

Range Extension and Vocal Strengthening Series

Part 3 - Vocal Aerobics

by Dr. René Torres

Welcome to Part 3 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) at least the warm-up exercises I suggested in Part 1, then STOP and do them. Doing the exercises outlined in Part 2 is optional, but recommended.

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.

Once again, it is important enough for me to repeat the following 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 warm-ups. They are not to be undertaken when you are going to go on and 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.”

Assuming your voice is sufficiently warmed up, here we go!

Imagine the following situation: You live in a third story apartment. You go and stand by the open window on a nice summer day, and look out at the view of the city. While you are there you look down at where your car is parked and you notice that someone is trying to steal the CD player from your car! You yell out, “Hey, you!” in an attempt to scare the would-be thief away. Now take that same tone of voice that you would use in that situation to sing, “Hey, you” on one note, beginning near the bottom of your range, and going up one note until you reach the almost top note of your range. This is not a time to try and stretch your note range, as you will be at a large volume of sound, and you don’t want to hurt yourself. Just go from a comfortable low note to a comfortable high note. Stress the volume of the sound (the louder the better), but without forcing yourself into a scream. Enunciate the phrase clearly. Feel the sound in and around your nasal passages.

Next, alter the above exercise by going to the phrase, “Hey, you, hey!” This uses a lot more air, and gets your body used to louder, air-consuming passages. At your top volume, but without screaming and hurting yourself, start at the top third of your range, and go down on a 5, 5, 5-4-3-2-1. The first five is a “hey,” the second five is the “you,” and the last run is a downward “hey” (without h’s in between, mind you; make it a smooth run). This exercise tends to be tiring, but you will get better used to it the more times you do it.

The next exercise has to do with interval training as well as vocal aerobics. Singing adjacent octave notes may sound easy, but doing it correctly, fluidly, and with the proper interval is a big leap (no pun intended) in your vocal training. You are going to sing the interval 1-8-1 starting at the lower point of your range, going up one note at a time and then coming back

down. At medium volume (5 out of 10) use the vowel sound “Ah,” which will use a lot of air, making you conscious of your breathing and getting you conditioned to more efficient breath use. As you do the exercise, do not put h’s in between the interval, and try to imagine a string connecting the two notes in such a way that one flows seamlessly into the other without a glottal break in between. For some, this will take more practice than for others, but don’t give up. The idea is to make the interval transition as seamless as possible. If you find it more convenient, start at a slower tempo, and as you get used to the interval jump, speed up the exercise accordingly. Try to speed it up to just a little faster than you can comfortably accomplish, in that way making the vocal mechanism improve. Stress a full “Ah” sound. Use up air. It would be normal to be a little out of breath after doing this exercise. Maybe even a little light headed from the rapid breaths. But stick with it. It can be very helpful to make you more confident in your abilities to sing middle-of-the-road passages tirelessly.

Okay, time to gradually withdraw from these exercises. Let’s do a series of cool-downs to bring your system back to a more mundane existence.

Start with sighing. This is a soft “Ah” starting high and sliding slowly to the low side. It is a very common exercise, and I’m sure you have done this before. Just take it easy, making the body relax as you do. But don’t relax so much that you don’t support the voice. Use lots of air. Do it about five or six times, and feel yourself returning to normal.

The next cool down is a “vocal cord massage.” Not literally, but vocally. The vowel sound sounds like “vwhooh” (it’s hard to write this – it really needs demonstrating). There is a lot of vibration especially in the mask as you do it. The notes – starting at low range, going up one note a time, and back down again – are on an interval of 1-2-1-2-1. Enunciate clearly, especially the “vibrating” part. Feel the soothing vibrations as you sing. Take it easy and slowly.

Finally, do a standard humming closer. Hum on a 1-2-3-2-1 phrase, quietly. Start low, go one note at a time to high, and then back down.

Then SHUT UP! I mean that literally. Have a moment of from five to ten minutes (or even more) when you simply do not use your voice. Let everything return to normal, lubricate itself naturally, and “come back to earth.”

And you’re done for the day!

I hope you have enjoyed this series of exercises, and that they will help you develop your voice to the best of your abilities.