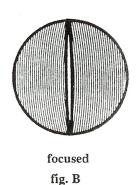
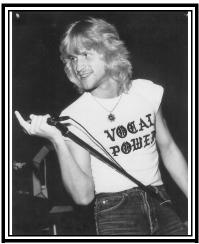
Focusing the Vocal Cords

(Techniques CD - track 7-11 / DVD chap 4)





[Vocal Cords - schematic representation]



"Vocal Power Rocks"

When air passes through vocal cords that are approximating (focusing, adducting), the vocal cords vibrate, producing clear vocal sound. Focused vocal cords may be imagined as a drum-head stretched across a drum and slit down the center (fig. B). When unfocused, the vocal cords are too open (fig. A), allowing too much air through, resulting in a breathy and sometimes raspy tone. This can cause friction and irritation of the vocal cord tissue. You may even feel a tickle, which could cause you to cough.

Prolonged breathy or raspy singing can cause the build-up of excessive mucus. This is the body's mechanism for protecting the vocal cords. Remember, when singing high and loud, don't push the air so hard that you un-focus your voice and produce a breathy or raspy sound. However, even though the cords must be focused for healthy singing, in some isolated moments breathy or raspy sounds may be desirable for emotional emphasis. Because excessive air is used to produce the unfocused tones, it diminishes the length of continuous tone and makes it more difficult to sing long, sustained phrases. This is why some singers are constantly out of breath. Breathy singing can be exhausting and bring down the energy level of the performance. Breathiness as an artistic choice is discussed later.

Focusing helps you to sustain tones, reduces throat problems, makes it easier for you to expand your range and improves your vocal flexibility and pitch accuracy.

FORWARD PLACEMENT (MASK RESONANCE)

Forward placement (*mask resonance*), is the sound and sensation of the focused tone resonating against the bony surfaces around the nose, including the bridge of the nose and the upper front teeth (see nasal, mouth resonances, page. 47). It is the result of the focused tone resonating through open throat, mouth and nasal passages. It is the sound of a professional singer.

The following exercises will help you to gain control over focusing the vocal cords and develop mask resonance.

EXERCISES:

1. Open your mouth, take in a breath and let out a breathy sigh. This breathy sound is the result of allowing excessive air through the vocal cords which are too open. This is an unfocused tone.

2. With your mouth open, as if ready to bite an apple, in a gentle but firm scolding tone, say "aa...aa..." ("aa" as in at) with a crisp, scolding tone.

Don't "cough" out the tone, make a clear non-breathy sound. Listen and feel the 'buzzing' sound of the focused tone. Feel your support and use your fingertips to make sure it stays constant.

3. Once more compare the unfocused tone with the clear, well-focused tone:

4. Now sustain the last "aa", like this:

Maintain an energetic and buzzing sound as you sustain the vowel.

Breathiness is an appropriate artistic choice at times but should be used sparingly and avoided completely in the high and loud ranges of the voice.

5. Now follow the "aa" sound with the "ee" sound. Try to match the buzzing, focused sound that you feel on "aa", like this:

6. Let's carry the focused tone into some other vowels. (Tech CD track 8) For example:

Be sure that the vowel sound that follows the "aa" does not become unfocused (breathy). Continue with this exercise, using the vowel sounds and diphthongs in the list on page 43.



PREPARATION

Before you begin to sing a phrase:

- 1) Take a full breath
- 2) Establish firm support
- 3) Feel the resonators open
- 4) Image the focused sound

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