



CHAPTER ONE

Breathing

"I am impressed with Elisabeth Howard's wonderful approach of non-classic style of singing... She is the first pedagogue to give coherent explanations about the technique necessary to these kinds of singers..."

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(Singing Techniques CD, Tracks 1-3)

If we approach the voice as if it were an instrument, we see that it has characteristics of both a wind instrument and a stringed instrument. The sound produced on a wind instrument, such as the flute or clarinet, is created by air (breath) flow and air (breath) pressure. This is also true of your voice, which uses your breath flow and breath pressure to make sound. The sound produced on a stringed instrument, such as the violin, is started by the vibration of the strings and enhanced or resonated in the body of the instrument. This is also true of your voice. Your vocal folds (vocal cords) vibrate, creating a sound which then resonates in the area from your vocal folds to your lips, called the vocal tract.

To play this instrument, your voice, you need breath control and breath support. As a singer, it is important that you learn how to take easy, full breaths. Refilling your lungs completely gives you a number of great advantages. You are able to sing longer phrases. You have increased control for singing high and low notes, for singing softly and loudly and for tone coloring and for flexibility. It helps you to control your vibrato, to speed it up or slow it down or to sing a straight tone (no vibrato). Proper breath management and support helps you to sing a clear tone and aids in singing smoothly through the registers.

How You Breathe

I want to assure you that breathing and support is not a complicated process. It happens naturally, it's easy to do, and it is simple to understand and so I am going to use very simple, basic terms and images.

There are three sets of muscles involved in breathing and support for voice:

1. The diaphragm,
2. The rib muscles, and
3. The abdominal muscles.

Note: It is possible to use less air pressure and still support for the softer tones. You can test this out by taking a breath, prepare your support muscles as if you were about to sing and don't sing. No sound is being heard at all, yet you are still feeling support.

Although the vocal folds relax for softer volume, they must still produce a clear tone throughout and the vowel must be kept pure. When singing softer, you will still hear resonance because your vocal folds are still vibrating and focusing, but you won't hear an *edge* or *buzz* in the sound. The soft tone will still project very well as long as the tone is resonant and not breathy.

Exercises

1. On a siren-like slide, first loud, then soft,

Sing:



On the upward part of the slide, gradually increase air pressure and lower the jaw. On the downward part of the slide, decrease air pressure, bringing the jaw back to its normal position. Make sure you maintain your support on the downward slide. Check with your finger tips at your ribs and then with your thumbs against your lower back. Be aware of your focused vocal folds to maintain a clear sound throughout.

2. And now in upper register, first loud, then soft,

Sing:



3. On the word "Hey," use the siren-like slide, followed by a 5 note scale within a comfortable vocal range and slide your voice slowly up and down with medium volume. Keep the volume and vowel constant throughout. Maintain the vocal folds in the focused position for a clear tone.

Sing:



(Singing Techniques CD, Track 15)

4. Use the following 5 note scale with the words "on and on." First louder, then softer in the lower chest range (an octave higher for the female voice).

Sing:

