For Men Only! By Sheri Gould

We're going to talk about men – one of my favorite subjects. For the record, I love men. There are a few that have captured my heart (my sons), and there is one in particular that has captured my complete being (my wonderful husband). But beyond that, the love and respect I have for these creations of God is truly magnanimous. For example, think about what the world would be like if it weren't for men. I mean, who else can open a box from Home Depot filled with 1,000 nuts, bolts, and other varieties of objects and be completely undaunted? In fact, men REVEL in this! They love a challenge. I recently watched my husband single-handedly put together a swing-set with NO directions available to him. Thousands of little nuts and bolts and weird looking connector things left him feeling quite manly when all was said and done.

So what does this have to do with singing? When it comes to men – everything! I find that the same element in men that drives them to try to accomplish things on their own (i.e. NO directions) definitely operates at full throttle when it comes to singing. Most men will actually use the directions (which are available to them from the start) ONLY if and when they hit a place that they simply can't keep going on their own. Guys will take a look at a guitar, for instance, and then pick it up and start strumming – soon figuring out that they don't know how to form a chord. Once they're convinced they really DON'T know what they're doing, they will buy a book of chord charts and be on their way to becoming a great guitarist. The rest is history.

When it comes to singing, however, there is no such equivalent (not that one can truly become an accomplished guitar player that way either. Maybe *I* should come up with "Sheri Gould's guide to singing in six easy steps"….ahem). Most guys I know are *proud* to say they've never had a singing lesson (as if they think I'll be surprised!). And although I admire their pioneer spirit, men should seek help with their singing. Here's why:

The single biggest problem I see associated with the male voice is vocal strain. In their exuberance and attempt to sing powerfully is a tendency to strain from the throat. Women are typically more timid to be heard than men when they aren't sure of themselves. Men, in their confidence, will "belt it out there!" They'll mistakenly try to throw their entire body into it at times (from the shoulders up) to get more power. This typically ends up leaving them sore, and sometimes hoarse, for days. Permanent damage can also be done to the vocal folds (cords).

Thankfully, there *is* a trend among some prominent male worship leaders to get vocal instruction – which is great! It will help them in their performance, and it will also raise the standard for the next crop of male worship leaders to come.

Ironically, for the most part, I rarely see a guy push himself out of his range vocally. Men seem to understand this intuitively: sing too high – voice cracks or squeaks – extreme embarrassment. This is a good thing, because if he were straining AND out of his range it would do double damage! Most guys (gals too!) can benefit from vocal training in terms of increasing their range significantly – without the strain. The following is a chart listing the various ranges for men:

Tenor – High Male Voice, C (an octave below middle C) up to high C or D (or above).

Countertenor – Highest male voice, also called alto, often falsetto

Heldentenor – Powerful dramatic tenor voice

Baritone – Middle Male Voice, low G/F an octave below middle C to B, F or G above middle C (just below the Tenor high C).

Bass – Baritone – More like a bass than a baritone, lacks the low bass notes

Bass – Low Male Voice, low E (or lower) an octave below middle C to E, F G above middle C.

Basso Cantante – High bass voice suitable for solo singing

Basso Profundo – Deep bass voice encompassing about two octaves above C below the bass staff

One last thing that men in particular seem to struggle with is getting their mouths open. The tendency is to "open" their mouths more from side to side than from top to bottom. This way they FEEL like their mouths are open! In reality they are forcing their tone to go out through their nose rather than their mouths, and typically end up with a nasally "twang." There is a certain vulnerability sensed when you open your mouth past a certain point. I'm not sure why this is, but I know that it's true. Maybe it stems back to the motorcycle riding days when they got that first bug caught in between their teeth… But it's usually pretty bug-free on most singing platforms today, and you guys need to get those mouths open! It will make for a better tone and far less strain.

So guys, what's the first step? Well of course, get some lessons if you can. Read my column faithfully, either way, and make friends with your *mirror*. Watch yourself sing a lot. If you have the opportunity to get a videotape of yourself, DO IT! Watch and listen. There should be about an inch and a half between your teeth (or roughly two fingers worth) when you sing your vowels. Remember you can't, or shouldn't, sing a consonant (you ARTICULATE a consonant); you can only sing a vowel. Look for all these things. Remember to keep your tongue flat against the back of your bottom teeth, while bringing the corners of your mouth IN. Avoid looking like you are smiling when you sing. Only Chris Tomlin can do that and still get Male Vocalist of the Year! Nice job Chris!!

(Hmmm…"*Sheri Gould's guide to singing in six easy steps*"…it does kind of have a nice ring to it…)