

**A Cappella Gold Workshop**  
**December 2002**  
**Lea's notes**

**Vocal Production**

"Yoga Breath" – Bend knees, bring arms down as you blow out, then arms up to above head as you breath in through nose, lock hands at the top and push up, then release arms bringing down slowly at sides as you exhale. Repeat.

**Capacity Exercise**

Use one arm at a time. Start with arms by sides, bring one arm across body and up as you breath in through nose, until arm directly above head, then exhale to shshs as arm comes slowly down to count of 4 (so arm does a full circle). Don't let shoulders roll forward Repeat with other arm. Repeat exercise and increase count for exhalation to 8, 12, 16, 20.

Posture – it's very important to keep sternum high and wide. Don't try to hold ribs up when exhaling, it creates TENSION. Do shoulder rolls for relaxation, face bubbles, ensure jaw is relaxed so that you can move it side to side (gently) with your hand without resistance? Most singers have a jaw that is too tense. Poke tongue out, roll from side to side.

**Vocal Warm ups**

Check sternum is high and wide, and shoulders never roll forward. Breath in and hiss air out slowly, then blow out excess air quickly until lungs empty, repeat and hiss, repeat and use "f" to release air.

Sigh (ah) start with a small little sound high to low, keep knees relaxed and use arms. Then sigh from low to high (vocalizing but not singing). Do all sorts of different sighs. Bend the body forward, get the body moving, and stay relaxed and supple.

Bubble 54321, start in middle voice and go down in halves.

Vocalise : Mah ee ah (5, 3, 1) in middle voice, lightly and always lighter on the higher note. Keep same open space on "ee" as in "ah". Move at the same time – head rolls, shoulder rolls, walk around – this helps connect a relaxed body with singing. Start in middle voice then go down in halves.

1212121212 meaheeaheeahee, up in halves. Each time you go up, ask them to sing it in a different space. When ever you have a key change, remind them to allow the sound to come from a different space in the head.

5---→1 ee-----→ah Down in halves. Push hands forward as you do this. Slide the sound forward rather than straight down, when you sing the bottom note, open up the top of the mouth rather than dropping the jaw.

Wah ee (12345654321) wah until 5 then ee up to 6 and back down. Keep “ee” as open and resonant as “wah”. Keep the same space in “ee” as in “wah”.

5 chord change to may mee my moh moo, keep the space open all the time.

Tag – I can sing and match my voice with you.

When basses sing higher, lighten up, rather than singing louder.

Yoh ee oh (5 3 1) – start in middle range and go up in halves, give it plenty of space.

To create space, think about the top half of the face rising, rather than the bottom half (jaw) lowering.

### **The Tuning Point**

- Notes are changed in your head, not in your throat.
- For good tuning you need:
  - Correct notes
  - Correct words
  - Matched Vowels
  - Matched reasonance
  - Synchronised delivery
- Pitch must remain in good relationship with “doh”
- Raise slightly 2,3,6 & 7 (Pythagorean tuning)
- Intervals must be clean
- Land on the open vowel sound in the correct singing space
- Take the breath in the singing space of the vowel to follow
- “Chord Walk” each chord in the phrase to tune them, all singing with as much reasonance as possible.

If you are doing something physical to sing and change notes, then you are not singing correctly. Singing correctly requires very little effort. The larynx has nothing to do with singing, its all in your head.

Vowels are mostly formed inside the mouth. Use the least amount of movement in the jaw and outside mouth, most of the movement is inside the mouth.

Keep the jaw relaxed and open vowels “up” rather than dropping the jaw down. E.g. on “ah”.

### **For better blending:**

Start with just the leads, sing “wee wee wee” exercise, get leads to sing with as much open reasonance as possible, then add Baritones and blend, then add Basses, then tenors who sing the overtone produced by the other three.

### **Synchronisation:**

- Get to the target vowel at the same time
- Finish the phrase endings together
- Breathe together

The above will fix 99% of synch problems in choruses or quartets.

Sing the song on “doo” on your beat (don’t hold it), you can do this for ballads as well as uptunes. Everyone sings the words on one note; everyone sings their notes on one vowel. All good for finding and fixing synch problems.

### **Listening:**

- The way you sound to you is not the way you sound to others.
- You are hearing yourself through bone conduction
- Others hear you through air conduction
- Bone and air conduction produce different sounds

Tone = pitch, resonance and vowels.

Tuning problems are often due to lack of air. Take more breaths & stay in tune until the ends of the phrase. No one ever got marked lower for having too many breaths.

Middle to head voice for leads and baris is middle C (middle voice) to C above (100% head voice)

Basses: Low C (mostly chest ) to F or G above middle C (100% head voice).

Scale 8 → 1 on “ee” Don’t move or change a thing inside or in your throat, just stay relaxed and keep your eyes bright.

### **Interpretation**

Look at:

- What the composer is saying
- What the lyricist is saying
- What is the message of the song?

Find places where you can add colour, e.g. using “picture words”

Look at the song as a poem, use word sheets. Find the message that the singers can latch onto.

It is the responsibility of the singer to convey the message of the song, not the director. What reaction do the singers want from the audience? – discuss and agree on this. It’s then up to the singers to get this reaction from the audience.

Decide and agree with the chorus what the song is about. The whole chorus must buy in. Visualise what the song means to us. Agree on this, but everyone will have a slightly different way of thinking about the message, to get the right emotion. Eg if the song is about coming home, “home” is different to all of us.

65% of all communication is non-verbal. All communication in the face happens from the nose up.

Your non-verbal communication has to match the words and the emotion.

Unit expression – practice in a mirror. Interpret the entire song, rather than portions of it.

Visualise each phrase as a line going up and a swirly ending (breath) then the line starts again a little higher.

Lift all the phrase endings

Don't change rhythm or tempo unless there is a good reason to

Look at each line in the music – where does it end up? Low or high? This will help you decide dynamic levels. When all parts are high, normally loud, when all parts (esp. bass) very low – normally soft.

Give each part a job / word / task , eg:

Bari's "sing beautifully"

Lead's "be engaging"

Tenors "sparkle"

Basses , "be the foundation"

Consonants add personality and life. Use them effectively on picture words.

Singers all the tools, we are just helping them to use their tools better.

Fear or lack of confidence is mostly due to lack of preparation.

Each singer needs to be responsible for their preparation.

To help get into character, act. Choose a character and be her for the performance. This free's you up because you are no longer your self. Very helpful for newer / shy members.

Visual communication – ask the singers to "step out of their shell", let your energy touch the first 3 rows in the audience.

"Thinking" is the biggest barrier to a good performance. What have you to think about? With the right preparation, you don't need to think about anything. If you're thinking, then you're not in the moment with the song.

Let your face tell the story, do you love to sing? Then let it show!

Look confident and ready.

Say to yourself, "I am calm, composed and confident, and I sing beautifully". Have positive self talk, not negative. It works.

Every sing face and body MUST be involved and committed to the music. If some aren't, then ask them to pretend they are.

Your energy must go way beyond the director.

Quartets should focus on about row 10 in the audience. Quartet members - Don't have wondering eyes, pick a point and look at it.

### **Develop mental toughness**

- Stop negative self talk
- Believe in yourself
- Have courage
- Have control over your emotions
- Be calm and relaxed
- Have focus and concentration
- Make your performance a gift to the audience
- Be well prepared
- Enjoy it "crawl inside the song"

### **Tenor / Lead section information**

Enunciation – use soft T's, D's and S's. Make a continuous wall of sound. When singing consonants, keep the space open in the mouth.

Tenors: If the other 3 parts are doing the right thing, its easy to sing tenor, you just sit on the top, often on the natural overtone.

As you sing higher DON'T pinch the sound, keep it open. Even think of it as an upside-down cone.



Tenors, if you are on a chopsticks with another note, sing it at the same volume as the other part (eg lead).

#### **Rules for tenors:**

- Sing higher and lighter in the cone
- Sing fuller when under the leads
- When singing octaves with another part, match the vowel and note and just sing higher
- When singing chopsticks with another part, sing that note at the same volume as that other part.
- Even though tenors sing lighter and higher than other parts, keep the open reasonance, don't pinch off the sound.

## **To help conserve air & build breath support**

On F, sing “oo” and go for as long as possible. Do it again and this time imagine that the air is coming into your body. This helps from letting all the air out too soon.

Keep your tongue loose and floppy on the bottom of your mouth. Think “no tension”, let your jaw drop naturally, don’t force it down.

Develop **relaxed breathing**. This is the key to good singing. On every breath think “relax” and re-state into a more relaxed state. Always take more breaths rather than try to stretch until the end.

Vocalise higher than the highest note you need to sing.

Duets are very good to do. Work on matching the vowels, matching the resonance and coming.

## **Unit sound**

Leads and basses are responsible for maintaining the tonal centre.

Unit sound = matched vowels, matched resonance, breathing together.

A breath is NOT a reward for the phrase just sung; it’s the beginning of the phrase to come.

Try to get ring on each note (requires space). Find voices that work well together – eg 2’s and 3’s. To help section unity, get each part to duet the leads. Start with leads alone, then lead / bass, then lead / bari then lead / tenor.

To get enough resonance equally on all words, find the tallest most open vowel word in each phrase and get the open resonance on that, then sing all the words in the phrase with that amount of space. Find out where you tend to close the space down, and work from your good vowels to your not so good.

When working with voices, always start working from their good areas, not their bad. For instant lock onto vowels, take the breath in the vowel shape to come on that word.

Wee wee wee exercise very good for developing unity. Do on all vowel shapes and pitches.

“I’ll” is pronounced “Awl”

“Get” ----- “It”

## **Self Coaching for quartets**

- Everyone has the responsibility to be the listener and corrector in a quartet. Don’t leave it to the lead.



- Don't take a suggested correction from another member personally. She is trying to improve the sound, not you. You're fixing the sound, not fixing the person.
- It is each member's personal responsibility to keep your voice healthy, active and practicing each day, so it's ready to go.
- Use good vocal production techniques each day when you practice and keep your voice well and truly used each day.
- Start rehearsals with vowel exercises, go through all the vowel sounds
- You are responsible for knowing your notes
- When learning a new song, lead sings it first, then everyone sings with the lead (the lead part), then do lead / bari duet, lead / bass duet and lead / tenor duet.
- Then do all possible duets
- Work on one or two things each rehearsal & use that in songs
- Learn your songs in the voice you want to use in performance, don't use a different voice in rehearsals
- Don't put limitations on yourself. Think it and you will do it
- **Tape your quartet rehearsals and listen to it**
  - Right notes?
  - Are you staying in key ?
  - Vowel matching?
  - In synch good? (often problems relate to lack of instant vowel matching and not breathing at the same time)
- Start using a metronome
- Teach the tempo to an uptune song first, then learn the song

