

Singing

The Fundamentals



A progressive course in six parts

Singing

The Fundamentals



A progressive singing programme in six parts

Course Developed and Presented by Russell Malcolm.

For



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Singing - The Fundamentals - An Open Course in Voice Production - Tayside Opera

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Welcome to our Singing Course.

A few notes before we start:

Please come to classes wearing loose-fitting, casual clothing. No tight belts, collars, or ties.

Things to bring with you each week:

1. A pencil
 2. Your course folder and music
 3. A personal mirror - preferably one with a handle, of a reasonable size
 4. Your name badge
-

Contact details:

If you have any queries or need help with any aspect of the course please contact:

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Course Outline

Week One: ***Discovering our Voice / Dispelling Myths***
Introduction, demonstration, class exercises, ensemble session

Week Two: ***Finding our Flow***
Theory, demonstration, class exercises, ensemble session

Week Three: ***Line and Language***
Theory, demonstration, class exercises, ensemble session

Week Four: ***Flexibility and Facility***
Theory, demonstration, class exercises, ensemble session

Week Five: ***Realising our Resonators***
Theory, demonstration, class exercises, ensemble session

Week Six: ***Losing our Last Limitations***
Theory, demonstration, class exercises, ensemble performance

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Week One: Discovering our Voice / Dispelling Myths

Introduction:

Welcome to Singing - The Fundamentals. This course will help you discover or improve your singing voice and find new pleasure from singing. Those who are new to singing often feel uncertain about opening up their voices and it is natural to feel a bit self-conscious to begin with. However, you will get the most out of these sessions if you engage whole-heartedly with the exercises from the beginning, don't worry about what comes out - it will improve wonderfully over the course of the next few weeks.

You will be part of a learning group from the beginning. But learning to sing is an individual process. This involves both listening to yourself, learning from the sensations of singing and following the guidance of your tutor.

In order that you can hear yourself properly, during the lessons on vocal technique we will encourage you to find your own space in the classroom. Toward the end of the lesson everyone will come together for our ensemble session - to experience the pleasure of vocal harmony and learn about balancing and blending voices in ensemble singing.

A Fresh Start

We all have our favourite singers and our own preferred musical genres. For the purpose of these lessons, it will be helpful if you can put aside your preconceptions of what is moving or meaningful to you in the world of vocal music. This course is about helping you find your own individual voice - in its most natural and communicative form. When your voice is freed from mannerisms and inhibitions it will develop. Then you can engage happily with the musical genres of your choosing.

Your Tutor

Your tutor for this course is Russell Malcolm. Russell started singing at primary school where he won a Laing medal. At secondary school in St Andrews he received his formative vocal tuition from Bill Fea. During his University years in Dundee, he studied with Doris McLaren and after graduation studied music subjects for three years to BA. From 1986, to the present day, he has studied voice production with John Robertson (Scottish Opera/RSAMD) and in recent years has received coaching in Lieder and Opera from Rupert Forbes. Over the years Russell has sung many principal roles with Glasgow Grand Opera, The Glasgow Opera Group, Edinburgh Grand Opera, Opera Camerata, and Tayside Opera. In recent years he has also sung solo recitals in Glasgow, London and Tunbridge Wells.

Acknowledgment

Russell would like to make a special acknowledgement of gratitude to John Robertson, whose teachings and deep knowledge of *bel canto* singing is central to the ideas presented in this course.

Week One: Discovering our Voice / Dispelling Myths

Introductory Session

The first cry - discussion
Notions of speech - discussion

Where and what is the larynx. What does it do. How does it work - discussion

Principles & Practice - Lesson 1

1. Natural release and the sigh (demonstration and exercise)
2. Initiation of vocal sound (demonstration and exercise)
3. Intoning the sigh (demonstration and exercise)

Exercise 1: The sigh
Exercise 1b. The sigh, first intonation and collapse'

Key Concept (1): Breath release is NOT an active process

Principles & Practice - Lesson 2

1. The larynx is part of a system: the vocal mechanism is part of a bigger design
2. The way the system works is partly automatic, partly habitual and partly conscious
3. Imperfect singing comes from:
 - a) formed, learned or taught habits (mainly extrapolated from speech)
 - b) inappropriate control of what should be natural and automatic
 - c) adjustments from misconceptions of how we sound to others

Exercise 2: The First intonation and collapse'
Exercise 2b. The First intonation, collapse' and first change of pitch

Key Concept (2): We do NOT hear our voice as others hear it

Principles & Practice - Lesson 3

1. The vocal mechanism is interconnected with mechanisms for eating and protection
2. Jaw movement plays no part in the initiation of sound
3. Jaw movement plays no part in sustained pitch or changes of pitch
4. Jaw movement plays no part in the timbre of the voice

Exercise 3a. First intonation, collapse' and pitch changes through a major triad
Exercise 3b. Using the mirror to check for inappropriate jaw movement

Key Concept (3): The Jaw should NEVER move as part of a pitch change.

If required by the lyric, the jaw moves slowly and late

Principles & Practice - Lesson 4

Contrast -

1. Sustained intoned pitch (Singing) - *cantabile sostenuto* with
2. Modulated / broken chains of sound (Speech)

Exercise 4: The sung lyric (practice this at home in front of the mirror)

Key Concept (4): Singing is NOT intoned speech

Ensemble Session:

Do you know your voice type?
If not, your tutor will help to place you.

In this session we will split the group into high, and low voices and begin to work on a vocal arrangement in four-part harmony. You will find the music in the appendix to this booklet.

Homework:

To get the most out of this course, you will need to practice at home - just as you would do, if you were learning any musical instrument.

Remind yourself of the principles outlined in each of the four lessons above and practice the techniques, using the exercises you have been shown today.

Additionally: use the CD provided: In week one you should practice exercises # to #
Have a look at the ensemble music and practice the lines you were introduced to today.

Check list: During the week review what you have learned and try to answer the following:

1. What are the physiological roles of the larynx?
2. How is sound initiated?
3. How is sound perpetuated?
4. What is a resonator or resonating space?

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5. What determines the pitch of a sung note?
6. How would you define the term 'collapse' as has been described on this course?
7. What is the role of the jaw in the generation of a sung pitch?
8. What is the role of the jaw in the process of changing pitch?
9. What is the role of the jaw in determining vocal colour or timbre?
10. Write the four key concepts from week one below:

1.
2.
3.
4.

Week 1. Practice timetable:

	<i>Exercises</i>	<i>CD</i>	<i>Ensemble music</i>
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			

Week Two: Finding our Flow

Welcome to Week Two of our Singing Course

We will begin by reviewing the principles covered last week.

Review of Lessons 1-4 and Exercises

Principles & Practice - Lesson 5.

The sung note consists of the fundamental frequency and its harmonics.

Key Concept (5):

Unlike the piano, we can produce only one fundamental frequency at any one time.
(*monophonic*) Melody consists of note sequences grouped together in *phrases*.

On *polyphonic* instruments, like the piano, musical *phrases* requires a playing technique which joins the notes in the sequence together. This technique involves holding each key down fractionally longer than its written length, so that it continues to sound while the next note is initiated. (See diagram below) This is known as *legato* playing.

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Exercise 6b:

We will now introduce a pair of phrases requiring *sostenuto* treatment and demonstrate how to introduce some simple words into the sung line. These exercises are on your course CD and should be practised at home.



Homework

Try the following exercise with your course CD. It is a *sostenuto* phrase that concentrates on developing pitch awareness in the middle and lower registers of the voice.



Ensemble Session

Please form groups in accordance with your voice type, just as you did last week. You will find the music for this session in appendix 2.

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Check list: During the week review what you have learned and try to answer the following:

1. What is a polyphonic instrument? Give an example:
2. What is the name of the playing technique used to join notes smoothly into phrases on a keyboard instrument?
3. What is the term used to describe the sustained singing-through of a vocal phrase?
4. What is the difference between the fundamental frequency and harmonics?
5. List some properties of line' in *bel canto* singing.

What are the five technical stages in singing a phrase?

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
-

Week 2. Practice timetable:

	<i>Exercises</i>	<i>CD</i>	<i>Ensemble music</i>
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			

Week Three: Line and Language

Welcome to Week Three of our Singing Course
We will begin by reviewing the principles covered in weeks 1&2
Review of Lessons 1-6 and Exercises

Principles & Practice Lesson 7:

Cantabile sostenuto, sustained singing, is the very embodiment of line in vocal music. Learning to do it well, means unlearning what we do in speech.

Up to this point in the course we have worked on the fundamentals of voice production, using open vowels in our exercises - in order for you to experience the sensation of a fully sung line.

Vowels

Vowels are formed in the pharynx, ie. the space below and behind the mouth and above the larynx.

Open vowels (ee, ~, ah) rely predominantly on the configuration at the base of the tongue and the shape of the pharynx. (We will restrict ourselves to Italian/English vowel sounds for the moment)

Key Concept (7): A well formed ee vowel does NOT require the stretching of the mouth into a smile.

This is frequently requested by chorus directors to enforce a brighter sound, but it is technically WRONG and is likely to tighten parts of the pharynx and generate unnecessary problems of intonation.

Closed vowels (oh, oo), although formed in the pharynx, are also modulated by the lips.
For oh, the diameter of the lips is about the same as the girth of your smallest fingertip.
A perfectly focussed oo vowel, requires an aperture the size of a drinking straw. In a fully sung *bel canto* phrase, this closed vowel will remain perfectly audible at the back of the auditorium.

Exercise: 7

This is a revision exercise using pure vowel sounds throughout an extended phrase.

- keep your face mask-like;
- form the vowels fully in the pharynx;
- keep the closed vowels (oh and oo) properly closed with regard to the lips;
- allow the tones to resonate properly behind the nose and facial bones
- remember to sing on the voice, fully committed to the pouring out of the line

Achieve a ringing tone without forcing or pushing. Use the collapse as taught in week 1



Principles and Practice - Lesson 8:

In this session we will introduce you to different classes of consonants, and demonstrate how these are incorporated within sung lines.

Sung consonants

l
m
n
ng
r
z

(b) tone initiated before lips part (bow), line sung through lip closure (oblong)

Stop consonants

k (c)
t
tt (double stopped in Italian)

(b) but tone extends beyond lip closure (fob)

Consonants executed as vowel diphthongs

w (oo-ah / oo-ee / oo-‘)
y (-ee / -~)

Aspirants / Sibilants

h
f
s (c)
th
sh

Plosives

b (soft lip plosive, tone initiated **before** opening)
ck (hard palate plosive followed by aspirant)
ch (tongue palate plosive followed by sibilant)
p (hard lip plosive, tone initiated **after** lip opening)

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Exercise 8:

This exercise will begin to demonstrate how the various vowel-consonant combinations are treated in sung text.

Key Concept: Correct vowel consonant transitions are essential for the preservation of line. Faulty techniques (from speech) will jerk the voice off-pitch and destroy the vocal line.

Checklist for Week Three. Check your understanding by answering the following questions:

1. Where in the vocal tract are open vowel sounds formed?
 2. What is required of the lips in the closed vowel sounds oh and oo?
 3. What is a diphthong?
 4. How is the ee vowel produced in singing?
 5. What is a sung consonant? List them.
 6. What is a stop consonant? List them
 7. That is a sibilant? Can you list them
 8. What is a plosive? List them
-

Week 3. Practice timetable:

	<i>Exercises</i>	<i>CD</i>	<i>Ensemble music</i>
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			

Week Four: Flexibility and Facility

Welcome to Week Four of our Singing Course

We will begin by reviewing the principles covered in weeks 1-3

Review of Lessons 1-8 and Exercises

Lesson 9:

We will demand more from the voice today. Using upward scales and vocal exercises, you will develop a demand-led' suppleness in your diaphragm.

Your tutor will demonstrate this for you and describe the dos and don'ts of vocal support.

Notes:

Exercise 9:

Introductory support exercise:



Lesson 10: Vocal Range - a discussion

Here is a rough guide to vocal range. Note that the final range of a trained voice depends on how well the basic techniques are preserved and how far the voice is developed through proper regular use.

[graphic]

With guidance and perseverance both men and women can gain huge extensions to their accustomed range and open themselves up to a much wider performance repertoire.

The adult voice has natural transition areas, where the focus moves to a different part of the vocal tract and the voice timbre changes. This is the area of the range where untrained voices tend to crack or flip suddenly into a head register. Trained singers learn to 'iron-out' the *passagio* or transition register, so that they can move in and out of it smoothly, as the vocal line demands.

Conversely, yodelling and certain ethnic vocal traditions, teach singers how to flip across the *passagio* in an accurate way. These singers effectively miss out the transition intervals. This serves to accentuate the distance between their voice registers. (A different and - to Western ears - sometimes unsettling kind of vocal virtuosity).

This is a difficult subject to explore in a group setting, since the *passagio* is quite an individual feature.

Key Concept 9: Singing above the *passagio*, demands far more support for the voice.

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Exercise 10:

Finding your transition range.

Once you have identified your transition points. Use an exercise arpeggio like the one demonstrated for you, to learn how to master your *passagio*. (Some singers spend years working on this!)

Checklist and questions for week four:

1. What do you understand by the concepts of the 'collapse' and 'vocal support'?
 2. How does your singing range and pitch, effect the demands on the system for 'support'?
 3. What do you understand by transition range or *passagio*.
 4. What have you learned about techniques for mastering the transition range.
-

Week 4. Practice timetable:

	<i>Exercises</i>	<i>CD</i>	<i>Ensemble music</i>
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			

Week Five: Realising our Resonators

Welcome to Week Five of our Singing Course

We will begin by reviewing the principles covered in weeks 1-4

Review of Lessons 1-10 and Exercises

Lesson 11

By this stage you should be feeling more confident about *voice placement*, *note initiation* and *vocal line*.

If you have been practising regularly, you will now be able to sing smooth, supported phrases and you will be experiencing improvements in the accuracy of your pitch placement. We hope you will also be aware of a stately ring to your voice - at least in some parts of your range.

It is likely, however, that not all areas of your range are yet resonating as you feel they should. It is important at this stage to avoid forcing the tone, and avoid pushing the voice to make it sound the way you think it should throughout its range.

In many ways we are entering the danger zone at this stage of your training, because you should now be aware of new potentials in your singing and may make you impatient for more. Achieving the best tone throughout your range, however, will take considerably longer than the duration of this introductory course and will depend on several things.

Firstly that the suppleness of the laryngeal muscles is developed slowly, through regular singing on the voice' using the techniques you have been shown and without falling into the temptation of pushing or forcing the tone, particularly in the upper register.

Secondly, that you learn to find and maintain resonance as you form different vowel shapes in the pharynx, at different registers. This involves 1. developing suppleness and control in the pharyngeal muscles and 2. getting accustomed to the different sensations that occur when the placement is correct and the resonators are resonating.

For example: Those who develop their lower range fully, will experience resonances in the chest, in addition to the signature 'buzzing' behind the nose and/or in the facial bones.

Part of today's lesson will be aimed at helping you experience the correct resonating sensations at different pitches and with different vowel shapes.

Thirdly, that you become increasingly skilful in the interplay between the breath support and the voice. You will learn to modulate the level of energy demanded from the diaphragm at different parts of your range, so that you are supporting the voice properly without force. The evenness with which you learn to sustain your support throughout the sung line, is a fundamental requirement in *cantabile sostenuto* performance.

Fourthly, you will explore the natural *passagio* area(s) in your range. The change in tonal quality that happens when you move above the *passagio* is natural, because different parts of the vocal folds generate the fundamental frequency. The pharynx also requires to be 'stopped' to shorten the resonating space. This is achieved by a placement of the root of the tongue and is known as covering. Your tutor will demonstrate this for you. Singing above the *passagio*, requires a big hike in the energy demanded of the diaphragm.

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As your voice is developing, you will undoubtedly experience frequent cracks and squeaks in the *passagio* region of your voice. It is well worth persisting however, since mastery of this area of the voice will give you an important extension to your range.

Pointers To Development

Exercising in the upper regions of the voice needs to be done with some care. Don't start your day with high exercises. The fundamental frequency of the cords in the morning is lowered, because the tone in the tiny vocal muscles has been largely absent overnight. Because the cords have not been in vibratory motion, there is some stasis in the lymph fluid within the tissues. This results in slight swelling of the vocal cords first thing in the morning. As a result they have a higher mass and a lower fundamental frequency at this time of day.

(This phenomenon is more marked in men than women, because the mass : frequency relationship is not a linear phenomenon. Men have longer vocal cords, in which the same degree of tissue swelling produces a more significant change in mass.)

Relaxed exercises in the middle register, sung *mezzo voce*, are a good way of limbering up, followed some hours later by more challenging work at the upper and lower ends of your register.

Short sessions frequently are much better for the voice, than long sessions undertaken once or twice a week. In fact, one of the biggest causes of vocal problems in amateur singers is the expectation that a couple of hours on a Thursday night and/or Sunday evening is a good way of keeping the voice in shape. Quite the contrary, two fifteen minute sessions every day is far better for the voice.

This is because the laryngeal and pharyngeal muscles are small and do not contain great stores of muscle glycogen (the energy fuel store of muscle). The vocal muscles therefore tire quickly, unless you have really good vocal technique. In an attempt to sustain the voice through a choir rehearsal, the Sunday singer often engages all sorts of compensatory techniques, which result in over-singing, vocal strain and ultimately voice problems.

So REMEMBER, short sessions frequently - then a rest for the voice. To begin with, we suggest a maximum of fifteen minutes of vocal exercise at any one time. As you become more experienced and the efficiency of your voice improves with improved technique, you will be able to sustain much longer sessions.

Exercise 11:

Some singing teachers speak of singing in the mask'. This refers to an experience of vocal focus, in the central region of the face. When you are correct in all aspects of technique, you will experience a resonance, perhaps in the upper teeth, or behind and below the nose in the palate or the maxillary area of the face. The resonance will be felt more intensely as you move from open to closed vowels, or sung consonants. This is natural and is a sign that you are singing correctly. Your tutor will take you through some exercises which will help you find this focus.

Key Concept (10): True vocal resonance has to be discovered - by recognising the sensations that indicate that you are singing properly.
You cannot push or force the voice into a resonating state.

Exercise 12:

In the finest singers - those with technique to die for' - the voice can become almost disembodied' and can almost appear to be resonating in a self sustaining space, 6-8 inches in front of the face. In singers of this calibre, you will notice **no** extraneous movements, **no** over-stretched opening of the mouth, and **no** perceptible jaw movement with changes of pitch.

However, you **are** likely to notice: a slightly forward posture of the lower jaw, a straight - almost vertical - posture in the neck and relaxed arms and shoulders. Try to bring these attributes into your exercise routine. At home, use a mirror to help you look for the different elements.

Checklist and questions for week five:

1. Where in our bodies are we most likely to experience focus' or 'resonance' when we are singing correctly?
2. What do you understand by *Cantabile Sostenuto*? What is needed to achieve it?
3. What is the term given to the technique which is used to intensify the resonant focus of the voice in the range above the *passagio*.

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4. What exercise routines are most likely to support healthy vocal development in non-professional singers

Week 5. Practice timetable:

	<i>Exercises</i>	<i>CD</i>	<i>Ensemble music</i>
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			

Week Six: *Losing our Last Limitations*

Welcome to the final week of our Singing Course

We will begin by reviewing the principles covered in weeks 1-5

Lesson 13.

Entire books have been written about essential ingredients of good performance. There is insufficient time, in a course such as this, to explore all the elements that come together to make a performance special. However, preparation and discipline appear to be two important factors that are consistently rated highly by professionals.

In performance art, the more relaxed, assured and accomplished a performance appears to be, the more likely it is to be a product of thought, preparation, rehearsal and a thorough grounding in basic technique.

It is surprising how few choral and ensemble singers are accustomed to learning material by heart. Many are so used to reading from vocal scores for concert performances, they have quite forgotten how to learn new material by heart. It is, however, a very good habit to adopt, because the art of performance is fundamentally about communication. The singer who has learned their material by heart is more assured, less encumbered and more able to connect directly with their audience.

Learning music by heart is a chore that requires discipline, but it is well worth the effort. Try the following routine and remember that, like everything else, memorising gets easier with practice.

1. Read a phrase for rhythm
2. Read the same phrase for rhythm and pitch
3. Sing the phrase without text, for rhythm and pitch
4. Read the lyrics for rhythm
5. Read the lyrics for rhythm and pitch
6. Sing the phrase with lyrics
7. Sing the phrase from memory
8. Repeat six times, from memory, before going on to the next phrase

A few more notes about performance habit.

In performance situations, including auditions:

- Don't slouch or lean.
- Don't clasp your hands in a chastity' or praying' posture.
- Don't indulge in expansive gestures or hand actions - small movements may indicate that you are relaxed, but if in doubt, leave your hands by your side.
- Don't adopt a stance - it looks rigid and unrelaxed. Stand face-on with your feet a foot or so apart and sing as though a thread of sound were extending directly from your chest and head, outward and slightly upward.
- Always sing with complete commitment to the line.
- If your voice crackles, pops, squeaks or breaks, don't stop - and never apologise. Sing through to the end.

Lesson 14

Everyone wants to be able to sing the big number,' but doing it properly will cost you in terms of energy - regardless of whether it is a chirpy coloratura aria or an elegy. Intensity, the sense of line, and complete vocal commitment are vital.

These final exercises will test your commitment to the outpouring of song.

Exercise 14a. Support the voice!

Exercise 14b. Never abandon the line!

Exercise 14c. Don't compromise on sung consonants!

Ensemble Session

Congratulations on reaching the end of this Singing Course
Finally, in this Ensemble Session, it is your chance to perform ...

Feedback

We hope you have enjoyed this Singing Course. Remember to give us your feedback so that we can continue to develop and improve the course.

Join Us!

We hope you will now be inspired to audition for membership of Tayside Opera. Every year, in addition to a fully staged show we sing concerts and social events. You'll have an opportunity to sing wonderful music in friendly company, and experience what it is like to make music with accomplished pianists, instrumentalists and singers. The audition process is not onerous and your course tutor will be delighted to give you guidance and practical help.

Summary of Ten key Concepts

- (1): Breath release is NOT an active process
 - (2): We do NOT hear our voice as others hear it
 - (3): The Jaw should NEVER move as part of a pitch change.
 - (4): Singing is NOT intoned speech.
 - (5): There is NO such thing as legato singing (see the concept of line)
 - (6): We can produce only one fundamental frequency at any time.
 - (7): A well formed ee vowel does NOT require the stretching of the mouth into a smile.
 - (8): Correct vowel consonant transitions are essential for the preservation of line.
 - (9): Singing above the *passagio*, demands far more abdominal support for the voice.
 - (10): True vocal resonance has to be discovered - by recognising the sensations that indicate that you are singing properly.
You cannot push or force the voice into a resonating state.
-

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Course Appendices

Study Music

Ensemble Music