

## Range Extension and Vocal Strengthening Series

### **Part 2 - Vocal Weightlifting**

by Dr. René Torres

Welcome to Part 2 of the series on Range Extension and Vocal Strengthening. If you are starting to read this article, but have not read (and more importantly done) the warm-up exercises I suggested in Part 1, then STOP and do them. The exercises contained herein assume you are warmed up and can take the vocal strain these exercises may exert. Please do not attempt them without warming up first.

Also, I am going to repeat the following important information from the first article, as it is imperative that you follow it:

“The tips and exercises I am going to talk about are not to be used for regular warmups. They are not to be undertaken when you are going to sing later that day. They are not to be done if you feel indisposed, are tired, have a sore throat, or are in any way physically indisposed.”

Okay, you are warmed up and ready to do some serious vocal weightlifting. Start by checking your range – highest comfortable note, lowest comfortable note – and write them down along with the date. You’ll want to refer to this as you progress in your quest.

Following that, start with the “nay sayer.” What, you say, is “nay” on each pitch. This exercise is done starting from the middle of your range and working up, then back to the middle of your range working down. At each end, try to go as high or as low as you can, and then try for a little more. This gently accustoms the muscles to more extension. The purpose is to go up the scale on a chest voice and down on a head voice. That means that in the middle of the range, this may sound the same, as there is a mixed voice range in there. The important thing is to think either chest voice or head voice as you do it. That way, as soon as you reach a pitch where it is possible to distinguish the different voices, it will happen. The intervals are 1-2-3-4-5 in chest voice, breath, then 5-4-3-2-1 in head voice. Start the exercise up from the middle of your range, then go back and start it down from the middle of your range, not up and back.

Next, you are still going to stay with the “nay” sound, but you are going to exercise with your chin on your chest the entire routine. Using high, mid, low sequence, talk (say) “nay” in all three regions and make special note of the resonance you feel in each. At the beginning the low will sound the most resonant, followed by the mid, and then the high region. As you progress, you may begin to feel a resonance in all regions. Do it twice per breath for five breaths. You can do more if you wish. This exercise is not difficult and, unless you yell (which I do not recommend), it will not be strenuous.

Now begin with a little contortion. Bend at the waist so that your head is dangling down. (Make sure you are physically able to do this for a period of time without any pain. Don’t

hurt yourself.) You will feel the blood rush to your head, as is to be expected. Then, very NASALLY, sing the “nay” sound on a 1-3-5-3-1 pattern going up the scale from midrange, then down the scale from midrange. Stay in your chest voice as much as possible, but try to go to both extremes of your range and maybe (carefully – don’t force!) one or two notes beyond on each side. You may feel muscles you never knew you had doing this one.

Staying with the “nay” sound, now try to put everything together in an exercise at proper posture. Stand upright with shoulders back and square to your body without forcing them back. Spread legs apart comfortably with one leg slightly in front of the other. This keeps you from trying to lock your knees. Keep arms at your sides naturally.

Now mentally picture yourself standing towards the front of the stage at a famous venue, and YOU are the featured artist. Get that “Here I am, just watch me!” attitude. With your chin slightly down as if looking at the orchestra conductor in the pit, sing “nay” on a 1-3-5-8-8-8-8-5-3-1 pattern at a medium volume (5 of 10). Make it a spectacular performance! Sell the audience on the fact that “nay” is the most important thing they ever heard! Start at mid range, go up to your highest point plus one or two (remember, don’t force!), and then back to the mid range and down to the lowest point plus one or two.

The exercises I have included here are designed to exercise vocal muscles, stretch them gently, and give them a good overall workout. That would not ordinarily happen if you just go about your daily routines, or warm up and sing once or twice a week. They are not the most comfortable exercises, but then if it were easy, everybody would do it, right?

If you are doing these exercises and are going to stop at this point, don’t forget to cool down properly. Do the humming closer. Find a pitch towards the lower side of your range, but without “pushing” and hum the pitches of 1-2-3-2-1. Go up a half step and do it again. Repeat this procedure until you reach almost the upper end of your range, but not quite, and then repeat the exercise coming back down the scale in half step intervals to where you started.

There are more exercises to be done in a typical workout session. The next set is geared more to developing endurance, or, as I like to call them, “vocal aerobics.” Look for more about that in the next article of the series. In the meantime, happy exercising!