

# Vocal Warm Ups

by Leanne Hoad



Singing Lessons

**Bring Out Your Voice!**

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"Continuing vocal efficiency can be promoted by maintaining a regular practice schedule, by cultivating good speech habits, by employing strategies to deal with the demands of performance and by warming up before performances (or any form of singing session)."<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Singers who invest time warming up their voice before they sing, will find that after a few years their vocal stamina develops to a stage where they rarely get a hoarse throat after singing.

Conversely, those who haven't invested this time will probably experience vocal fatigue such as a hoarse throat; sometimes after just one heavy singing session, gig or rehearsal.

## What is a "vocal warm up"?

A vocal warm up is the process of warming up the muscles of the voice box (larynx) in preparation for singing.

In the context of singing, it is done through a combination of different singing exercises.

## The importance of vocal warm ups.

It is important to establish a regular warm up routine tailored to your voice because it will:

- **Develop vocal stamina**  
Singers need to strengthen the muscles of the larynx (voice box) so that it is able to withstand the long haul of singing and the physical demands placed on the voice.
- **Prevent overextending the voice**  
Overextending the voice can cause short or long term vocal damage due to the strain on the larynx muscles.

Just as warming up before sporting activity is important to prevent over-extending and damaging muscles, the same is true for singing.

## How do we warm up the voice?

It is important to think in terms of a structured warm up routine for your voice rather than a series of random vocal exercises.

A warm up routine (see below) should be done before each singing session. A session can be a singing lesson, a singing practice at home, a gig, performance, concert, audition or any rehearsal involving singing.

## Establishing a warm up routine.

Callaghan<sup>2</sup> states that undertaking an established warm up routine before performance offers psychological as well as physical security to the singer.

Each individual's voice type (bass, tenor, soprano etc) will determine the amount of time spent on warming up the voice.

A routine of 15 - 20 minutes is recommended depending on the individual's needs and voice type.

As previously indicated, any warm up routine needs to be tailored to the individual voice.

As a guide, a good routine should include a gentle beginning, slowly extending the range to its upper and lower limits. Include some exercises which access the entire range of pitch and vocal quality. Callaghan<sup>3</sup> recommends completing the warm up with some loud singing.

### LHSS warming up exercises:

1. we start with 10 minutes of gentle 'sirening' in the singer's comfortable range; not too loud or forcing too much air past the vocal folds. This exercise is an excellent way to start because it is very gentle on the vocal folds.
2. gently extend this 'sirening' exercise to the upper and lower ranges of the voice.
3. using the 'æ' sound (as in 'mæt') sing exercises using small intervals of a 2nd or 3rd in the singer's comfortable range.
4. once the singer's comfortable range has been warmed-up, they can carefully extend the exercises to the upper and lower ranges of the voice and move to more complicated interval patterns.

For maximum voice quality (and to avoid bad habits) it is imperative that correct technique be applied at all times when singing, including warm up exercises; this is especially the case for beginners.

### Vocal fatigue (avoid over doing warm ups)

The singer must be aware of their vocal limits and not overdo warm ups, or singing in general, for long periods to the point of vocal fatigue.

Fatigue is a cause of weariness; labour; exertion.<sup>4</sup>

Callaghan<sup>5</sup> quotes Titze (1983a) by saying "vocal fatigue is linked to inefficient use of the mechanism, to muscular fatigue, and to dehydration. Fatigue may result when the mechanism is asked to perform a task requiring unaccustomed muscle use. Some muscle fatigue can be expected to occur after prolonged periods of phonation, regardless of how well the muscles are developed."

Ultimately, the singer will understand his/her own voice and will get to know for themselves at what point their voice is warmed-up enough to start singing. The teacher can assist in this process.

### Dealing with the temptation to skip the warm up routine.

Singers are often tempted to bypass their vocal warm up routine and to get straight into singing. This is a mistake.

Major factors which tempt singers to skip their warm up routine include:

- undervaluing its importance
- not knowing how to warm up
- not allowing time to warm up
- finding a suitable location

It is crucial to understand that your voice relies on warming up for its longevity, range and quality. You also gain the psychological security of knowing your voice will deliver the goods.

Do you want your voice to last for 20 years?

Do you want to hit the high notes you dread?

Do you want to be considered reliable and get the roles?

Do you want to last the gigs night after night without your voice tiring?

The answer is simple, effective and timeless with no shortcuts:

**Warm your voice up before you sing.**

## Vocal Cool down

It is worth mentioning the cool down process which should be exercised after extensive singing.

Callaghan<sup>6</sup>, says "Cooling down has long been advocated after extended athletic effort. While it is rarely mentioned in the vocal literature, it would seem a sensible procedure after extended vocal effort."

Thurman and Welch<sup>7</sup> quote Saxon and Schneider by recommending that a vocal cool down be undertaken after extensive and/or vigorous voice use. A cool down begins after vigorous voice use and a reverse warm up is performed. Cool down helps prevent post-voice-use muscle tightening.

Thurman and Welch further suggest a less strenuous version of earlier more vigorous singing will gradually reverse the warm up process. Gentle stretching is recommended, perhaps using softer, downward sigh-glides using a puppy-cry sound with the starting pitches gradually lowering.

External hand massages of the larynx and other neck muscles, and exercises that are performed near the beginning of the warm up are also appropriate.

## What to do now?

You can:

- establish a regular warm up routine. We recommend you consult a singing teacher to help you.
- make sure you set aside time to warm up before every singing session

A series of warm ups on a cassette tape can be a useful tool, especially for those who are not yet used to the warm up regime.

You can do these exercises at home during the day or in the car on the way to work, to choir, to the singing lesson or gig. When at the venue find a vacant room, bathroom or car. or set aside time to warm-up as a group.

At our singing Studio we have recording facilities whereby we tape the lessons. Upon request we can also record a 'warm up exercise programme'.

## Footnotes

1. Miller, Richard (1990). Structure Of Singing System and Art in Vocal Technique, New York: Schirmer Books,
2. Callaghan, Jean PhD (2000). Singing and Voice Science. San Diego, California: Singular Publishing Group, p105.
3. *ibid*, p105.
4. Delbridge, A., Bernard, J R L, eds. (1988). The Macquarie Concise Dictionary, Australia, New South Wales: The Macquarie Library, p342.
5. Callaghan, Jean PhD (2000). Singing and Voice Science. San Diego, California: Singular Publishing Group, p102.
6. *ibid*, p103.
7. Thurman, Leon., Welch, Graham, eds. (2000). Body & Voice Foundations of Voice Education, Minnesota, USA: The VoiceCare Network, pp 502-503.

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- Oates, Jenni (2003). What Is Vocal Fatigue. *Voiceprint*, 23, April 2002 - May 2003, pp1-2.
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