

Free Body, Free Voice
Harmony University Northwest, July 2010

Floorwork Release

- Notice breath, no need to judge or change
- Scan body from toes to top of head, releasing tension in each area
- Elastic box breathing: lie on back, breathe into front; lie on side, breathe into 'up' side; lie on front, breathe into back; lie on other side, breathe into 'up' side – 4 sides noticed. Notice 'top' (shoulder girdle) and 'bottom' (pelvic floor).
- Exhale with 'sigh of relief'. Pause after exhalation, wait for body to allow new breath in.
- Exhale on a gentle 'fff', noticing effortless friction between top teeth and bottom lip.
- Change 'fff' into 'vvv', notice vibrations
- Change 'vvv' into 'vvvaaaaah'
- Find origin of sound deep in the pelvis, release 'sigh of relief' as a 'huh' sound.
- Spine drop-down with partner: supporting partner touches/massages each vertebra of acting partner, starting at spine-skull connection and working way down to tailbone. Acting partner releases body forward at each vertebra, ending up hanging upside down. Keep knees soft, neck free, arms free. While hanging upside down, notice breathing; breathe into belly, back ribs. Supporting partner reverses sequence, bringing acting partner back to standing. Remind partner to keep neck released and head heavy until the very end.

Warm up

- Three releasing breaths, shoulders high, sigh out
- Elbow elastics: imagine very strong elastics connecting the elbows to the side ribs. Pull elbows up slightly, bringing ribs up as they lift. Notice suspension of breath in lungs with very lifted and expanded ribcage. (NOTE: this is not how to breathe for singing! This is simply an exercise to expand the breathing spaces so that the body can allow the breath freely in.) Release. Repeat, bringing elbows higher, release. Repeat, bringing elbows up to shoulder height, release.
- Drop into feet: imagine a brightly coloured dot of light behind right heel. Slide the dot around outside of foot to pinky toe. Slide back to heel. Slide dot around inside of foot to big toe mound. Slide back to heel. Slide dot around outside to pinky toe, trace around each toe, ending at the big toe mound. Slide dot back to heel. Notice 'footprint' on floor, drop weight of body into footprint. Notice what releases. Repeat other side.
- Neck drop & circles on 'huh'
- Bubble octaves ('ee' inside) with strong, smooth, 'Director' gestures. Top hand palm faces down, curved, and represents the soft palate. Bottom hand palm faces up, curved, and represents the larynx/tongue. Gesture ← → on silent breath to expand breathing spaces, and gesture up and down for bubbling.
- 4-stage hum experiment: hum simple pattern with teeth closed. Where are the vibrations? Hum same pattern with teeth *just* apart. What happened to the vibrations? Hum same pattern with dropped jaw (lips still closed). Now what happened? Hum same pattern with lifted soft palate (yawn breath). Now what happened to the vibrations? Where are they? Which direction? Hum same pattern, adding more energetic use of breath. NOW what happened?

- Notice larynx – feel for ‘ligament space’ where neck meets jaw. Swallow, notice what happened. Yawn, notice what happened. After the yawn, where the larynx lands is ‘neutral’, good position for singing.
- Slide from bottom to top of range and back down on ‘uh’ – notice larynx movement.
- Tell larynx to relax, (Hey buddy, you don’t have to help!) feel effect of yawn breath
- Notice tongue – feel under chin with thumb. Swallow and notice what happens (flexion).
- Repeat slide, noticing tongue.
- Massage tongue with thumb under chin. Repeat slide – softer tongue? More released?
- Stretch tongue passively: stick tongue out, bite down to immobilize it, lift chin way up and forward and feel stretch of tongue deep in throat. Twist *slightly* in both directions, release. Repeat slide – less flexion now?
- Tongue releasing exercise: ‘ee-yahs’ – tuck tip of tongue behind bottom teeth. Roll body of tongue way out of mouth (jaw must be dropped to get ‘ee’-ish sound rather than ‘nn’), release tongue back to ‘uh’ sound. Repeat 3x on a middle pitch, move down by semitones toward lower range, and back up. Repeat slide – softer tongue now?
- Engage soft palate – inward ‘kaaa’, yawn breath, think high note
- Jaw release – think of jaw as bottom jaw, and rest of head as top jaw. Hands control the bottom jaw in this exercise, no muscles are used to move the bottom jaw. With hands, pull bottom jaw down. [Lift bottom jaw up. Lift top jaw *off* bottom jaw.] Repeat until head is all the way back. Reverse. Notice what controls the top jaw (back of neck).
- 3-way breath: on inhalation, notice the spaces opening in three directions: soft palate goes up, larynx goes down, and tongue goes out. (Usual tongue movement on yawn breath is *back*; notice the different feeling.) You are re-training these three things to happen together for singing breathing.
- ‘Awful arpeggios’ – tongue all the way out. Notice how transitions happen without the help of the tongue.
- ‘Nay’ arpeggios with wiggle – release neck, feel free high note