# How can I increase my vocal range? by Sheri Gould

How can I increase my own range, or for that matter the range of my worship team or choir. This is a common issue as most people would love to sing more notes in better form then they currently do. Divas like Mariah Carey or the late Minnie Ripperton may come to mind for many women. Steve Green, or any of the "Three Tenors" may come to mind for many men. Is it possible to extend your own range to such an extent?

Well, although most of us are stuck with more average ranges than the above mentioned exceptions, over the years I have experienced this phenomenon: as soon as someone starts to learn how to sing properly, their range increases. Most of my students have ended up extending their range no less than an octave. How does this happen? I believe that two reasons are largely responsible for the change; elimination of fear and accumulation of proper technique.

**1. Be sure to worship together as a team**.
Most people are very fearful of all but about an octave (max!) of their range. Why is this? Simply stated, people are the most comfortable with their speaking voice range. All day long and for their entire lives they have been exercising this part of their range and most people can use this part of their range pretty efficiently and without much strain. So it follows rather naturally then, that most people will find this range comfortable to sing in. The minute they move beyond this very comfortable and well used part of their range they begin to "panic" as they start to feel a different sensation than they're used to and most of the time they begin to tense up making it difficult to sing. At this point they generally conclude that they have reached the end of their range.
This of course is rarely a true indication of the extent of their range, however it does demonstrate to me where they are most comfortable singing and therefore how far they have worked their voice. My job at that point is to try to push them farther and here's how I do it. The first thing is to simply introduce them to the other notes available in their range. Many of them go kicking and screaming, but they go! Once they've experienced the new territory, the fear starts to dissipate and they become more comfortable with themselves in the new range. Many times they are also quite impressed with themselves! So the first order of the day is to TRY! Try some new notes, a couple higher, a couple lower all the while making sure to keep proper vocal technique.

**2. The development of proper technique is the key to range expansion**. Learning to relax is so important. Using a mirror can be a vital component to learning to relax. Many times people have no idea how much or where they are tensing. Keeping ALL muscles relaxed enables the vocal mechanism to function at peak capacity. Learn to use the diaphragm to power your sound, NOT the muscles in your throat. So as you look in the mirror make any necessary changes to be sure that you do not strain and tighten the muscles in your throat, neck and face. Stay in front of the mirror for all of your vocalizing and practicing.
Also while you're looking in the mirror, locate your voice-box in your throat. This may be simpler for the men whose "Adam's Apple" is larger than most women's. As you're facing the mirror, put a finger on your voice-box. You can be confident you have placed your finger correctly by "yawning". As you "yawn" you will feel and see the voice box move downward. As you are able to become more aware of your voice-box placement you will begin to be able to lengthen your range as you are able to keep your voice-box as low as possible. As you lower your voice-box to the maximum (your yawn) you'll notice a completely different sound coming out (the sound you make when you yawn). This is your throat in its most open position. Although this is NOT the sound

you're looking for, it will give you an idea as to how to control the placement. The lower you're able to keep it, the more relaxed position your throat will stay in.

Try the opposite just for comparison. Try (while keeping that finger in place on the voice-box) to make a sound equivalent to "Minnie Mouse". You'll see the voice box practically disappear *up* into your throat. I try to use the illustration of a garden hose when I teach this concept. Think of your windpipe as a garden hose that carries air from the lungs to the mouth. IF the hose is left unrestricted you'll get the best flow. When you keep the muscles relaxed and the voice-box out of the way the flow is the least restricted. However, when your muscles tense and the voice-box is forced upward, it "kinks" the hose much as if you were bending a hose as the water flows out. What happens then? The airflow is impeded. Sound gets distorted and you don't have the same control over the flow—it doesn't go where you want it to.

### 3. Practice, Practice, Practice!

One of the last keys to a great range is to maintain what you have. This is only done through practice. What you don't use, you lose! When I was in college choir and sang first soprano, I was forced to sing high "c's" on a daily basis. After many years out of college and much less challenging music, those high "c's" do not come nearly as easily as they once did. Are they still there? Sure…but they need to be found and then exercised! So once you start to develop that new range, keep at it. You will gain confidence and eventually those notes that were at one time unthinkable will become yours and what used to be the extreme parts of your range will suddenly become easy to sing!