Nailin' Those High Notes by Sheri Gould



With regard to today's modern music culture, I've often said that we have a tendency to strive for what I call "vocal gymnastics". I suppose that if we did a historical study of vocal genres down throughout the ages we might find varying degrees of the same type of thing. People have always sought to push the limits of what the human voice is capable of. Our generation is certainly no different. We want more: more power, more control, more trills… just more of everything! Yet, I would be willing to bet that throughout ALL generations of singers from the beginning of time, *one* vocal skill has pretty much always been on every singer's wish list: *more range*. Additionally, with the exception of a small percentage of singers, most vocalists would love to take their range *higher*. So, I'm going to try and help you figure out how to *NAIL* those high notes, once and for all!

First Things First

One of the first mistakes that singers will make is to simply not be prepared vocally. In my video "The Ultimate Vocalist" I outline some key things that can help any singer maximize their potential. The first one is "being prepared" and I contrast this with the idea of practice. As singers we often spend time practicing and preparing our music, but we tend to spend very little time preparing our voice to meet the many physical demands placed on our vocal mechanism and body overall.

Singing can actually be very demanding physically, and without a proper warm-up and work out, our vocal strength, stamina and ability will be hampered. So many singers spend little to no time putting in the necessary time to prepare their bodies for the physical undertaking of singing. Our bodies and voices are capable of SO MUCH MORE than we may realize, but without proper conditioning, we put ourselves at a disadvantage. Because of this, we will most likely never reach our full potential.
As with any physical exercise routine, the muscles associated with singing need to be warmed up and stretched on a regular basis to maintain elasticity, strength and flexibility. If we want to get the most out of our voice, we need to get prepared. This takes time, effort and commitment. Most of the singers I know tend to have unrealistic expectations with regard to what they should be able to accomplish with virtually *zero* preparation.

The Importance of a Vocal Work-Out

There are some singers who have learned the value of warming up their voice. This is invaluable and perhaps one of the most important habits a singer can employ. However, for those of us who want to take our voice to the next level, there is another important step that needs to be taken: working out. A solid vocal work-out is how we can learn new skills. A work-out can help us to hone our old skills and safely push forward to find new ones. It is a vocal *work-out* that can enable us to reach the goals that we may have as singers. Without a regular, proper work-out, pushing for new heights can not only be ineffective but it can even be disastrous for us vocally. It is during your vocal work-out that you want to try to stretch your range and learn to "nail those high notes". There really is no more effective time to attempt this. If you don't have a good warm-up routine or don't really understand how to truly work-out vocally, I have a DVD available on my website to help you with this.

The "How-To"

In order to maximize your ability to not only hit those high notes, but actually *nail* them, you have to understand two different aspects of singing and employ them at the same time: breath support and resonance. Breath support is the underlying

foundation for every successful vocal endeavor. If you don't understand and employ proper breath support, *you should not try to extend your range.* The only way to achieve a powerful high note (or any note for that matter) is with proper breath support. The inherent problem with reaching for higher notes is that they require adequate support. If you're not using the right muscles, you're using the *wrong* ones. This is improper vocal technique and can lead to vocal damage. Please, *never* try to stretch your range without using the proper support. You can really hurt yourself.
While we commonly think of breath support as a very basic aspect of singing (and it is), many people do not fully understand it. If you need help with understanding breath support, I offer instruction on my DVD "Basic Vocal Technique".

Resonance, on the other hand, is commonly misunderstood and not often taught in contemporary vocal instruction. I think this is because most people really don't think about this "more advanced' technique with regard to contemporary music. Often, our training is "dumbed down" with little or no attention given to understanding different areas of resonance. This is a shame, really, because the ability to do so can enable us to achieve much more diverse styling. Without it, the modern singer is relegated to one sound or perhaps two if they are able to sing in falsetto effectively (men) or have a break in their voice (women). So understanding tone placement is the other key to being able to hit those high notes easily, with power and without strain.

In my DVD called "Developing Style" I outline several areas of resonance and explain how to access different areas of a singer's body to produce different tone qualities. When we are trying to sing higher, it's important that we learn to place the tone higher in the head so as to avoid vocal damage. Unfortunately, many people end up misplacing the tone when they attempt this and thus achieve an airy, operatic, small or "hooty" sound—none of which is appropriate in contemporary music. Next time I will try to explain-as much as it's possible through the written word-where to best place your tone to achieve the power and the tone quality you want for a dynamic upper register. In the meantime, try working on some of the things I've mentioned so far so that you might be better prepared for the next steps!

(I'm sorry for the triple DVD comments by the way. I don't usually mention my products in these articles, but I wanted to offer some resource options for you in case)

May God bless you as you seek to serve Him with singing!