

## **Sing Out! Course Notes weeks 6-10**

NB I've numbered the pages continuously with the notes from weeks 1-5, so you should be able to put all the notes together and keep the contents pages at the front...

### Contents

<b>6.1</b>	<b>Confidence building</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>6.2</b>	<b>Singing with meaning</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>7.1</b>	<b>Making a song your own</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>8.1</b>	<b>Ornamentation</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>8.2</b>	<b>Vibrato</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>8.3</b>	<b>General singing tips not covered elsewhere</b>	<b>30</b>
	<b>More Songs</b>	
	On the Moor (Trad)	32
	Once there was a man (J Arrowsmith)	33
	Diadem (Sheffield Carol: Perronet / Ellor)	34

## 6.1 Confidence building

Lack of confidence, or fear/stage fright is a very common barrier to singing, stopping you from enjoying singing in front of others or stopping you from doing it at all.

In general, I think there are two ways in which we can build confidence. One is to work on the skills of whatever it is we're doing – in this case singing – and gain confidence in our technique by doing lots of practice and work. However that only goes so far – if the problem is actually fear or performance nerves, then however well you can do it in private, that doesn't necessarily make you feel any better about doing it in public. What needs practice is often the actual singing in front of other people. If you never push yourself to do it, it never gets any easier, and if you do push yourself to do it, I promise that it does get easier in the end! But that can be easier said than done.

The other thing I think you can do is to treat confidence building as a task in itself. It's easy to say "oh well, I'm not very confident" and use that as a reason for not doing something. Instead I would challenge you to turn it around and say "what can I do to build my own confidence?"

Here are some ideas for things that you can do to be proactive about confidence building:

- Set yourself achievable challenges, and recognise when you have done them. Make them SMART targets. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timebound). Identify a thing that you would really like to do and consider what your barriers are. Take as many baby steps as you need to unpick those barriers.
- Pick a handful of exercises, or a song, and sing them every day for a week, then record yourself doing them. Then, do them every day for a month and record yourself again. Then listen to both recordings and make a list of all the improvements you can hear from the first one to the second one – there will be some! Even if you can still hear things wrong with the second recording, for this particular exercise, only list the positives – this is about improving your self esteem.
- Be kind to yourself! We are usually our own harshest critics. Give yourself pep talks before and after your challenges as if you were a slightly nervous friend whose feelings you are being careful of.
- Laugh off any mistakes – but learn from them. A wrong note or two is not the end of the world. You probably notice way more than the people around you anyhow. Same goes for forgetting words – I always reckon I don't know a song properly until I've forgotten the words in public a couple of times! Partly – it is all about the recovery. Think in advance about what your recovery strategy would be if the thing you most dreaded did happen.

## 6.2 Singing with meaning

Despite all our work on physical and practical technique for singing, it is also important to think about the emotional experience of singing, or listening to, a song. It's easy to focus so hard on the technical stuff that the story and emotion of the song is lost.

For me the words are of paramount importance. Enunciation and projection are key so that the words come out clearly, but phrasing, emphasis and pace are also incredibly important. You can enunciate all you like and sing beautifully in tune with fantastic projection and tone, but if you do it all in emotional monochrome and don't let the poetry of the words come through, or don't use emphasis and phrasing to add colour to your singing, then it is still not going to feel as satisfying as it could.

Say the words – try speaking the words out loud as if it was a piece of prose. Don't get caught into 'sing-song' rhythmic delivery just because these are the words of a song. There is no 'wrong' way to do this – in fact there are lots of 'right' ways – but it is worth experimenting with what you feel is important in that set of words, both to be sure that you really understand what you are singing about and to bring out the natural rhythm and flow of the syllables as meaningful language.

Then you can look at how that fits with the tune. My favourite songs tend to have a tune and words that naturally marry together with the emphasis all in natural feeling places – but sometimes you have to tweak either words or tune in order to make it make sense to you. Don't be frightened to do that!

## 7.1 Making a song your own

It is very easy, especially if you learn a song from the singing of somebody else, to end up copying them stylistically and essentially singing a "cover" of their version of the song. I don't think there is anything wrong with learning songs from other people's performance or recording – it's a perfectly valid way of sourcing songs that appeal to you. But if it matters to you that you don't just sing covers, then you need to find a way of getting inside the song and delivering it in your own way.

What makes a performance of a song unique to the performer?

- Pace
- Pitch & tone
- Variations in the words or tune
- Phrasing & emphasis
- Ornamentation

What can you do to make a performance yours?

- Listen to lots of different versions of the song (if you can find them)
- Track down as many different versions of the lyrics as you can and choose or construct the one that you like best. (Probably only appropriate for traditional songs!)

- Observe what it is (in the version that you initially had) that you really like about it, and what the singer is doing that is stylistically “them” – that includes ornamentation and phrasing, as well as any musical arrangement choices.
- Take a step away from that recording – stop listening to it or singing along with it for a month or two.
- Strip the song back to the absolute basics and sing it like that for a while – take out any ornamentation, or lilt in the timing, etc
- Read the song words out loud as prose and analyse where the emphasis should be to make most sense to you.
- Sing the song straight but put in as much dramatic emphasis as you like.
- Make your own choices about putting ornamentation, lilt etc back in again using the things that you feel most comfortable with rather than whatever was in the version you first knew.

### 8.1 Ornamentation

There are as many ways to ornament as there are singers. Ornamentation falls into two main categories:

- 1) Extra notes around the tune. These may be:
  - a. Grace notes – where you sing a very quick note before the actual note of the tune. This is sometimes a note just one step higher or lower than the note you’re heading towards, or it can be a bigger interval. The effect can sound very different depending on which note you use as the grace note.
  - b. Wibbles (not the correct technical term but descriptive nonetheless I think!). By this I mean flicking quickly to a different note and then back again part way through the note that you are singing. It’s a bit like a grace note but in the middle of the note rather than at the start. The real name for this is a mordent – an upper mordent if you flick to a higher note than your main note, and a lower mordent if the one you flick to is lower.
  - c. Turns – a turn is often used in Irish music, and is where you sing the note you’re singing, then the note above it, then the note itself again, then the note below it, then the note again. The idea is to do this very quickly so that the overall effect is like a wobble around the note.
  - d. Other twiddles or runs – there are an infinite number of other ways in which you can insert extra notes around the notes of the tune, many of which are variations on the ones I’ve listed above – such as doing a run up to a note (several notes in sequence taking steps towards the note you’re aiming for, in the same way as a grace note but with a few notes instead of just one), or ending a note with a move to a different note (like a slow grace note or wobble at the very end of a note), or... as many others as you can think of!

- 2) Swoops and slides. With these, rather than singing discrete separate notes, you can bend the pitch of the note that you are singing but then slide it back to the true pitch. So, you can slide into a note by starting sharp or flat and then gradually coming to the true note, or you can bend the middle of the note by singing the true note, bending it sharp or flat in the middle, and then bringing it back on pitch. Note bending introduces a little bit of tension at the point where you're singing the slightly flat or sharp bit, and a sense of release and 'rightness' when you bring it back on pitch.

Having defined these two separate categories, you'll probably actually find that lots of ornamentation is a combination of the two. Whenever you are singing extra notes around the tune, you can also slide from one note to the other instead of singing them with clean jumps in between them.

So, if you want to work on new types of ornamentation, one thing that you can do is to pick an ornament, practice executing it just on a single note or a little bit of a scale or arpeggio, and then choose a song that you already know well and try placing that ornament into the song in as many places as you possibly can. It'll feel odd, and far too ornamented, but it'll help you to identify the kinds of places where you are comfortable using that ornament in that song. Then sing it again just with the ornament in the places that feel good.

Another thing you can do is listen to other singers, or recordings of other singers, and try to analyse and work out what different kinds of ornamentation they are using. Then you can copy just one of them at a time to see if it feels good to you.

Final word about ornamentation – obviously it is a very personal choice as to what ornamentation to use and where, but just be aware that a little goes a long way! Ornamentation is like the icing on the top of a cake – too much and it can just spoil the whole thing.

## **8.2 Vibrato**

Vibrato is a musical effect where there is a regular pulsating change of pitch – a 'wobble' if you like. The use of vibrato is intended to add warmth and depth to a note. Vibrato is not the same thing as tremolo, although some people use the terms interchangeably. Tremolo is a fast repetition of the same note, which can have the effect of a regular pulsating change in volume. . In practice, it is difficult for a singer to achieve a pure vibrato or pure tremolo (where only the pitch or only the volume is varied), and variations in both pitch and volume will often be achieved at the same time.

Vibrato is produced in two ways:

- Vibration of muscles within the larynx (generally faster vibrato)
- Vibration of the diaphragm (generally slower vibrato)
- And some people use a combination of the two at the same time.

BUT it's not something which is easily learned. It's possible to do exercises that can create a vibrato effect by artificially creating the vibrating pitch variation but the result can be a bit forced. There's even something some people call 'Gospel Jaw' where the jaw wobbles up and down with each wobble of the vibrato, which is actually a sign of less than ideal technique. Artificial vibrato can cause tension and strain, and generally doesn't either sound great or feel comfortable.

So instead of exercises to develop your vibrato, I think it is better to concentrate on the fundamentals of strong, relaxed, well supported singing, and let your vibrato develop by itself. If you focus on your resonance and timbre, then a natural vibrato may come with time without you actually doing anything to create it. Good, natural vibrato should feel very relaxed and be a release of tension.

In terms of where to use vibrato – some singers naturally produce vibrato whenever they sing, some singers never use it at all, and others just use it occasionally – often towards the end of long notes – as another kind of ornament. Vibrato goes in and out of fashion and I don't personally think you need to be able to produce vibrato in order to be a good singer. I also think it's easily possible to overdo vibrato which can then get in the way of clearly hearing the tune or understanding the words, but obviously that is my own personal taste more than anything. My advice – if you find you are producing vibrato when you sing, just make sure it's a conscious choice whether you are using it or not, and use it with subtlety! If you experiment you'll probably find that you can vary the width of the vibrato (the amount of wobble) and the speed of it. Different styles will work better for different people and for different songs, so just have a play and see what is most comfortable for you in each case.

### **8.3 General singing tips not covered elsewhere**

This final section of notes covers things that haven't necessarily come up in specific sections of teaching but that nevertheless might be helpful to think about. Some of these came up while doing group singing, others were prompted by the master class sessions. In no particular order... :

- Clip words slight to improve clarity. Make sure that each syllable fits within the note that you are singing, rather than trying to stretch the vowel to the full length of the note which then rushes the consonants and makes all your words run in together.
- Think about where to breathe – use it like punctuation. Try not to breathe in the middle of a word – and if that means taking a preparatory breath before you actually are running out then so be it!
- Although in an ideal world you may want to aim at singing long phrases all on one breath, this is not always possible. Don't be afraid to add extra punctuation by taking an extra breath if you need one – better to do that than to run out of breath before the end of the phrase!

- When you do take a breath, make it count! Ensure that you breathe from the diaphragm *and* lower ribs fully, rather than just snatching a bit of air with the top of your chest.
- Experiment with pitching. You've usually got more head room than you think – pitch your song at the point where the lowest notes are comfortable and have sufficient projection at performance volume, and then look at where you might need to shift tonally to get the smoothest transitions to the upper part of your voice. The transition may not be anywhere near as noticeable to the listener as it is inside your head (this is often the case).
- Don't strain up to your top notes – sing 'down' on to them.
- Posture is key to relaxation and it can help to observe in a mirror, on video, or with a third party, to see if you are doing anything perverse especially with head position – are you pushing up with your chin towards high notes? Are you tilting your head back (essentially, lifting the top of your head) when you open your mouth rather than allowing your jaw to drop? It's all about reducing tension and strain or constriction in the neck, which will then restrict what your voice can do.
- If you're going to be singing into a microphone, remember that you don't have to push your projection so hard – let the mic do the work for you.
- If you are singing a harmony part, memorise a 'hook' to get you into it. Analyse what the harmony part does relative to the tune - does it start on the same note or a different note? If different what is the interval between them? What is the shape of the first phrase of the harmony part? What notes does it use (i.e. the numbers of the scale)? What is the interval between the first and second notes? And whatever else you can do to fix that first phrase in your head – once you've got your part going it is easier to continue!
- If you are nervous, try and kid yourself into being more relaxed by consciously adopting relaxed body language and breathing. If your body is allowed to engage its 'fight or flight' mechanisms just because you're full of adrenaline due to singing in front of others, then the tension can spiral out of control. Think about how you stand and what you do with your arms, and think about how you're breathing.

## Songs

### On the Moor (Trad.)

On the moor I saw a plover

1 1 (7) (7) 2 2 1 1

And the curlew called her lover

3 3 2 2 4 4 3 3

Pee-wit! Pee-wit!

5 5 5 5

Spring shall surely come again

5 (5) (5) (5) (5) (5) 1



## Once there was a man (J. Arrowsmith, 2013)

1. Once there was a man and he had no song,  
He felt his head was empty and his voice was wrong,  
And though he'd often tried, his songs were trapped inside,  
He couldn't find the place where they belong.

*But raise your voice with mine,  
For now's the perfect time to join the song*

2. Once there was a woman and her songs were loud,  
She sang them in the shower, and she sang them proud,  
But when her friends were near, her voice it shrank with fear,  
And left her shaking, mute, before the crowd.

*But raise your voice with mine,  
For now's the perfect time to join the song*

3. Now if you want to sing but don't know how or why,  
Don't listen to the ones who say you should not try,  
There's bound to be a way you've not tried before today,  
To free your voice to soar beneath the sky.

*So raise your voice with mine,  
For now's the perfect time to join the song*

4. Once there was a singer and he made his choice,  
To leave his doubts behind him and to find his voice,  
The journey that he's on is to learn just one more song,  
And sing it out and make his friends rejoice.

*So raise your voice with mine,  
For now's the perfect time to join the song,*

*Raise your voice with mine,  
For now's the perfect time to join the song.*

**Diadem (Lyrics:Edward Perronet (1779), music:James Ellor (1819-1899))**

1. All hail the power of Jesu's name!  
Let angels prostrate fall,  
Let angels prostrate fall;  
Bring forth the royal diadem,  
*And crown Him, crown Him, crown Him, crown Him,*  
*And crown Him Lord of all!*
  
2. Ye saints redeemed of Adam's race,  
Ye ransomed from the fall,  
Ye ransomed from the fall,  
Hail Him who saves you by his grace,  
*And crown Him, crown Him, crown Him, crown Him,*  
*And crown Him Lord of all!*
  
3. Sinners, whose love can ne'er forget  
The wormwood and the gall,  
The wormwood and the gall;  
Go spread your trophies at his feet,  
*And crown Him, crown Him, crown Him, crown Him,*  
*And crown Him Lord of all!*
  
4. O that with yonder sacred throng  
We at His feet may fall,  
We at His feet may fall;  
Join in the everlasting song,  
*And crown Him, crown Him, crown Him, crown Him,*  
*And crown Him Lord of all.*

Coda: *And crown Him Lord of all.*

*And crown Him Lord of all,*

*And crown Him Lord of all,*

*And crown Him Lord of all.*