

## Complete Vocal Warmup: Jordan Taxonomy

### Relaxation

- 1. Layup with follow-through:** Place a basket at eye level and demonstrate correct layup form with an imaginary basketball. Incrementally increase the height of the imaginary basket, which will require singers to reach above their heads. Palant directs choir teachers to “emphasize the follow-through, where the hand freely goes up and over *without tension or interference*” (Palant 104, emphasis mine). The goal of this exercise is to warm up the body in a way that is fun and engaging for singers. Teachers can draw a connection between the layup maneuver and the desired flow of air for singing.
- 2. Massages:** Have students massage each other’s backs (Ehmann and Haasemann 26). This can build a sense of camaraderie right from the beginning of the rehearsal and gets students’ back and shoulder muscles (very important in the breathing mechanism) relaxed for singing.
- 3. Shoulder Relaxation:** Stand upright with arms hanging freely at your side. Rotate shoulders backwards, first one at a time (four times) and then both at the same time (four times) (Jordan 11).
- 4. Shakeout:** Shake out each limb ten times, counting down from ten. Repeat, but decrease from ten to nine, then eight, etc. until the last round is one shake per limb. This exercise not only shakes out the muscles of every limb in the body, but also builds rapport and energizes singers. I learned this exercise from my former conductor, Anne Tomlinson.

### Alignment and Body Awareness

- 1. Posture alignment:** Singers raise both arms above their head and slowly lower them without collapsing their chest (Palant 110). This exercise puts singers in the correct (or mostly correct) anatomical position for singing, and is especially good at correcting the notorious slouched/collapsed posture in young singers that compromises their singer’s breathing.
- 2. Posture alignment, bottom-up:** Singers fall forward at the waist, breathing in and out passively. They should shake their arms loosely in this position, then slowly stand back up as if stacking one vertebra on top of another (Ehmann and Haasemann 26). This exercise creates awareness of the correct posture from the perspective of keeping support and alignment in the core and spine.
- 3. Verbal Body Awareness Reminders:** Ask the students to close their eyes and think about the following questions:
  - How is the joint of the head to the spine? Can you feel it?
  - Are you balanced at your hip joints?
  - Are your knees released and flexible?
  - Are your feet feeling the floor?
  - Can you feel the “tripod” on your feet?

- Is your back free, long, and wide?
- Are you singing with your whole body?

These questions guide a student's body awareness. With repetition and time, singers will learn to be more aware of their body throughout the rehearsal (Jordan 23-24).

4. **Picking fruit:** Raise arms above head and pretend to pick fruit from a tree. This extends the spine upward, contributing to better alignment (Ehmann and Haasemann 3).

### **Relaxation of the Vocal Tract: Relaxing the Jaw, Tongue, and Lips**

1. **Syllables for relaxation of the jaw, tongue, and lips:** Sing repeated syllables such as "blah-blah-blah," "fra-fra-fra," or "gah-gah-gah" on any of various pitch patterns, such as ascending and descending five-note scales (Ehmann and Haasemann 29). Encourage singers to use a very spacious "ah" vowel and let their jaw relax into the neutral "ah" position following each consonant or consonant cluster. This exercise is probably best done at a fast tempo so students do not have time to think about tensing up their singing muscles.
2. **Tongue relaxation:** Extend and retract the tongue as if "imitating a poisonous snake" (Ehmann and Haasemann 29). This exercise activates the tip of the tongue and allows it to relax after being extended.
3. **"Lips, Teeth, Tip of the Tongue":** Sing "lips, teeth, tip of the tongue" on a single pitch, ascending by half-steps. In this exercise, by saying the names of the vocal articulators, students become more aware of their function in singing. I learned this exercise from my former conductor, Mandy Brigham.
4. **D, T, J:** Sing/speak the following vocalises:

9

**3** d t j ; working the tongue

Moderato (♩ = 96 - 112)

d t j ; d t j. Dah dah dah dah t j ;

Dah dah dah dah t j. Dah dah dah

tah\_ tah\_ t j; Dah dah dah

tah\_ tah\_ t j. Jah jah jah jah.

This exercise activates the tongue and helps singers learn how to connect both voiced and unvoiced tongue consonants with vowels (Telfer 9).

### Creating Spaciousness

1. **Sighs:** Drop the jaw and yawn, exhaling on “ooh” on an unspecified high pitch and sighing down through the clef. Use an up, over, and up gesture (hands come over head, down, and finally point up) to reinforce the correct technique learned through the sigh (Jordan 30). This exercise creates lots of space in the vocal tract without any pressure to make the sound agreeable because no one is singing.
2. **Hum on [m]:** Hum on [m] gently on an ascending and descending three-note scale. Ascend by half-steps. After a few repetitions, open to [u], [o], [e], and finally [a]. Encourage singers to maintain a “yawn” space during the humming and to keep that space when they open to the vowels. This exercise encourages the use of front and back resonance on a neutral vowel (Palant 106).
3. **Sneezing:** Sneeze with a loud “ahtchoo!” Repeat, this time extending the final [u] vowel over several pitches. The syllable [a] “broadens the space at the back of the mouth” and the consonant clusters “force the tone forward” (Ehmann and Haasemann 13).
4. **Breathy sigh:** Drop the jaw and create the yawn space. Start exhaling lightly, but audibly. There should be no pitch yet. Slowly bring the vocal folds together to create

first a very light, breathy sung pitch. Sustain this pitch until it becomes louder, less breathy, and more supported, then sigh down from that pitch on an [a] vowel. This exercise effectively opens the vocal tract, allowing singers to find an open sound without clenching or holding the note. I learned this exercise from Dr. Morscheck.

### **Breathing**

- 1. Lie-on-the-floor breathing:** Singers lay down on the ground and take some deep breaths in and out. The conductor should direct the singers' awareness to how their abdomen is expanding (in and out). In this position, it is very difficult to engage in clavicular breathing. Students then stand back up and try to recall the sensation of breathing while lying down. This is a good breathing exercise for giving students an experience of breathing the *correct* way rather than just explaining it. I learned this warmup from Dr. Lucas Tappan at a music conference.
- 2. Breathe in the fresh air:** Pretend to open a window to a bright, sunny day and breathe in the fresh air. This exercise teaches students to breathe fully and deeply. I learned it from Dr. Morscheck.
- 3. Feel the breathing muscles:** Place one hand on the abdominal wall with the other on the small of the back. This allows one to feel the so-called "breath ring" and thus feel the expansion and contraction of the abdomen with breathing (Ehmann and Haasemann 5).
- 4. Breathing while sitting down:** Sit down in the chair. Place elbows on your knees, then breathe in this position, taking note of the sensation. After a little while, stand up and try to breathe in the same way. This exercise teaches proper breathing technique as well as an awareness of how it feels (Palant 111).

### **Exhalation and Inhalation**

- 1. Cooling the soup:** Singers cup their hands, imagining that there is a bowl of hot soup in their hands. Singers should slightly pucker their lips and blow to "cool off" the soup. This exercise helps singers to "create a steady expulsion and use of air" (Ehmann and Haasemann 6).
- 2. Whisper an exclamatory phrase:** Singers energetically whisper an exclamation such as "Oh, what a beautiful morning!" or "It's almost like being in love!" According to Ehmann and Haasemann, "if these exclamations are made in a pianissimo dynamic, the diaphragm remains passive. When the phrases are repeated fortissimo, the immediate diaphragmatic involvement can be felt in the abdomen, sides, and back" (Ehmann and Haasemann 27). This exercise could be especially useful when it is done using text from the choir's current repertoire.
- 3. Puffing at dandelions:** Each singer holds an imaginary dandelion and tries to blow the seeds away with as little air pressure as possible (Ehmann and Haasemann 6). This exercise is great for teaching a controlled, steady release of breath.
- 4. Breathing through a straw:** Imagine there is a drinking straw between your lips. Blow out air in three blasts, then, after waiting a moment, draw air in through the straw in three gulps. This exercise encourages good, steady, relaxed breathing technique. It keeps

students from associating their breathing with the lungs at all (Ehmann and Haasemann 28).

### Support

1. **K, T, P:** Model and have choir repeat the following pattern of consonants, very energetically:

K T P P P T T T T K K T T K K K T T who!

This exercise is brief but very effectively engages diaphragmatic support by energetically speaking the consonants “T” and “K,” and immediately transferring that support to a vowel sound (who!) on a nonspecific pitch. I learned this warmup from my former conductor at LACC, Anne Tomlinson.

2. **Flexibility:** Sing the following exercise with accompaniment. Be sure to keep the voice very light. The directions say to sing the vowel on short notes “like a quick, happy chuckle” (Jennings 16). Remind singers of this and perhaps ask them to make a jolly chuckling noise to engage the correct support for this exercise.

## 7. FLEXIBILITY

- Repeat the vowel on the slurred notes ("fleh-eh-eh") like a quick, happy chuckle. (Surprisingly this is easier to do quickly than slowly. Do not be overly concerned about accuracy at first.)
- Keep your voice light.

The musical score is divided into four systems, each with a Voice line and a Piano accompaniment line. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4.

**System 1:**  
 Voice: Flex - i-bil-i - ty, flex - i-bil-i - ty, sing with light and short\_ notes;  
 Piano: Accompaniment with chords and moving lines.

**System 2:**  
 Voice: Flex - i-bil-i - ty, flex - i-bil-i - ty, sing with eas - y float - ing breath:  
 Piano: Accompaniment with a *simile* marking.

**System 3:**  
 Voice: Yah\_ ah, ah, yah\_ ah, ah, yah\_ ah-ah, yah\_ ah-ah, yah\_ ah-ah ah.  
 Piano: Accompaniment.

**System 4:**  
 Voice: Yah\_ ah, ah, yah\_ ah, ah, yah\_ ah-ah, yah\_ ah-ah, yah\_ ah-ah ah.  
 Piano: Accompaniment.

The goal of this exercise is to engage the proper support for short, staccato pitches, as well as legato, slurred pitches.

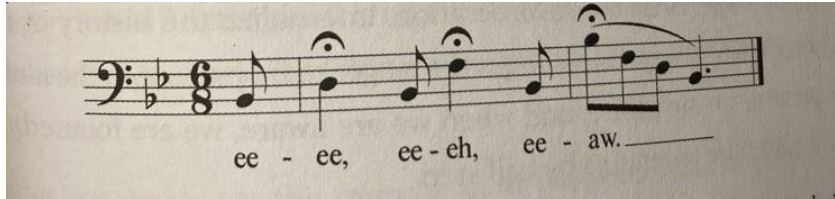
- Hissing:** Singers take a deep singer's breath and exhale on [s]. Singers should sustain this as long as possible. Creating an informal competition out of trying to be the last one left with breath to spare works well with younger singers. This exercise engages the core

muscles necessary for diaphragmatic support without overly tightening the core. I learned this exercise in an elementary music class.

4. **Hot Dog in the Summer:** Pant like a dog. First pant quickly, then more and more slowly, until finally stopping, not holding in the breath by closing the throat but simply allowing it to sit in a fully expanded core. The quick, shallow breathing engages the core muscles and teaches good breath support. I learned this from Dr. Morscheck.

### General Resonance

1. **Arpeggio on vowels:** Sing energetically the following exercise, ascending by half-steps:



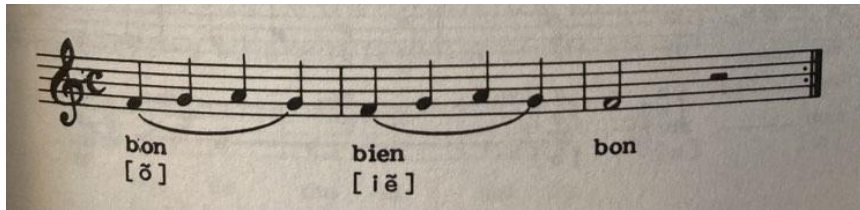
This exercise brings the energy of the comfortable, lower register into the higher register and invigorates it with lots of resonance. Instruct singers to bend the knees on the high notes like a pli —this helps anchor the high notes (Palant 105). When done at a brisk tempo, this exercise could be especially effective because students will tense up less.

2. **Humming and chewing:** Hum on the consonant [m] in the middle register and make a chewing motion (lips together but not tight, teeth apart). The sound should be high and forward with lots of resonance in all areas. Singers can place the heel of their hand on the forehead as they hum and chew to feel the resonance and ensure the sound is correctly placed. This exercise helps generate resonance in all registers (Jordan 42).
3. **Bad Smell:** Sing an exercise melody (such as a five-note descending scale on “noh”) with the nose wrinkled as if you smell a terrible odor. This exercise creates forward resonance and when you transition back to the regular singing voice, there will be a noticeable difference (Jordan 51).
4. **Mm-Ah:** On a single note, sing “mm-ah, mm-ee,” moving from the hum to the vowel slowly. Keep the lips relaxed and teeth slightly apart. This exercise places the voice forward and helps make vowels more resonant (Telfer 16).

### Specific Resonance

1. **Ming:** Take in a “cool” breath to encourage bright resonance. Then sing a quick five-note descending scale on “ming” with a strident, almost ugly sound (Jordan 43). This exercise encourages the development of specific forward resonance.
2. **Nyah:** Sing “nyah” on a do-ti-la-sol-la-ti-do pattern, keeping the sound as nasty as possible to focus the voice. This exercise encourages specific forward resonance to eliminate breathiness (Telfer 34).
3. **Nee-no-nee:** Sing “nee-noh-nee-no-nee” on a descending five-pitch scale. Repeat, taking the whole exercise up by a half-step each time. This exercise encourages the development of specific forward resonance. I learned it from my mother.

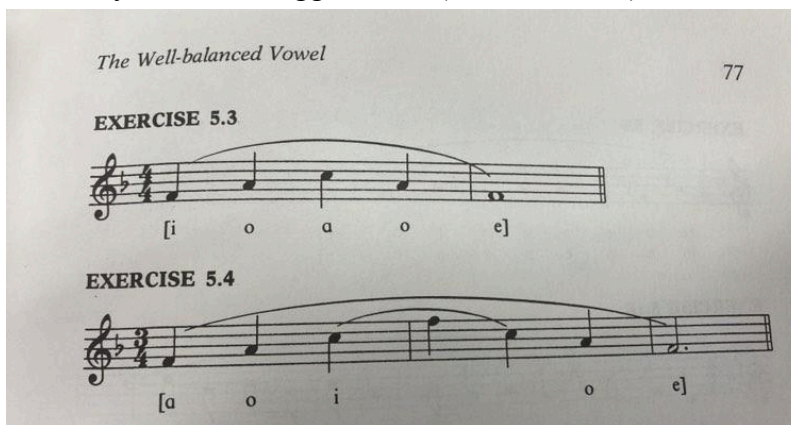
4. **Bon, Bien:** Sing the following pattern on “bien” and “bon,” with resonant and forward French nasal vowels:



This exercise, through the use of nasalized vowels, encourages the forward placement of sung pitches (Ehmann and Haasemann 35).

### Vowel Development Hierarchy

1. **Vowel Differentiation Legato Exercises:** First speak and then sing the following vowel patterns. When speaking, students should take note of how their lips and jaw move - “naturally, without exaggeration” (Horstmann 76).



While singing these patterns, students should maintain awareness of lip and jaw mobility. The purpose of this exercise is to differentiate between the acoustic space for back and front vowels.

2. **Moo, Moh, Mah, Meh, Mi:** Pick a note on the piano (A or Bb suggested). Students sing [mu] [mɔ] [mɑ] [mɛ] [mi] on the same pitch, making the following motions with their hands: “pulling” the sound from their mouth (mu), making a circle around their lips with pointer finger (mɔ), hands pulling vertically away from the mouth (mɑ), pointer finger arching out from the mouth (last two). This exercise teaches students to form vowel shapes correctly and carries the resonance from [m] into the vowels. I learned this exercise from my former conductor, Mandy Brigham.
3. **Unifying vowels:** This one is similar to the previous exercise, but with slightly different hand motions for the vowels. Unify “oo” by circling the mouth with the pointer finger. Unify “oh” by placing the thumb and pointer finger a few inches from the opening of the mouth and focusing the sound through the small opening between them. Unify “ee” by placing hands on cheeks, with all fingers pointing toward the ceiling. This makes the vowel taller. Unify “ah” by placing the right hand at eye level, keeping the sound tall and arched. Unify “eh” by stretching an imaginary rubber band from the top lip with the right



hand. This exercise achieves vowel unification across the choir and teaches individual singers to form vowel shapes correctly (Palant 109).

- Vowel Modification Exercises:** Sing an arpeggiated triad (do-mi-sol-do-sol-mi-do) slowly on [na]. Singers should reduce the size of the aperture on the lower notes and drop the jaw more towards the top. Repeat the exercise with [nu], [no], and [ni]. With each repetition, the same principle applies—drop the jaw towards the top to create more space for the vowel to resonate. This exercise targets the tricky technique of vowel modification. Since higher notes require more space, the mouth needs to open more on the higher notes for each vowel (Ehmann and Haasemann 56).

### Register Consistency

- Five-Note Descending Scale:** Sing a five-note descending scale on neutral syllables, such as “loo-ah,” on each pitch of the scale. Start in Eb or F major and lower by a half step with each repeat. Instruct singers to energize the upper register and carry that energy into the lower notes, without any weight or extra muscle engagement in the lower notes. This exercise is great for unifying registers and creating awareness around the singer’s passagio (Palant 104).
- Sigh the Tone:** Students sing the following exercise with piano accompaniment:

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## 6. SIGH THE TONE

- Slur on the words “sigh” and “smile,” feeling the voice a bit lighter on the lower pitches.
- Imagine the “smile” inside, especially on the “ah-ee” diphthong.

Voice

Sigh the tone, sigh the tone with a smile in - side;

Piano

Sigh, smile on an e - ven breath.

This exercise is great for unifying registers by bringing the lightness of the high register down (Jennings 14).

3. **Ping:** Sing “ping, ping, ping” on a single note, then hum on [ŋ] on a five-note descending scale. The gliding [ŋ] sound carries the head town down into the lower register. Be careful not to allow the lower notes to become throaty. It may be helpful for singers to use a pointer finger to point to the tone (Ehmann and Haasemann 12).
4. **Sirens:** Hum on [m], [n], or [ŋ], sliding up and down through the vocal range like a police siren (Ehmann and Haasemann 12). Phonating on these voiced consonants requires an open throat but also maintains glottal pressure. This exercise thus encourages consistency throughout the vocal registers as the breath balances and the throat opens automatically.

## Works Cited

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