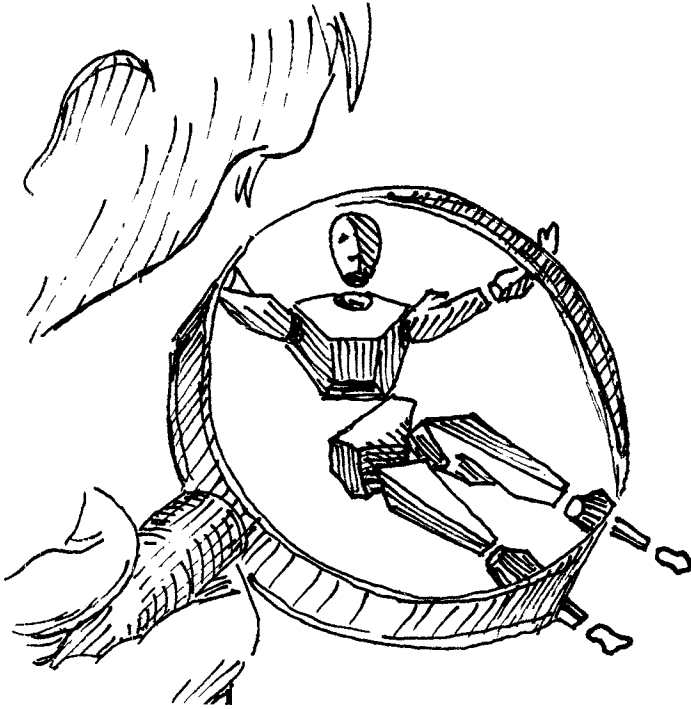
The purpose of this book is to examine you and your voice, step by step, as simply as possible. Exercises and gymnastics are included to help which require only one-half to three-quarters of an hour of work a day. The chapters are planned to explain how your voice works, how it functions, how to use it, how to improve it, and how to rid yourself of various stumbling blocks — most importantly those of strain, repression, and lack of knowledge of the simple fundamentals.

Your voice is dependent not only on your desire or intuition, but on mastering breathing, a well-balanced and relaxed body, correct tone production, clear articulation, and a basic knowledge of music and rhythm. You **must** also achieve conscious control and flexibility of your voice.

A chapter also deals with the problems of facing an audience, and the basics of showmanship, which every performer needs. Another section is devoted to dealing with a choir.

Music and speech are natural gifts to us all. They are not specialized esoteric arts. Through self-knowledge and determination you may happily and easily claim what is yours by right — to sing well and to speak well!

Chapter 1



Self-Analysis

One of the great “secrets” of any art is the ability of the creative craftsman to analyze and evaluate his own work. A musician deals with sound, and the only way to evaluate sound is by listening, developing an ear. The result of effort and study is revealed not only in the quality of the sound of the voice itself, but also in terms of its effect on the listener. If your work has been intelligent, you should be able to note your own development and have some idea of the kind of voice you have; not in such general terms as “good” or “bad,” but in the specific effect it has on others when you use it.

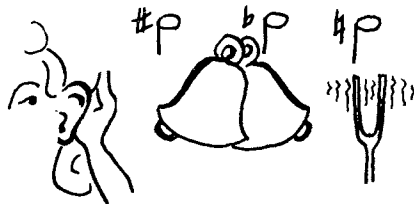
Your voice does not sound the same to other people as it does to yourself because of the way the human ear is constructed. So your **most accurate gauge is your listener’s reaction**. Never forget that speech and song are first and foremost forms of communication.

People usually sing for one of the following reasons: because they enjoy it and find it a compatible hobby, because it is a profitable avocation, for the choir singer and semiprofessional, or because they wish a career for themselves and the resultant fame and fortune. A future for a professional singer requires a combination of certain essential qualifications: voice, brains, talent, a good ear, sound musical knowledge, stick-to-it-iveness, and good luck. As a matter of fact, anyone who sings well, exemplifies the combination of these qualities. The difference between the career singer and the hobby singer lies perhaps in the degree to which these qualities have been applied. To have a vocal career, you must depend not only on your gifts and capabilities, but more importantly, on your willingness to apply yourself — to submit to self-discipline.

One of the first steps in developing yourself is to know yourself. Learn to listen to yourself. Listen not with the idea of being afraid of what you are doing, instead, just aware of what you are doing. You should listen not with infatuation to the sound of your own voice, but dispassionately and objectively. This kind of objective self-consciousness is the key to progress.

Strike a note on the piano. Sound this note vocally; that is, sing it easily. Don't try to make it good or bad, just sing it. Strike the note again. Sing it again. Can you notice any difference between the two vocal sounds? Was one better than the other?

As you begin to be able to detect differences of this kind, you will begin to develop your ear. Comparison and the ability to detect differences are the beginnings of discrimination.



Examine and analyze yourself honestly, so that you can understand what you are doing when you sing or speak. Find out what interferes between your thought and your voice, what comes between your intention and your effect on the listener.

Shyness and Stage Fright

Have you ever noticed that some people can do well at home but are terrible when with their teacher? Performing in the presence of others **should** result in greater and better output. This is true especially when the work is of a physical or muscular nature and the other participants are friends. However, it is often true that work that involves careful discrimination, judgment, thoughtfulness, and originality can suffer when performed in the presence of others.

The problem of working alone or with others differs from the dilemma created by shyness, insecurity, and self-consciousness.

It is natural to feel shy when one finds oneself the center of unaccustomed attention. There is a wholly involuntary tightening of the muscles and an increase in glandular activity. This can occur not only on a public platform, but on the dance floor, a street corner, or in a living room. Some individuals are more seriously affected than others, but the feeling is common to everyone at some time or other.

Leadership depends upon one's ability to "step out front," that is, to be the center of attention.

But sometimes the feeling of shyness gets out of hand. It can then lead one to avoid a person or thing, caution or timidity making the sufferer reserved, bashful, and distrustful. The shy person is torn by a desire for a thing and by a fear of it; a fear that it will cost him too much holds him back. Often he will settle the dilemma by putting out no effort to fulfil his desire, finding it safer to stay in a corner. An unresolved conflict of this sort involves a waste of energy, for the shy person will avoid putting his energies wholeheartedly into anything.

But a shy person can change. He can resolve his conflicts if he will recognize them. The hold that shyness has on him will be relaxed once he realizes that he **can** change. As soon as the situation of "unaccustomed attention" is no longer unaccustomed, familiarity disposes most of the terror. He will grow as he gets a taste of how it feels to be free of fear of the unknown. He will find that sincerity is equated with wholeheartedness; that sincerity means "putting forth one's whole being," with nothing held back, kept in reserve, dissembled, or wasted.

Security comes with familiarity. Familiarity comes with repetition. The word for *rehearsal* in French is *repetition*.

Every performer feels a little nervous before an appearance, and a little nervousness is perhaps a good thing. It means, at least, that the performer is not completely cold-blooded. But *stage fright* is something more than slight nervousness, or shyness. It is more than the slight flutter in the pit of the stomach, the “butterflies” felt before one sings or speaks.



Stage fright is a condition brought on by uncertainty and worry; the worry of not knowing exactly what you are going to do, or how it will come out. In extreme cases, this worry asserts itself by tying the body “in knots”; the knees knock, the hands shake, the voice trembles, the throat is dry, the mouth is full of cotton, the body dripping with cold sweat — a very painful state. Some people solve the problem simply: they quit. That laryngitis, that cold, which develops just before a performance, is usually the result of apprehension rather than germs. The throat **can** be inflamed, be a visible red, and require medical treatment; yet the indisposition originated from fear rather than bacteria. The motivating factor is psychosomatic rather than physiological.

In less extreme manifestations, however, stage fright usually feels more disturbing to the victim than apparent to an audience.

Stage fright results too often from a sense of inadequate preparation. This is not so much a lack of preparation itself, but of the conscience telling one he has cut corners, not made all the preparation he should have. **Proper** preparation depends not on what satisfies someone else, but on what enables a person to feel satisfied himself.

The unfavorable effects of stage fright can be overcome, though, if a) you know that you know what you are going to do, and b) then do it, without needing the proper mood to strike you. Also c) you should not mind too much about making a fool of yourself; a sense of humor enables you to live with your mistakes. Psychologists say fright and fear are forms of anxiety arising from the "unknown." You fear what you do not know. So, to overcome fear, **know** what you are doing. It is simple, then, to do it.

Fear expresses itself by making a person physically tense. The body gets all set to run away, in a physical sense. Therefore, it is vital that a performer master the art of physical relaxation and control.

Consider, for instance, the fear of whether an audience will laugh at the performer. Examine an audience; why is it there? An audience comes to enjoy itself; otherwise it would stay home. True, some husbands and beaux are dragged there by wives and sweethearts, and some aesthetes are there because it is "the thing to do," and some status seekers believe it is well to be seen there, but these people are never more than a very small portion of an audience.

The Audience

Very few people ever go to a concert with the intention of ripping a performer to pieces. Most people attend a performance because they expect it to give them pleasure. They want the program to be good. And a great deal of the success of a performance is due to the audience **willing** it to be good. When an audience has paid good money, there is little predisposition for boredom or apprehension. An audience will always "pull" for you; they pull for every performer. Once you assure the audience that you are secure, and know what you are doing (have a sense of authority), they will gladly respond as you want them to.

You will find it important to assume a definite attitude toward your audience. There is no "best" attitude, since this depends upon the performer and the occasion.

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