Teaching Head Voice to Young Men

Prepared for Virginia Wesleyan College
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Common questions...

- Are falsetto and head voice the same thing?
- Does head voice develop naturally with age, or is it something that can be learned?
- Do basses and baritones have head voice, or is this a tenor thing?
- When should a singer begin to develop head voice?
- What are exercises that contribute to the development of head voice.
OVERVIEW . . .

- Young male voices are faced with developing head voice in a comfortable way without using falsetto.

- Typical concerns
  - Carrying the chest voice too high (strain)
  - Using falsetto instead of head voice (weak)

- Consciously developing head voice gives singers tools to deal with this challenge.
  - Concept of the “flip”
  - Uniformity of register
  - Exercises for building the head voice
COMMON PROBLEMS . . .

- Bringing the chest voice too high
  - Leads to a strained sound
  - Inefficient

- Singing in falsetto instead of head voice
  - Leads to a weak sound
  - Efficient for marking, but not for legitimate singing
SOLUTIONS. . .

- Step 1 – Establishing a common vocabulary
  - The “flip”
  - Chest voice vs. head voice
  - Falsetto

- Step 2 - There is a head voice
  - Keeping the chest voice “light” masks the problem
  - Before a singer can mix, they have to have something to mix with

- Step 3 – Exercises for developing head voice
Step 1 - Vocal Register

- Register Event, Transition, Shift, Break
  - Falsetto
  - Head (Chest)
  - Secundo Passaggio (Upper Middle Mix)
  - Primo Passaggio (Low Middle Mix)
  - Chest (Chest)
**Step 1 - Vocal Register**

CT (cricothyroid) lengthens the fold.

TA (thyroarytenoid) shortens the folds
Step 1 - Falsetto

What happens physiologically in falsetto?

- In falsetto, TA muscle relaxes completely, and so the length of the folds depends solely on the degree of contraction in the CT muscle. Since the TA muscle is lax, it also does not cause the vocal fold cover to stiffen or thicken. Only the outer layers of the cover vibrate.

Characteristics of Falsetto

- Weak in overtones
- No Singers Formant
Step 1 - Head Voice

What happens physiologically in head voice?
- CT and TA muscles are contracted
- CT muscle predominates, and so the range of pitch for head voice is higher,
- Since the folds are lengthened, thinned and stretched.
- A smaller portion of the folds is in vibration in head voice; only the outer layers of the cover vibrate

Characteristics of the Head Voice
- Rich in overtones
- “Ring”
## Falsetto vs. Head Voice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Register</th>
<th>Muscles used</th>
<th>Part of folds in vibration</th>
<th>Quality produced</th>
<th>Pitch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pulse</td>
<td>TA only</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>vocal fry; pulsating</td>
<td>lowest; below singing pitch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chest</td>
<td>mostly TA, some CT</td>
<td>most, both cover and body</td>
<td>heavier, fuller tone</td>
<td>lower part of singing range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head</td>
<td>mostly CT, some TA</td>
<td>cover only</td>
<td>lighter, thinner tone</td>
<td>upper part of singing range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falsetto</td>
<td>CT only, TA is completely lax</td>
<td>very little, only outer cover layers</td>
<td>lightest possible</td>
<td>highest sung pitches; above normal range</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Falsetto vs. Head Voice

Falsetto should not be called head voice.” – Richard Miller

Make it real for me, audio examples:

Falsetto:
Flammende Rose by Handel. Ian Howell Countertenor

Head Voice:
Pavarotti, Nessun Dorma 2:06
Step 2- Plan for fostering evenness of register

Develop Head Voice

Develop First Transition

Develop Second Transition

Flexibility exercises throughout transitions
STEP 2 - VOCAL RANGES

The Six Species of Human Singing Voice, and their Registers

Middle C  F#

C = do
D = re
E = mi
F = fa
G = sol
A = la
B = si(ti)
C = do

C  D  E  F  G  A  B  C

First Register
Second Register
Third Register
Fourth Register

Middle C  F#

C  C  C  C  C  C

64 128 256 512 1024
Step 2 - Male Vocal Register Shifts
Step 3 - Exercises for Head Voice

- These can be done in a group or choral rehearsal
Step 3 – Exercices for First Transition
Step 3 –
**Exercises for Second Transition**
Demonstration Singers

Thank you to our demonstration singers.