Sing!
Sing!

Text and Songs for Voice Class

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Introduction

This book starts you on the way to becoming a creative, exciting singer. It gives you a wealth of songs to sing and discusses singing concepts and techniques, just as a teacher would in voice lesson or voice class.

We anticipate the questions you might ask if we were there at your side. We offer songs and strategies to help you build a solid grounding in the basic areas of singing so that you can tackle some fairly advanced steps. Once you have integrated what you’ve learned in this book into your singing experience, you’ll be ready to improvise, invent, experiment, and finally find your own singing style.

Who Should Use This Book?

This book is specifically intended for the beginning student who is enrolled in a voice class or private lessons. It focuses on fundamental singing skills and explores topics such as vocal technique, music fundamentals, and how to learn a song. It presents a series of vocal exercises to use in lessons and in practice sessions between lessons. And many songs offer specific exercises to help learn the song.

Of course, there are always those beginning singers who, with minimal work, can produce a beautiful sound or just walk on the stage and give exciting performances. But these singers are few; most beginning singers need considerable training to achieve an effective performance. If you are a beginning singer, be sure to give yourself permission to be a beginner—it takes the pressure off. Let yourself advance a step or two in each lesson, instead of demanding that, after one lesson, you emerge as a fully polished, professional singer! With the guidance of your teacher, you can find some things you do successfully right now. Enjoy those things while you enrich your singing in lessons or in your voice class.

What Is a Voice Class?

A voice class is a place where a small group of singers, usually of similar abilities, gather together to learn about singing from a qualified teacher. A voice class offers instruction to help you develop your voice, learn songs, and
sing and perform confidently. It is a place where you experiment, make music, find your own expressiveness, and share the process with other people who are equally interested in singing. In class, you have permission to learn singing fundamentals at your own pace and to make mistakes in a safe environment.

The Key Ingredient to Learning to Sing

This book provides excellent guidance and training, but we must point out that singing cannot be learned exclusively from a book. A book can present only one approach to learning concepts, exercises, and songs. This approach may not have taken into consideration your specialized needs.

The key ingredient to learning to sing is your teacher—actually, the relationship between you and your teacher. Your teacher connects with your personality, chooses the exercises and songs best suited to your needs, encourages you, and guides you firmly along your path to good singing. Your teacher is there to present additional and amplified information. Joan and Pamela hope that you and your teacher will find these lessons and exercises sufficiently flexible, so that they expand, rather than restrict, the creative work of your class.

A Few Words about Your Voice

Your voice is a musical instrument. Like all musical instruments, the voice is made up of parts: one part that provides power (the breath), another that gives pitch (the vibrating vocal folds), and another that amplifies sound (the resonator: the mouth, throat, and nose). The tone quality of the voice, like other instruments, is the result of its size, its shape, and the texture of its walls.

But in some important ways, your voice is unlike other musical instruments. It is part of your body; it cannot be held in your hands and manipulated like a guitar, trumpet, or flute. As part of your body, its size and shape are determined by your genetics. You are born with a certain sized mouth, throat, and larynx (voice box). The cartilages of your larynx are of a specific size, your vocal folds have a certain muscular texture. Your lips can only open so wide, your tongue is just so big, your neck is only so long.

But genetics makes up only one chapter in the story of your voice. As a singer, you can also readjust the parts of your voice. You can move your lips, jaw, tongue, and soft palate to create many sizes and shapes and a multitude of sounds. Consider the number of sounds that excellent mimics, such as Bobby McFerrin and Rich Little, can make with their voices! In your voice lessons, you learn about the capabilities and limitations of your particular physical structure and you learn how to use your voice to sing as you want.

The following chapters help you find out about your voice and how to coordinate its parts for singing.
Vocal Technique

This chapter includes information and exercises to help you learn about the different parts of the voice that combine to produce a singing sound: the supportive body, breath, vocal folds, and resonator. It discusses vowels, tone qualities (which are sometimes referred to as registers), and how to sing a smooth scale from the bottom to the top of your range.

The Supportive Body

Singing requires subtle muscular coordination in your entire body—in your torso to breathe, in your neck and larynx to make sound, and in your throat and mouth to turn the sound into words and tone qualities. In fact, singing demands delicate, balanced coordination among all of the muscles of the body.

Before singing, check out your body to relax physical and emotional tensions you may have accumulated during the day. Find your best posture, stretch out and relax any muscular tension you find in your body (particularly in your neck and shoulders), and breathe to further relax your body and focus your mind on your singing.

Use Your Best Posture

Stand or sit in a balanced, erect posture to support your singing tone. Be sure that you are not locking your knees, arching your back, slumping your shoulders, tightening your neck or lifting your chin.

Stretch Out Your Body

Use physical activities to release your daily tension and generate energy for singing.

◆ Stretch out your body before you sing—and as you begin to sing—to release tensions.
◆ Thrust your arms forward and upward, like a boxer punching an uppercut with both fists, and forcefully say ba several times in rhythm with your arm thrusts.
◆ Walk or jog in place while you sing any vocal exercise or song you choose.
Breath Deeply to Relax

Deep, rhythmic breathing is one of the most reliable ways to relax, to focus your mind, and to prepare for singing. In this exercise, you begin by inhaling over four slow counts and exhaling through pursed lips over counts that gradually lengthen in duration as indicated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inhale</th>
<th>Exhale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 counts</td>
<td>4 counts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 counts</td>
<td>8 counts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 counts</td>
<td>16 counts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Breath

Deep breathing for singing should be a low, relaxed, natural process; one that occurs as easily in singing as it does in normal living.

Some singers try too hard. They gasp in air, raise their shoulders to inhale, and use heavy, excessive muscular effort as they exhale. Other singers do the opposite and use too little energy—they inhale with shallow and passive breaths, and collapse their rib cage and chest as they exhale. The next paragraphs describe inhaling air deep into the lungs and exhaling to support the singing tone.

Note: For a guided tour of the breathing mechanism, view the videotape The Singer’s Voice—Breath (Wall, Caldwell).

Inhalation

Your best inhalation for singing is to bring air deep into your lungs by lowering your diaphragm and expanding your ribs at the sides. This causes you to expand all around the middle of the body and your lungs to fill up with air.

It is easy to identify the location of the ribs on the side of the body, but when asked to locate the diaphragm, many singers touch the front of their body at or above the waist, believing they are touching the diaphragm. Actually, they are touching the upper portion of the abdominal muscles and are surprised to find that the abdominals attach to the front of the ribs as high as the sternum. (See Figure 1, “Breathing Muscles in Torso,” on page 3.)

You actually cannot feel the diaphragm by touching the front of their bodies—the diaphragm is located up under the lungs—but you feel the effect of the diaphragm pushing the viscera (the stomach, liver, intestines, kidneys, etc.) against the abdominal muscles. (See Figure 1, “Breathing Muscles in Torso,” on page 3.)

The diaphragm is a large, thin, dome-shaped muscle that separates the chest from the abdomen. It is located just under the lungs and on top of the abdomen. (See Figure 1, “Breathing Muscles in Torso,” on page 3.) Its thin, outer edges are attached to the front of the body at the sternum, to the sides at the ribs, and to the back at the spine. The bottom of the lungs are attached to the diaphragm. When you inhale, this muscle contracts and moves downward, causing the lungs to stretch vertically, a movement that causes a partial vacuum in the lungs so that air to rushes in to fill the lungs.
During inhalation, a singer also widens the rib cage and expands the lungs horizontally. This also causes a partial vacuum in the lungs so that air rushes in to fill the lungs.

**Figure 1. Breathing Muscles in Torso**

Exhalation
You exhale most efficiently for singing when you keep your rib cage expanded and activate the abdominal muscles located between your sternum and navel at the front center of your body. The strong and flexible abdominal muscles control the pressure and flow of the outward stream of air and connect your breath to your singing tone.

In these exercises, discover deep breathing by using some common, everyday activities: panting like a dog, speaking strong consonants, feeling the breath movements of your body under your hands, hissing, and blowing out candles.

**Activating your Breathing**

Do these activities to energize and engage deep breathing. Become conscious of how your body moves when you breathe by placing your hands on your torso and feeling the in and out movements of your torso. Then, activate and energize your diaphragm and abdominal muscles by panting.

**Become Aware of Your Breath**

Use this procedure to become more aware of what happens in your torso during breathing. Put one hand on your upper chest and the other on the front of your body at your waist to feel the movements of your body while you sigh, hiss, and sing *ah*.

1. Sigh out a quick sigh and feel the movements under your two hands. Feel your body move quickly inward under both hands as you sigh.
2. Hiss a long, sharp sss, like the sound from a leaking tire. Feel the movements under your hands. Notice that your chest stays up and the muscles at your waist (your abdominal muscles) become firmer. The outward flow of air is more controlled.

3. Sing a comfortable, medium loud ah on any pitch. Feel the movements under your hands. The body does not get not as firm on the sung ah as during the hiss, and it does not collapse as with the sigh. If your chest collapsed as you sang ah, try again and do not let your chest collapse.

**Pant Like a Dog**

In this exercise, pant like a dog to notice diaphragmatic and abdominal movements and to activate your deep breathing. When you practice this exercise over time, you build considerable flexibility in these muscles, develop a full, deep inhalation, and become familiar with the movements of the abdominals.

Place your hand on the front of your body at your waist, and pretend to pant like a dog. Let your tongue hang out over your lower lip, and pant like a dog on a warm summer day. You have been running—and it’s really hot! Feel the in-and-out movements at the center of your body.

After a few seconds, you should feel smooth, rhythmic in-and-out movements at your waist.

**Managing your Inhaling**

Stimulate your imagination with the following two exercises to inhale more deeply and smoothly.

**Smell a rose**

When people smell a pleasant fragrance, they tend to breathe deeply and without unnecessary tension. In this exercise, tap into this familiar experience to learn a new way of inhaling for singing. Later, when singing songs, you can induce good inhalation by remembering this image of inhaling a pleasant fragrance.

Imagine smelling a rose and notice your body’s response. Repeat the process, to feel the sensation of a deep and gentle inhalation. Keep your jaw relaxed and your upper chest still as you inhale. Notice the expansion that occurs around the center of your body.

You may choose any pleasant fragrance that you enjoy—for example, perfume, warm bread on a winter day, the scent of a favorite place in childhood, a cake baking, a sea breeze, or a piney forest.
One Hundred Noses

Here’s a playful image to help you inhale with good expansion at your front, sides, and back.

Imagine 100 noses positioned like a belt around your waist. Breathe in through every nose simultaneously, and feel the full, complete, deep inhalation.

Notice that when you inhale, your body expands around your waist like a barrel. Your upper chest and shoulders should remain calm, with little or no movement. Be sure you are not “heaving in air” or moving your shoulders and chest up and down.

Managing your Exhaling

Use familiar activities such as speaking, hissing, and blowing on a feather and a candle to control your exhalation from the abdomen.

Whisper Stop-Plosive Consonants

When you pronounce stop-plosive consonants (p, b, t, d, k, and g), you use three actions: a “stop” of the air, a buildup of pressure, and an explosion of the air. In this exercise, these familiar stop-plosive consonants help you engage your abdominal muscles and activate your breath energy at the center of your body.

Vigorously whisper the consonants below using simple rhythmic patterns. Use quite a bit of strength from your abdominal muscles.

Musical Example 1.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{p} & \quad \text{p} & \quad \text{p} & \quad \text{p} & \quad \text{b} & \quad \text{b} & \quad \text{b} & \quad \text{b} \\
\text{t} & \quad \text{t} & \quad \text{t} & \quad \text{t} & \quad \text{d} & \quad \text{d} & \quad \text{d} & \quad \text{d} \\
\text{k} & \quad \text{k} & \quad \text{k} & \quad \text{k} & \quad \text{g} & \quad \text{g} & \quad \text{g} & \quad \text{g} \\
\end{align*}
\]
**Hiss on Consonants**

In these exercises you hiss on the sustained consonants *s, f,* and *th* (*th* as in *thin*) to feel the action at the center of your body that accompanies good exhalation.

1. Hiss with short bursts of air on *s, f,* and *th* (*th* as in *thin).*

*Musical Example 2.*

```
\[ s\ s\ s\ s\ s\ s\ s\ s\ \ |
\[ f\ f\ f\ f\ f\ f\ f\ f\ \ |
\[ th\ th\ th\ th\ th\ th\ th\ th
```

2. Hiss in prolonged sounds on *s, f,* and *th* (*th* as in *thin).*

Continue to feel your abdominals contract at the center of your body; keep your throat and neck relaxed and maintain good chest and shoulder posture.

*Musical Example 3.*

```
\[ C\ o\ \ |
\[ o\ \ |
\[ o\ \ |
```

**Blow Out Candles**

In this exercise, pretend to blow out candles while keeping your rib cage open to manage your exhalation with deep abdominal control. There are two steps: one blowing out candles on your shoulders, and another blowing out several candles on an imaginary cake in front of you.

1. Imagine that you have candles on each shoulder—the kind of party candles that relight themselves after they’ve been blown out. Turn your head from side to side and blow out the imaginary candles on each shoulder. Feel the strong abdominal action at the center of your body and feel your neck muscles limber up as you look from side to side.

2. Imagine several candles on a cake. Put your right hand on the front of your waist and your left hand on your side. Use short bursts of air to quickly blow out imaginary candles in front of your face. Feel the small, quick movements of the muscles at the center of your body as you blow out the candles.
Blow a Feather

Use the familiar childhood experience of blowing a feather to learn how to control your exhalation from your abdominal muscles.

Pretend that a feather is lying on a flat surface in front of you. Blow the feather lightly, as if gently guiding it across the surface. Notice how your control of air is easy and natural, governed by the slight contractions of your abdominal muscles near and below your waist. Be sure you don’t collapse your chest as you exhale.

The Vibrator: The Vocal Folds

Your voice begins in your larynx—your voice box. Your larynx is located in your throat just at the top of your windpipe (the trachea). You can feel it at the Adam’s apple, which is more noticeable in men. Composed of cartilages and muscles, the larynx houses the vocal folds, a pair of muscles that stretch across the windpipe, from the front to the back of the larynx. (See Figure 2, “Top View of vocal folds.”)

The vocal folds open and close. For daily living, they open to permit breathing and close to seal off the passageway from the throat to the lungs, thereby preventing food and other foreign matter from entering the trachea and the lungs. For singing, the vocal folds close gently, and outward flowing air causes them to vibrate and produce a pitch.

Like all muscles, the vocal folds contract and relax. Each degree of contraction in the folds raises the tension in the folds, causing changes in pitch and tone quality. Also like all muscles, the vocal folds get thicker and shorter when they contract. As they become thicker, they vibrate more slowly and produce lower pitches and a heavier tone quality. As they become more relaxed, another pair of muscles (the cricothyroids) can contract to pull on the vocal folds, stretching them like rubber bands, causing them to become thinner and longer. In this condition, the vocal folds vibrate more quickly, producing higher pitches and a lighter tone quality.

The thick, short vocal folds in the low range and the thin, long vocal folds in the high range produce the two basic tone qualities of the voice—the heavy voice and light voice. There are many differences between very short, thick vocal folds and very thin, long vocal folds—and, consequently, there are many differences between the heavy and light tone qualities they produce. Singers learn to exploit these variations in order to sing smoothly from the bottom to the top of the range. (For more information, see “A Smooth Voice” on page 33.)

You cannot directly control your vocal folds; they adjust automatically in response to your mental image of pitch, dynamics, and tone quality and to your ability to relax your throat and use appropriate breath pressure and resonance.