

Full Body Warm-ups for Vocalists

Erzsébet Gaál

Harpa Hungarica, Indiana, USA

Indiana University-Bloomington, Indiana, USA

Full-Body Warm-ups for Vocalists is a building block for an ensuring success in singing. Posture development, breathing motion, and breath management are integral parts of the preparation for singing. It is an everyday practice to work on coordinating posture, supporting muscles for diaphragmatic breathing, along with relaxing the jaw and facial muscles during lessons or practice sessions. However, singing involves more than just certain parts of the body, it involves the entire body. Therefore, it is best to warm-up and to prepare the entire body, mind, and spirit in order to establish an optimum work capacity level.

Definition of Warm-up

As an immediate preparation for music-making, this paper focuses on physical warm-up. There is an abundance of literature regarding the subject of warm-up. Most of this information is related to sports of all kinds. In fact, warm-up is a common practice before any physical exercise session or competition. Warm-up is employed to improve athletes' level of performance and to reduce the potential risk of injuries. According to *The American Heritage Dictionary*, warm-up is a phrasal verb meaning "to make or become warm or warmer" and "to make or become ready for an event or operation." Increasing blood flow through exercises, which elevates body temperature, in turn positively affects for example, strength, power, reaction time, and so forth. Athletes' warm-ups can consist of stretching, jogging, jumping, running or, as a method of passive warm-up, a massage. In general, all these procedures prepare the body for a higher level of activity.

Purpose of Warm-up for Musicians

Our total well-being is essential for good music-making. This entails a good general state of health, soft, warm hands, tension-free throat, unlaboured deportment, sharp attention, calm, balanced mood, and a will to work. This means a well-balanced and good condition physically, mentally, and spiritually.

This desirable and favourable state is rarely attained spontaneously in that it depends on many kinds of influences. "This is difficult in a career," states Martina

Arroyo, soprano "because all conditions affect the voice: travel, diet, weather, emotions, [and so forth] (Hines, 1982, p. 34)."

Therefore, the purpose of warm-up is to try to establish an optimum work capacity level. It can be summarized as tuning up the body as we tune our instruments or an orchestra before playing. By warming up, we prepare our bodies for immediate response to our beck and call. Warm-up is conditioning, getting the body ready for higher levels of performance or work capacity. It is also enabling the body to ward off stress. By warming up we enable the immune system to react positively to negative impulses or a negative situation: This happens by strengthening the body's defences.

Traditional Warm-up in Music

For some musicians, rest is important as a passive warm-up. For example, Luciano Pavarotti says, "I sleep until eleven or twelve the day of the performance. I trust very much in rest for the voice (Hines, p. 217)." Plácido Domingo agrees, "I like very much to talk, but try to do minimal talking the day before. I sleep to about eleven-thirty...then I like to walk, because that wakes me up (Hines, p. 108)." Walking is another common practice among musicians to get physically fit. "I do like to get out in the fresh air and walk before a performance," says Martina Arroyo (Hines, p. 34).

However, for most musicians, traditional warm-up means finger exercising or placing the voice in the masque through vocalization. Playing or singing scales, arpeggios, can help achieve, for example, flexibility of fingers or lubrication of voice and concentration. This traditional warm-up of the instrument is not always adequate. In some cases several hours of practice are needed to be sufficiently prepared for musical tasks. When Fiorenza Cosotto, mezzo-soprano was asked, "How long does it take you to warm your voice up for a performance?" she answered, "A minimum of an hour, beginning gently (Hines, p. 72)." It would appear that musicians, including singers, need a more efficient warm-up method involving a more holistic approach. They need to be warmed-up physically, mentally, and spiritually in order to be ready for any musical assignments.

Connection between Sports Training and Musicians' Training

Athletes' training and musicians' training have much in common. As Oestreich (1996, August 27) wrote in *The New York Times*:

Full Body Warm-ups for Vocalists

Musical performance is, in part, a physical test. It requires, in at least some parts of the body, good basic agility and co-ordination, finely honed skills, intense conditioning, brief warm-up and, especially for Wagnerites or Feldmanites, considerable stamina (p. 11).

In addition, to give an example how physical condition affects music performance, Kristen Moser Frost, soprano, said:

To me, being a singer is so much like being an athlete...physical fitness and strength training has played a strong role in whether my voice is in top condition. I enjoy how physically involved singing is. Singing teaches self-discipline and body awareness just as athletics do, and so much more (Hines, p. 51)!

Also, Pavarotti thinks that exercise and sports are good for the voice, "I play tennis just the day before a performance...When I come off the tennis court I must cover up, come right home, and take a hot bath (Hines, p. 217)."

Musicians, too, are prone to physical injuries because of professional hazards. For example Morton Cooper, speech therapist, points out that "Physical factors, such as exhaustion or physical fatigue from demanding schedules and tours, or cold or upper respiratory infection, can begin a voice problem (Hines, p. 51)." However, it is possible to reduce the risk of these injuries by practicing proper warm-up routines as athletes do. In a *Time* magazine article, Christine Gorman (March 1, 1999) wrote about Michael Jordan:

Through 13 seasons with the Chicago Bulls, six championships and five Most Valuable Player awards, Jordan suffered only one serious injury: a broken foot in 1985. Much of that extraordinary good fortune can be tied to Jordan's intense conditioning regimen, especially his devotion to stretching before, during and after his workouts and games (p. 86).

At the Illinois-American String Teachers Association Conference, June 1984, Anne Mischakoff (1985) wrote:

Audience members filled out a questionnaire about their experiences with pain or injury related to string playing and about their own habits regarding practice, warm-up for practice, general exercises for fitness.... The results of the questionnaire confirm that among these string players...there had been a general lack of warm-up routines away from the instrument, regular exercises, or training in the area of movement education.

While working on a doctoral degree, Gaál (1997) did a research project, entitled *Incidence of Occupational-Related Problems Among Harpists*, regarding harp player's physical wellness. As part of the research, she developed a questionnaire, which was mailed to 500 harp players in 47 countries. Gaál was not surprised to find from the results that the problems of 1984 were very much the same in 1997.

According to the survey, most harp players omit any kind of general body warm-up exercises, or even finger warm-up exercises before they practice, even though they acknowledge that such exercises could prevent injuries. As one respondent commented, "It amazes me how often my colleagues seem to fail to use common sense—an athlete would not expect to sprint 100m from cold, yet musicians frequently do!"

The Kovács Method

As a solution to the problem, the Kovács Method, the *Care of Musicians' Work Capacity* program suggests beginning a preparation for singing with a full body warm-up. Géza Kovács, scientific researcher, developed his special program for musicians based on the research that he did together with his associate, Zsuzsa Pásztor, pianist, over forty years (1959-1999) at the Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest, Hungary, focusing on musicians' occupational-related problems. International physical wellness literature reveals that research in the same area started in different countries at the same time. The centre of these activities was the United States.

Surveys of various health problems among musicians were conducted not only by Kovács and Pásztor but also, for example, by the organization of the Medical Problems of Performing Artist, the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians, the Medical Program for Performing Artists Clinic, and the American String Teacher Association. While all of this important research in the field of music medicine focused mostly on diagnosis and treatment of occupational injuries, Kovács' program was aimed toward preventing occupational-related problems and designing a lifestyle that

Full Body Warm-ups for Vocalists

helped to meet the continually intensified and broadened professional demands made upon musicians.

For instance, not only occupational-related injuries prevented by Kovács' approach but also further significant results are achieved. Pásztor conducted a research project in 1970 in the School of Music at Tata, Hungary: She included a three-minute, full-body, warm-up exercise at the beginning of each music lesson twice a week. At the end of the school year, which was actually two months shorter than a regular school year, she found that the students accomplished 17% more as a result of the full-body preparation.

Full-Body Warm-up Exercises

Following is an example of selected warm-up exercises that could be used at limited space situation, for example, in a classroom. The exercises gradually become more difficult. They peak at the fourth exercise and ease on the fifth exercise. The optimal time for warm-up and the repetition of the exercises should be according to the individuals' need, strength, and momentary work-capacity level.

1. Easy arm exercise: Standing, swing arms up, stretch arms above head and pull them backwards twice. Repeat.
2. Easy leg exercise: Standing on one foot, raise the other foot by bending the knee then push the leg down with the pressure of both hands on the knee. Repeat.
3. Easy trunk exercise: Fold arms on chest and turn to right and then to the left. Make sure to follow the movements with eyes by trying to look back over the shoulder. Repeat.
4. More intensive arm or leg or trunk exercise that deepens breathing: Run in place.
5. Winding down exercises such as neck or breathing or balancing or easy hand or foot exercises: In a sitting position rotate the head left and right.

Benefits Derived from Warm-ups

The next illustration came from the writer's experience as a student at Indiana University. On one occasion, Mary Goetze, Professor at Indiana University, gave an assignment to her college class studying children's choirs to sight read a piece of music (personal communication, March 1993). The work was done well, but the singing had some flaws. Goetze had the class stand up and do some physical exercises after the singing. Then, she had the students sit down and read the music again. During the

second reading, many of the singing elements had improved. Following the second reading, some more physical exercises took place in the classroom. Then, the singing was repeated. Finally, all the musical elements that previously had a problem were corrected without using any musical instruction. Using physical exercises to warm the body brought results in this case in concentration, quality of singing, applying oneself to the work, and laughter.

The writer drew some further results from using full-body warm-ups in her teaching, such as:

1. Pronounced effect upon our emotional state, our mental capacity to think, and our direct physical ability to approximate our very best at all times while performing
2. Prevent occupational related injuries
3. Teach awareness of proper breathing
4. Reduce and control stage fright
5. Save time and energy in music activities for both music students and teachers
6. Better quality of accomplishment in a shorter period of time and in using less effort
7. Better stabilization throughout a practice session, or a lesson, or a performance
8. Relax the body

Some of the audience members at the *Phenomenon of Singing International Symposium V* shared similar experiences. One participant said that she uses shoulder massage at the beginning of her choir practice as part of the preparation. One of her students commented that he looked forward to these relaxing exercises at the beginning of each practice session. Thus, motivation is another benefit to using physical exercises as part of the warm-up.

Another participant asked how to introduce these warm-up sessions to his classes. According to one of the pedagogical principals of the Kovács Method, the full-body warm-up exercises should be introduced with the first music lesson, and should be integrated consistently in music education. As a result, they will become common practice in a musician's professional life.

As a final point, a fellow professor asked at the presentation, "Where could we learn more about this subject?" The Kovács Method is a new domain of music pedagogy that offers some publications in English on this subject. The author of this article produced a DVD, *Harp Playing for Life*, that can be useful not only for harp players but for musicians

Full Body Warm-ups for Vocalists

in general. In addition, there is literature available in different music and sport fields, regarding the theory and practice of full-body warm-ups that can be helpful sources for further information.

References

- Bishop, D. (1991). *The musician as athlete: Alternative approaches to healthy performance*. Calgary, AB: Kava Publications, 1991.
- Gaál, E. (1997). *Incidence of occupational-related problems among harpists*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Gaál, E. (2002). *Harp playing for life: The Kovács method in harp pedagogy*. DVD, Harpa Hungarica.
- Gaál, E. (2003). Benefits derived from warm-ups. *Harp Today*, 7, 11.
- Gorman, C. (1999) Stretch like Mike. *Time*, 153(8), 86.
- Hieken, D. C. (2001). Being a singer is so much like being an athlete. *Pan Pipes*, 11.
- Hines, J. (1982). *Great singers on great singing*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company.
- Kovács, G. and Pásztor, Zs. (1999). *Hand strains from instrumental playing*. Debrecen, Hungary: Muzsikáló Egészség Alapítvány.
- Kovács, G. and Pásztor, Zs. (1999). *Ten short sets of exercises*. Debrecen, Hungary: Muzsikáló Egészség Alapítvány.
- Kovács, G. and Pásztor, Zs. (2000). *Movement preparation for playing instruments*. Budapest, Hungary: Kovács Módszer Betéti Társaság.
- Lassú, T. (1997). *The care of human work capacity*. Budapest, Hungary.
- Lieberman, J. L. (1991). *You are your instrument: The definitive musician's guide to practice and performance*. New York, NY: Huiksi Music.
- Mark, T. (2003). *What every pianist needs to know about the body*. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications.
- Mischakoff, A. (1985). *Sforzando! Music medicine for string players*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group.
- Morris, W. (1985). *The American heritage dictionary, Second College Edition*, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Pásztor, Zs. (1971). *Pihentető testnevelés a tatai zeneiskolában*. [Relaxing exercises in the Tata School of Music]. *Parlando* 13 (2, 3), 15-22, 3-14.
- Oestreich, J. (1996, August 27). In music as well as sports, injuries can end a career. *New York Times*, p. 11.
- Winberg, J. S., & Salus, M. F. (1990). *Stretching for strings*. Fairfax, VA.: American String Teachers Association.

The Singing Actor—The Act of Song

Andrea Lane Gardner

Memorial University of Newfoundland, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada

Classical art song is a well-loved genre that became popular in the early to mid 1800s and consists of poetry set to music. The most famous composers of art song, Franz Schubert and Robert Schumann, set a high standard that was followed closely by many other composers, up to and including today's composers. The traditional way of performing art song is a singer and pianist onstage. Usually the singer stands in the crook of the piano and remains there for the duration of the recital. A typical program consists of songs by Schubert and Schumann, French songs by Debussy, Fauré or Chausson, maybe some Russian songs or Spanish songs, and an impressive aria or frivolous showpiece to finish.

In recent years, the changes that have taken place in the format of the song recital have been mainly those of programming and stage etiquette. These days it is not uncommon to hear a cabaret song in a recital setting, or songs that walk a thin line between pop songs and contemporary art songs. Also, singers have started to show more of their individual personality through fresh interpretations of well-known songs. It is not unusual for a singer to address the audience from the stage, an act that was formerly frowned upon by most conservative audience members. These changes, while offending some who hold tightly to tradition, draw many audience members closer to the material being performed and dispel elitist stereotypes that some may hold regarding classical music. Audiences of today are constantly being renewed, thus should the performance of art song be renewed. I suggest that this can happen with the addition of acting to the performance of the art song.

When one performs a search of the existing literature regarding art song and its performance, it is apparent that not much has been written about what the singer does non-vocally. There have been volumes written about text-music relationships and, increasingly, about how the piano music portrays as much or more about the emotions and meaning of the poetry than does the vocal line. A survey of literature about vocal performance will produce information on how the singer can express different moods and characters through changing the quality of the voice. Such information covers the topics of timbre, dynamics, and pitch. Only recently have there been some writings about non-vocal physical performance. In their book, *The Art of the Song Recital*, Emmons and Sonntag (1979) comment upon the lack of acting skills of most singers. In a chapter entitled "the Singing Actor" they claim that "Many contemporary singers