

# Coaching Corner

## Just breathe!



Jim Emery

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Nearly every voice teacher and singer understands the importance of breathing to good singing. Air is the necessary source of energy to produce a quality tone. In my coaching experience, improper breathing is likely the source of more poor singing than all other causes combined.

There are many approaches to teaching proper breathing for singers. I won't attempt to cover those in this short article. For more on breathing technique, read my other articles on this subject.

### **The biggest breathing problem of all**

Over the years, the single largest breathing problem I have seen in my coaching is actually *remembering to get a good breath* with every breath you take during a song. What a simple thing this is, but how incredibly important it is!

I am always amazed at how often performers get lousy breaths along the way through a song.



Even International quartet performers! I recall a well-known International quartet lead a few years ago that had an incredible voice but almost never got

a really good breath to begin his phrases. On the rare occasions where he took a really good

breath, he was phenomenal. Unfortunately he never really fixed this habit and his quartet never placed much better than International quarter-finalists. This is a voice that could easily have made the Top 10 at International with a little more focus on breathing.

### **Barriers**

There are countless distractions during a song that can prevent you from getting a good breath.



Trepidation over a high note or a big interval skip can lock up your breathing apparatus. Focusing on choreography can cause you to forget

to get a good breath at the beginning or in the middle of a set of choreo moves. Executing a particularly soft or delicate phrase can cause our breathing apparatus to freeze.

## Breath deficit

I don't know who coined the term, but I have witnessed with many singers what is called a "breath deficit". That is, the longer you go in a song taking less than adequate breaths at the planned spots, the more out of breath you become by the end of the song. It's almost like the



feeling when you're swimming underwater and finally juts have to come up for air. And when you get out of breath, all kinds of tension and other bad singing habits creep in, to the detriment of your singing.

## Practice breathing

So, while it seems elementary, spend some time at each rehearsal focusing on nothing other than getting a good breath at every breath point in a song. Practice while doing everything else you do in performance, too, such as facial expressions, stage moves, and the like. Also make sure you practice this breathing in the middle and at the end of a song where you may be building up breath deficit. This will guarantee that your breathing habits meet up face to

face with the barriers described



earlier. But don't get distracted with all those other problems you need to fix. Many of them may just vanish if your breathing is good. Do this breathing practice regularly and you'll build the habit that every breath is a good breath, in every phrase of every song.

## Benefits

Oh what marvelous benefits arise just from getting a good breath every time.



- A good breath relaxes your body, especially the areas where tension builds up in the vocal tract.
- The "yawn" breath your director or coach encourages opens up the critical resonance areas of the mouth and throat.
- A good breath ensures that there is plenty of air available to sustain a phrase.

- Because the resonance areas are open and relaxed and the lungs have a full tank, a full resonant tone comes easy.
- A relaxed singer with an easy-to-produce full resonant tone is one whose confidence grows the more he sings.

## Summary

Work on your breathing and your singing technique all the time. But the most important technique is to remember to just breathe!