

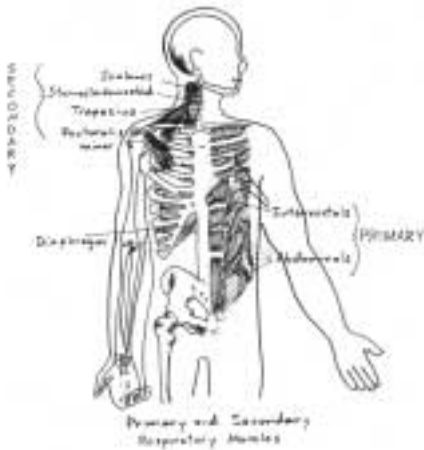
Yoga and Breath for Musicians 2

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.

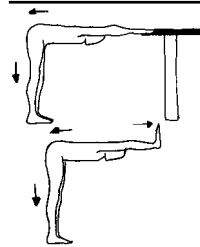
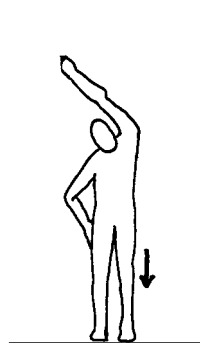
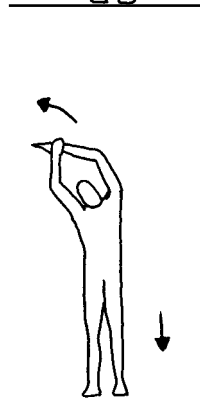


Table Stretch Place your hands (shoulder width and height) flat on wall, table, or back of a stable chair. Ensure that your feet are squarely positioned under your pelvis. Lengthen your spine, and exhale your chest towards the floor. You should feel the stretch in your shoulders, upper back, and armpit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



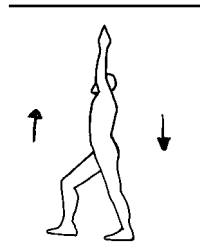
Palmtree 1 This exercise is for intercostal and abdominal awareness and expansion. Place your left hand on your left hip, right arm straight up in air. Inhale, do nothing, exhale, bend from hip to the left, reaching diagonally up and out with right hand. Keep sighing through the sensation for five breaths.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

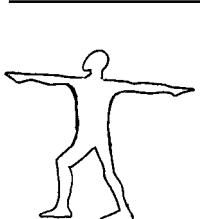


Palmtree 3 Same, both arms up, left hand holds right wrist, exhale, bend to the left. Reverse.

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.