For Women Only by Sheri Gould

There are some things that tend to be more gender related, so I'm taking time to focus on some issues that usually affect gals a little more often than guys. . .

Range

When I teach women, the first thing I typically hear is…"I'm an alto". However, this is largely NOT the case. MOST women I work with have a mezzo/soprano range. Look at the following chart to find your range. (The numbers refer to the piano keyboard from the left-start counting the applicable note at the beginning of the (88 note) keyboard. For example for middle c4, start at the left and count the c's until you reach the 4th one. Now you're at c4)

- **Soprano** – High female voice, G3 (below middle C4) to F6 above high C6 although anywhere above high C can be included.
- **Coloratura** – A singer, usually soprano, who sings ornamental passages in music – C4 to F6 or G6 above high C6
- **Lyric Soprano** – Warmer middle sound – Bb3 below middle C4 to high C6 or D6
- **Dramatic Soprano** – The loudest and lowest with cutting power – low Bb3 or A3, to a pushed high C6
- **Mezzo-Soprano** – Middle female voice with dark quality, Low A3 or G3 (below middle C4) to at least high C although it is not uncommon for high A6 or Bb6 to Eb6 above high C6.
- **Alto or Contralto** – Low Female Voice, low C3 (below middle C4) to high C6 or up to high A6

Having read this chart, most women will still argue with me that they are more comfortable singing "alto" even though they most likely cannot sing the lower range of a true alto. The reason they feel this way is because they have not discovered their upper range or how to reach it with any ease. After a little work, most women end up with the range of a mezzo although they may have color to their voice that more resembles a soprano. If you note the above chart in terms of RANGE only, there is not that much difference between the mezzo and the soprano except for "color". True altos are far more rare, just as is the coloratura or the true dramatic.

NO BREAKS!

The biggest problem that most women have, by far, is creating a voice that is a seamless instrument, from the lowest pitch to the highest. More often than not, we find that an untrained voice is full of "flips," "breaks," and different tonal parts. But a trained voice effectively eliminates these impurities through proper technique and a lot of work! However, there are many untrained vocalists in the genre of pop and contemporary Christian music that are hailed as great singers but simply do not display a refined, smooth voice. Unfortunately, these musical icons have set a fairly low standard that is leading so many of our young singers down a road of frustration.

This is also why, in part, many untrained singers think their range is so small. Without having learned to make it through some of the rough spots in their voice, they mistakenly feel like they've reached the "end" of their range. Once proper vocal technique (for men AND women) is utilized, a side benefit is usually quite an increase in range.

Here are some of those techniques:

- Breathing: Diaphragmatic breathing is essential to master. A strong singing voice requires strong support. It is also important to develop the habit of breathing through the nose and out the mouth to help keep the cords from drying out: avoid throat gasping.
- Proper vowel shaping and tongue placement: Learning to get the mouth open, the tongue flat, and the lips relaxed and full.

- Larynx control: Ability to control the larynx. A necessity in terms of proper singing and determining thickness of tone.
- Resonance: Understanding the various places of resonance, and the ability to place one's tone properly.
- Chord adduction or "thinning": Shortening the amount of contact the vocal cords have. Learning to do this smoothly will eliminate the breaks and flips referred to earlier.

FEEDBACK

Getting proper feedback is such a great tool for growth in any musician. For a singer there are a couple of essentials. The number one tool that most women fear is *THE MIRROR*! In my teaching I make it so that it's almost impossible to avoid looking at oneself in the mirror, but you would be amazed at some of the creative methods women use to avoid looking at themselves!! I have to ask myself, are these the same women who will spend hours plucking and brushing and applying every possible lotion/ointment/make-up imaginable?! It's quite amusing actually. Men have no problem looking in the mirror. Why is that? But we women are deathly afraid. So to all those mirror phobic women out there, I have three important words for you…"GET OVER IT!" Trust me, the mirror is your friend. You NEED your mirror. Being able to see how you stand, how you breathe, how you shape your mouth, and whether or not your muscles are relaxed is absolutely essential to making sure you are singing properly. Your teacher/coach can't be there to watch you when you practice at home. The only hope you have of insuring that you are properly employing what you've learned and developing good habits is to check yourself constantly, as your teacher would.

EMOTIONAL FRAGILITY

Women tend to be very in touch with their feelings and therefore more connected emotionally to their singing. I can't tell you the countless times women will end up in tears at the end of a lesson. Women also have to fight the tendency to be competitive in their singing, even in a worship setting. Being "emotionally integrated" beings, we tend to connect our ability to sing with who we ARE. Anyone, man or woman, can fall into this trap. Therefore we -especially as women- need to be clear on who we are in Christ first, who we are as a person second and then who we are as a singer. If we lose track of this we can easily fall into the trap of comparing ourselves continually and this can be destructive, not only to ourselves but to any group or team we're singing with.