

THE MIRACLE OF YOUR VOICE

CLASS 2 - BREATH



SING AND USE YOUR VOICE WITH
CONFIDENCE AND FREEDOM!

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The Miracle of Your Voice – Class 2 – Breath

First of all welcome and thanks for purchasing this product - the second in a series of three classes. I firmly believe that we are all capable of making sounds and singing in ways that we find enjoyable and healthful. I hope that you'll enjoy the journey and I look forward to the progress I know you'll make – not only in your voice but in yourself!

Track 1 – The Class

Part 1 - Physical Warm-Up

The Washing Machine.

Begin standing with your feet hip width apart, your knees relaxed and soft, your arms hanging relaxed and your shoulder blades low. When instructed slowly begin to swivel your body from side to side (Fig.1 & 2) and continue as instructed.

Fig.1

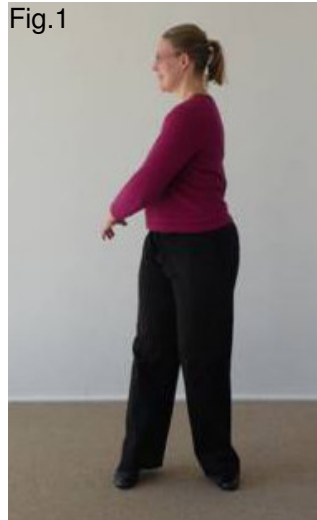
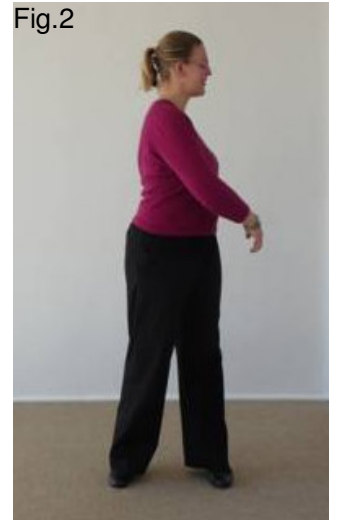


Fig.2



The Hippy-Dippy

Stand in a relaxed upright posture with your hands placed where they naturally fall on your thighs. Slowly bend over to the right allowing your right fingertips to slide down your leg towards your knee (Fig.1). Then return to centre and slowly bend over to the left (Fig.2), continue as instructed.

Fig.1

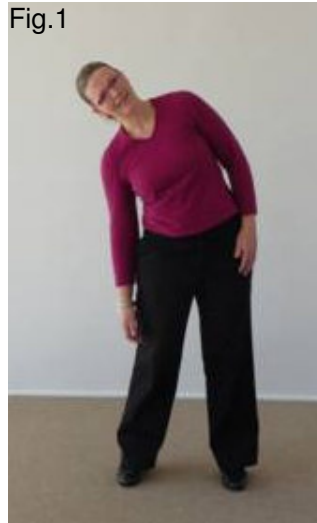
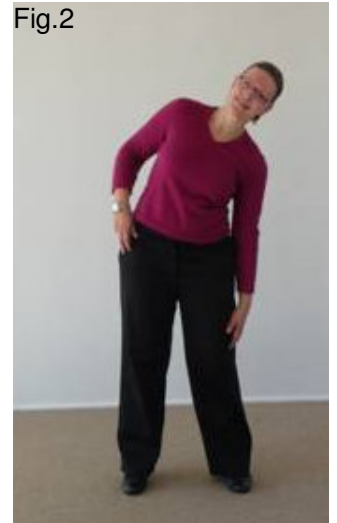
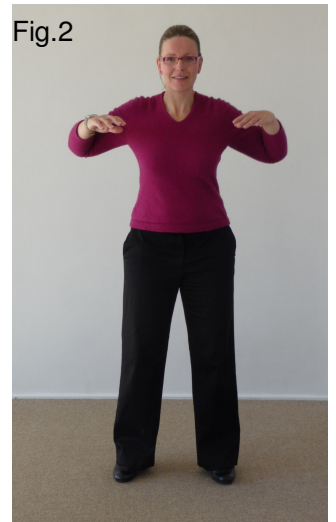
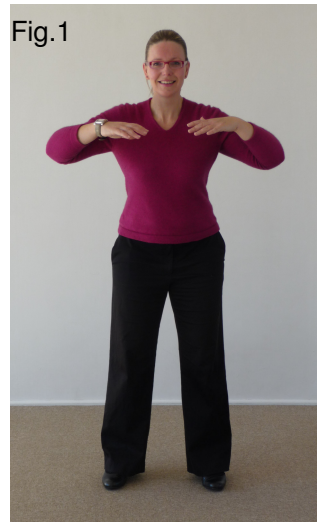


Fig.2



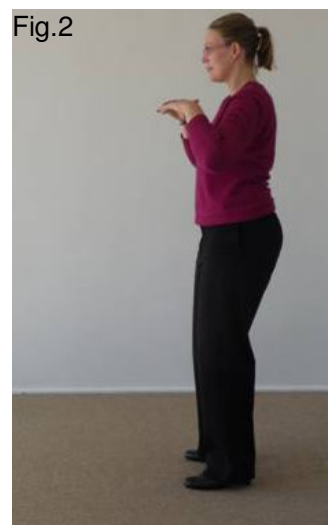
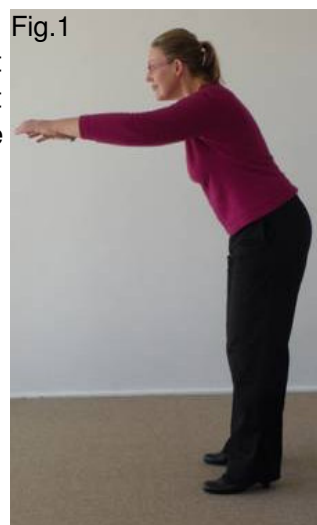
The Rooster

Stand in a relaxed upright posture. Raise your elbows up and out to the sides with your hands in front of your chest. Now begin to move your elbows backwards and forwards (Fig.1 & 2) and continue as instructed.



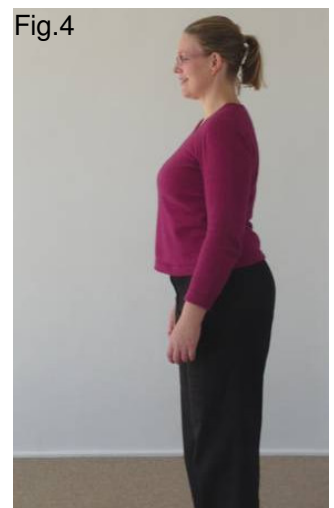
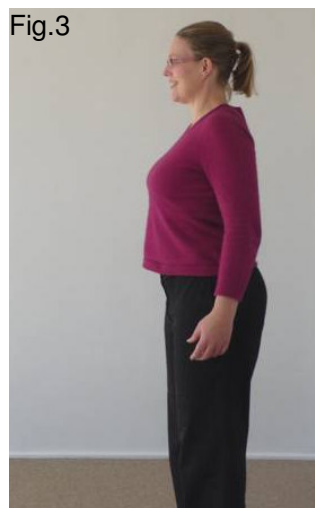
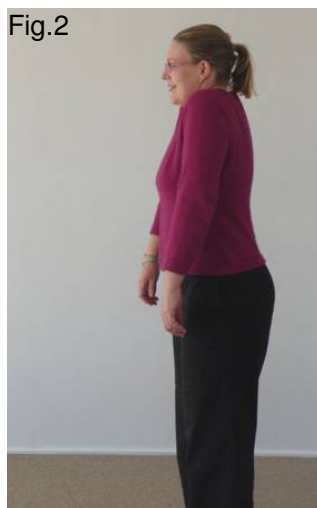
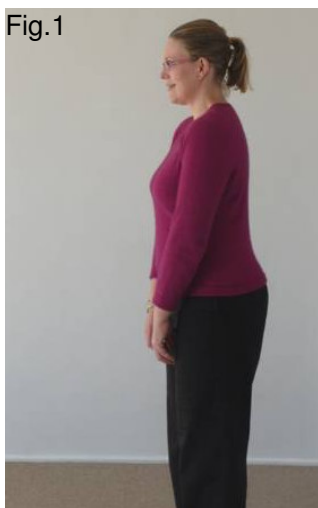
The Albatross

Stand in a relaxed upright posture with your hands at your sides. Lean forward slightly, raise your arms out to the sides of your body and flare them forwards like giant wings (Fig.1). Now draw your hands back towards your chest as if you are rowing a boat (Fig. 2). Continue as instructed.



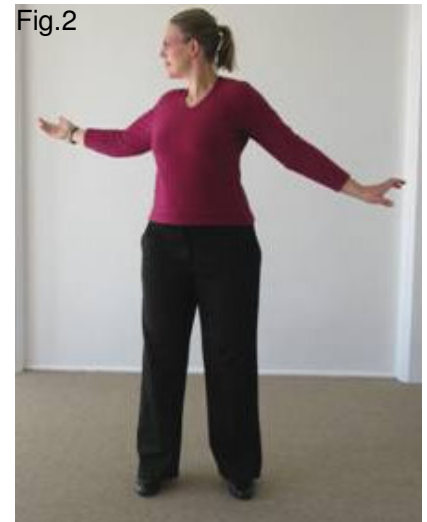
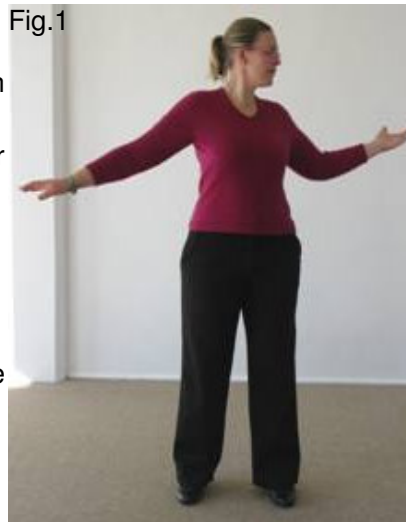
Shoulder Rolls

Stand in a relaxed upright posture with your hands at your sides. Move your shoulders forward, back, up and down (Fig.1, 2, 3 & 4) and continue as instructed.



Shoulder Rotations

Stand in a relaxed upright posture with your hands at your sides. Lift your arms straight up from the sides of your body. Rotate your left hand upwards and your right hand downwards (Fig.1). Then rotate your left hand downwards and your right hand upwards (Fig.2). Look towards the upturned hand each time and continue as instructed.

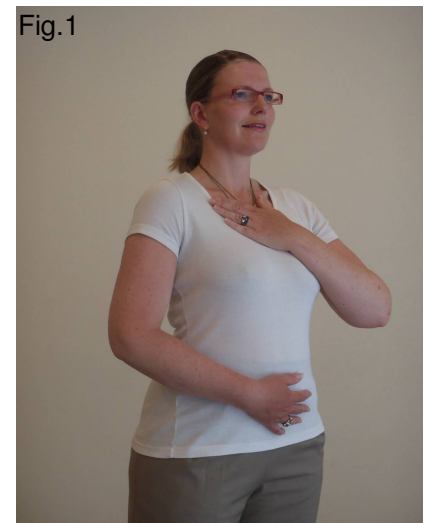


Part 2 - Breath

Begin standing in a relaxed upright posture with your hands at your sides and continue through the sighing vocal exercises with the mouth closed and then open as instructed.

Floor Breaths and The Lazy Boy

Begin standing in your neutral relaxed upright posture. Place one hand on your upper chest on top of your collarbone. Place your other hand on and below your bellybutton and continue as instructed (Fig.1).



When instructed lay down on the floor on your back and continue as instructed. When instructed place your chosen item across your bellybutton and lower tummy (Fig.2). Focus on your breathing rhythm and continue as instructed with this exercise and the Lazy Boy Breath exercise.



The Pump Breath

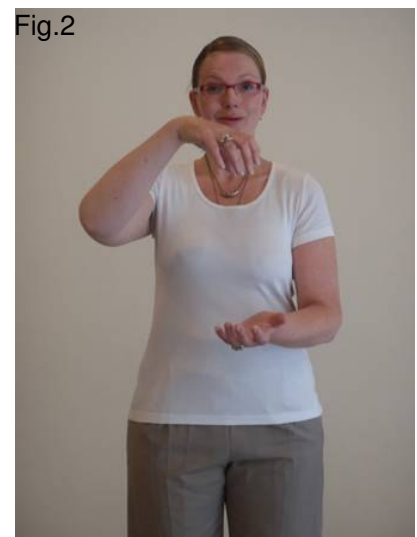
Begin standing in your neutral relaxed upright posture. Place both hands onto your stomach (Fig.1) and continue with the pump breath exercise as instructed.



Bambi Bounces.

Begin standing in your neutral relaxed upright posture and continue with the exercise as instructed.

You may find it helpful to use your hands whilst performing this exercise. Place one hand palm up in front of your body, now cup the other hand and place it on top of the first hand (Fig.1). Bounce your cupped hand up and down as you bounce the sound between the two notes (Fig.2). Continue as instructed.



The Singing Seaweed.

Begin standing in your neutral relaxed upright posture. As you place a singing tone on top of your breath, allow your body and arms to move as if you are a giant Kelp moving and flowing with the gentle currents of the ocean (Fig.1 & 2). Continue as instructed.



Song Study – Amazing Grace

Amazing Grace has a beautiful, simple melody, words that are easy to remember and the tune moves in reasonably simple steps. It's the ideal piece for beginners to practice as an exercise to get the breath under the tone and use well enunciated vowels and consonants.

Amazing Grace – Verse 1

Amazing grace how sweet the sound,
that saved a wretch like me,
I once was lost, but now I'm found,
was blind, but now I see.

Support Notes:

The importance of water

The voice is a wet membrane and wind instrument. You need to keep it moist and hydrated for optimum performance. Make sure that you drink plenty of clean water throughout the day particularly an hour prior to your singing. As a guideline a **minimum** of 1.5 litres of should be drunk daily.

Basic anatomy of the voice

Your voice is produced in a structure called the larynx. The larynx is made of cartilage positioned just under the mid-point of your throat. You can place the fingers of one hand gently around the front of your neck about two thirds down the length of your chin. Now give a gentle swallow. You should feel a structure bob up and down slightly. (This may take a few repetitions to find the right spot!) This structure is your larynx.

The vocal chords are a miracle consisting of different layers of membranes (the things that come together and vibrate to actually make the sound!). The vocal chords (or folds) sit cross-ways within the, 'ring' of the thyroid cartilage which slots into the, 'ring' of the cricoid cartilage. These membranes are braced, supported and manipulated by a variety of ligaments capable of moving in a number of directions. The membranes or vocal chords sit inside the larynx horizontally in a 'V' shape that meets at the front and spreads out in the v towards the back.

The entire larynx is balanced on top of the trachea or wind-pipe. When we want to make a sound the brain signals that we release a puff of air from the lungs, the air comes up the wind-pipe and passes between the notch or 'v' of the vocal chords. The brain signals the vocal chords to come together. When the vocal chords meet they begin to vibrate which produces a sound wave. This is the miracle of your voice.

The miracle of your voice

If you look at the nail tip on your index finger you have the rough size and dimension of your vocal chord. Yet this tiny delicate structure is capable of producing notes of the most exquisite range, beauty and expressiveness. When we sing 'tuning A' (A above middle C), the note that orchestras use before they start playing, we produce a note that is vibrating at 440 vibrations per second (or A 440 kHz). I include this information so that you can appreciate that it is impossible to consciously control the actions of our body to produce sound (we cannot consciously make our body do anything at the rate of 440 vibrations in a second!). What we can do is set up optimum conditions in the mind and body for the voice to do what it intuitively knows how to do. Therefore singing is in many ways a clearing away of our sense of, 'how we should' sing and a learning to just allow what is and can be.

Sing on the air

Always start sounds (phonation) gently and on the air. When you begin it is useful to start each sound with a small, 'haaah' of air prior to starting the sound. This is to ensure you don't start the sound with too much of a bang or squeeze known as a harsh 'onset' or glottal.

Breath Coordination

This CD is designed to put you through your paces when it comes to breathing for effective speech and singing! Concentrate on keeping low, soft shoulders when you breathe and relaxing the tummy. For some of you this in itself may be quite a feat! Many of us have been trained since a young age to suck in the gut and hold up and tense the shoulders constantly – like the sergeant major on parade. This is the **opposite posture** of a good singer's breath. With a singer's breath the shoulders remain low and relatively still when we breathe in. The ribs should flare out (most at the lower ribs) and the tummy should relax and swell gently outwards.

The muscles of breathing

Breathing is a physical action that involves a number of muscle groups. The breathing muscles include the 3 paired sheets of abdominal muscles the

- external obliques
- internal obliques, and
- transverse abdominis.

The other key breathing muscles are the intercostals which strut each of the ribs and the diaphragm.

A note on the diaphragm

It is important to realise that the diaphragm is an involuntary muscle (we can't sense or 'feel' it) that bisects the body in the shape of an upside down cup at about nipple height. Because we can't consciously feel this muscle, as we take our breath it is better to concentrate on the swinging up and out of the lower ribs and the expansion of the tummy.

Opening the space between the vocal folds

Your breathing will become easier if you ensure that you open up the space between the vocal folds as you take in your air. This means we need to find the, 'start of the yawn' feeling as we take our breath. We don't want to hear the breath audibly with a 'catch' sound as this indicates that the throat is closed as we take the breath. Sometimes the image is used of taking a, 'Darth Vader' breath minus the sound effect! This gives you the feel of opening the space in the larynx between the vocal folds as you breathe.

How to practice

When you start singing you should practice little and often. As you build strength and ability in your instrument you can increase the duration and frequency of your practice. 10 mins 3-4 times a week consistently will yield good results. After a few weeks increase this if you can to 15- 20 minutes 3-4 times a week. Don't force your voice, start gently, be attentive, let your voice teach you, your voice knows how to sing if you let it!

A Note on Pitch

This vocal series is not focussed on pitch. I firmly believe that everyone has the ability to find pitch (sing in tune). However, it is true that the ability to recognise the relative nature of pitch and sing within the framework of a prescribed series of notes varies from person to person. **THIS IS NO BARRIER TO LEARNING TO SING AND ENJOYING YOUR SINGING!!**

Maybe you don't know if you sing in tune or not – many people don't. That doesn't matter. I know from experience in my private teaching that the ability to sing in tune develops over time. It's a matter of waking up the right parts of the brain that recognise pitch. If you've had people in the past tell you you're out of tune or 'can't sing' put that behind you and let go of it, this singing course is for you. For now, just sing for yourself, then you're perfectly, 'in tune' with how your own voice wants to express itself!

What if we were to forget entirely about pitch and just sing!!

'Nothing ventured, nothing gained' - nothing sung nothing pitched! i.e. you'll never get there if you don't go from here – so just sing. Over time the ability to sing in tune will grow – but first plant the seed by singing!

Have you ever had the experience of just singing for the pure joy of it? Maybe you were walking in the bush, out at a hut somewhere isolated, in the car in the rain with all the windows up – singing a song that you know from childhood, a song that takes you back to a special time and place and singing it at the top of your lungs with all your heart! The objective of this course is to get you singing like that – so at this stage in the game don't worry about pitch!

The first stage of learning to sing is just to sing! Sing uncritically and freely – sing because it feels good not because you want to 'sound' good – (whatever that means!).

Important Note for The Male Voice

If you are a male working with this vocal series please remember that the quality and range of your voice will differ significantly from mine. **You don't need to start on the same pitch as me.**

Because the male voice has a unique range known as the falsetto it is quite possible that you can sing all the notes on the same pitches as I do. However, if you do this you will not be exploring your own unique head, chest and middle voice registrations. Therefore it is important that you work to discover where the low chest, high head, and middle notes are in your own vocal range.

Put it into practice

Use the song study in this class, 'Amazing Grace' to get the coordination of breathing working as you sing a melody. After you've worked with this song and feel confident that you're singing 'on the air' you should branch out to other song choices. Choose songs you enjoy but make sure that the tune is achievable i.e. moves in relatively small pitch steps, has a memorable tune, and has a simple melody. Make sure it's something you enjoy working with – you can sing along with the radio, TV, your ipod or a CD. Work with a song that doesn't strain your voice. Sing in the comfortable mid-range of your voice (not extreme high and low notes and not with big jumps in the tune). While you're singing try and stay down and grounded in your body, do the physical and vocal warm-ups first if possible.

Checklist for song singing

Think about the registrations you learned in Class 1 – Registration (chest, head, middle voice) while you sing your song study, 'Amazing Grace'. Make sure you're expanding the tummy as you breath and swinging the ribs as you've learned in Class 2 – Breath. Get in touch with the feeling in the body, in the throat, in the head as you move through the notes of the tune. Ask yourself these questions as you sing:

- Do I feel free vibration in my face, throat and torso?
- Do I feel relaxed?
- Is my tummy expanding as I breath in?
- Are my ribs swinging up and out as I breath in?
- Does my tummy move back towards my spine as I sing and let the breath out?
- Can I get all the notes?
- Are some notes much easier to sing than others?
- What notes are easier – the high notes, the low, the middle?
- How's my posture when I sing?
- Are my shoulders relaxed?
- Are my eyes level forward?
- Is the back of my neck long?
- Is my chest comfortably high (but not rigid)?

Wait for the answers to these questions. Don't rush. Ask the questions lots of times. The answers (and the next question!) will change as you progress.

Bibliography

This course is designed to be a practical, 'feeling sense' experience of what it is to sing well. There are many useful and informative books on the mechanics of singing. If you're some-one who enjoys detailed explanations and anatomical description here is a selection of the ones I have found most clear and relevant.

Singing and the Actor, Keyes, Gillyanne, Routledge, 2nd Ed. 2005.

The Structure of Singing, Singing, Miller, Richard., Schirmer Books, 1986.

Singing - The Mechanism and the Technique, Vennard, William, Carl Fisher, Revised Ed. 1967.

Sites for Singers

www.youtube.com - Of course! This one has revolutionised the teaching of singing. Go on-line and find in a heart-beat multiple renditions of most pieces you would want to sing! Compare voices, technique and interpretations.

www.sheetmusicplus.com - A comprehensive site for purchase of sheet music.

www.onlinesheetmusic.com - One of the main sites for instant sheet music download.

www.ameritz.co.uk Faithful to original backing tracks available at a low cost.

Glossary

Aspirate - The 'hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh' sound when we release a puff of air.

Glottal - Starting a sound with a hard strike of the vocal chords together, like when we say, 'ah-huh'.

Larynx - A structure made of cartilage and membrane that sits on top of the wind-pipe and houses the vocal chords.

Phonation - Making sound.

Pitch – A sound at a specific vibratory rate.

Resonaters – The spaces that reflect and magnify the vibrations from the vocal folds i.e. the chest cavity, throat, mouth and sinuses.

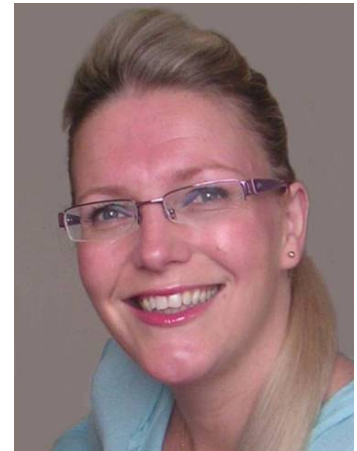
Vibrator – The vocal folds.

Vocal Chords (or folds) - The 2 membranes housed inside the larynx that when brought together begin to vibrate and create sound waves.

Meet your Teacher – Barbara Ann Grant

Barbara Ann Grant is a classically trained mezzo soprano. She sang her first public performance aged 6, began formal lessons at 13 and went on to study performance voice at the Wellington Conservatory of Music, Victoria University and Oberlin Conservatory, Oberlin, U.S.A, where she received a full tuition scholarship.

She says, "Our voice is a deep expression of our true self. We need to, 'feel good to sing good' and 'sing good to feel good'. Treat the voice with the curiosity of a child and the voice itself will teach us the lesson that we are always free and whole and we have always been so. When our voice finds this truth it echoes it back to us on all levels and in all ways and we are deeply transformed."



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