

# **Free to Sing**

## **Vocal Warm-ups & Exercises for Women**



**Written, compiled and edited by Laura Stevenson**  
**Accompaniment by Marjorie Mock**



## Free to Sing

Singing has been identified as an integral part of all cultures, no matter how advanced or primitive. Adults sing infants to sleep. Song is used to teach basic concepts to children. Vocal music can carry a much deeper emotional message than spoken words alone.

Can anyone learn to sing?

Yes! Any person with a normal speaking voice that can "carry a tune" (or can to learn to do so) can learn to sing well. Many believe singing is strictly an inborn talent. It is actually a skill that can be learned from a qualified teacher, improved by practicing and reinforced with positive performance experiences.

How does someone learn to sing?

Singing is both a mental and physical process. Intellectual learning and muscular training are necessary. Students must gain awareness of the vocal instrument and then use daily practice to form good habits and eliminate harmful habits. Setting goals builds success and therefore, confidence.

## International Phonetic Alphabet Symbols Used in this Book

The International Phonetic Alphabet, or IPA, for short, has come into universal usage over the last decade by singers, teachers of voice, and teachers of language. It is a system of great simplicity and clarity. Working through the exercises in this book will acquaint you with many IPA symbols. A list of the symbols used follows as well as a key to their pronunciation.

### Pure Vowels:

#### Neutrals

[a] = father

[ə] = above

[ʌ] = love

[ɒ] = hot

#### Brights

[i] = eat

[ɪ] = it

[e] = chaos

[ɛ] = met

[æ] = mad

#### Darks

[u] = boot

[ʊ] = book

[o] = hope

[ɔ] = awe

#### Mixed

[y] = [i] + [u]

[ɣ] = [ɪ] + [ə]

[ø] = [e] + [ɔ]

[œ] = [ɛ] + [ɔ]

#### Nasals

[ã] = [a] with a dropped soft palate, creating a nasal quality

[ɔ̃] = [ɔ] with a dropped soft palate, creating a nasal quality

#### Consonants

The consonants in the book are pronounced orthographically, e.g. the way they are spelled. There are three exceptions:

[ŋ] = sing

[ð] = this

[j] = a glide, and in Alleluja

# Breath Exercises

## *Onset*

Adagio

1

*mp*  
(tu hu hu hu hu)

### Instructions

1. Before you begin, note your posture and correct it if necessary. Say the Alexander mantra - "I release my neck and shoulders to allow my head to float gently upward."
2. As you inhale, notice the expansion through the ribs.
3. Use a delicate contraction of the abdominal muscles to make the [h].
4. Round the lips softly with a small aperture, as if you were going to kiss something.
5. Continue to energize the vowel sound with a gentle muscular contraction. Push the button, e.g. find the solar plexus and make sure the abdominal muscles over it are in engaged.
6. Keep the ribs out; don't let them collapse, even when you are running short of air.
7. Renew the breath by taking small, gentle breaths between notes.

## DICATH EXERCISES

### Onset

Moderato

2

[hi hi hi hi hi]

#### Instructions:

1. Follow instructions 1-3 on the previous page.
2. Sing this exercise slightly faster, with a bright, clear [i] vowel.
3. Use the abdominals in a somewhat more energetic manner. Feel the muscles flex at the beginning, or onset, of each note.
4. Push the button; keep the ribs out and the chest high.
5. Continue to renew the breath between each note.

Allegro

3

[ha ha ha ha ha]

#### Instructions:

1. As on the first two exercises, think of posture and of releasing the neck, shoulders, and jaw as you inhale. Notice the *sense of expansion through the ribs as you inhale*.
2. Sing this exercise rapidly, using rather large, energetic contractions of the abdominals. Propel the air with intensity.
3. Push the button and keep the ribs from collapsing.
4. This time, don't take breaths between the notes, but do make a little space between notes. Observe the fermata.

## *Lip and Tongue Trills*

4. & 5. Lip Trills  
6. & 7. Tongue Trills



### Instructions:

1. Lip Trills are also referred to as "bubbles" or "bubble slides"
2. Gently close lips and blow enough air to make the lips vibrate, like blowing bubbles under water or making motor noises.
3. Some people find it necessary to push up on the corners of the mouth with the fingers to create this sound.
4. This exercise produces steady breath control while eliminating tension.
5. Tongue trills may be substituted for lip trills.
6. Perform Exercises 4 and 5 with lip trills.

### Instructions:

1. Tongue trills are "rolled r's" on pitch.
2. It is helpful to use a "d" or "th" mouth position.
3. This exercise produces steady breath control while reducing tension.
4. Lip trills may be substituted for tongue trills.
5. Perform exercises 4 and 5 with tongue trills.



# Vowel Exercises

## Bright Vowels



|     |    |    |    |    |    |
|-----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 15. | ai | ai | ai | ai | ai |
| 16. | zi | zi | zi | zi | zi |
| 17. | ne | ne | ne | ne | ne |
| 18. | ma | ma | ma | ma | ma |

### Instructions:

1. On bright vowels, the muscles of the mouth are relaxed and in a neutral position, not smiling nor pulled down nor rounded. The tip of the tongue gently touches the lower teeth ridge; the tongue is slightly rounded and elevated just behind the tip. Ideally it is the tongue position which gives the bright vowels their characteristic brilliance, not a smiling mouth position.
2. As you progress through the exercise, the vowels progress from close to more open, so the jaw should drop slightly. The high "fronted" tongue also drops a bit as the vowels progress from close to open.
3. Energize the initial consonant with the breath. This consonant helps to focus the sound and to keep it more forward.
4. Sing this exercise *legato*. Don't put an [h] sound on the second note of the two-note groups.

# Vowel Exercises

## Dark Vowels



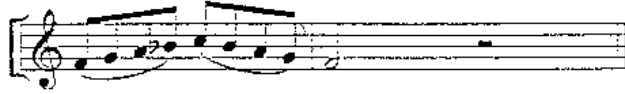
19. [zu — zu — zu — zu — zu]  
20. [nu — nu — nu — nu — nu]  
21. [mo — mo — mo — mo — mo]  
22. [vo — vo — vo — vo — vo]

### Instructions:

1. Dark vowels must be energetically rounded. Although it may seem alien to do so at first, a singer who hopes to be understood must become comfortable with these "kissy" mouth positions.
2. Again energize the consonant. Become aware of its buzzy sensation; it will help you find the placement for the vowel sound.
3. Sing slowly and *legato*.

# Vowel Exercises

## Dark/bright crossovers



23. [zi — zu — zi]  
24. [vi — vu — vi]  
25. [me — mo — me]  
26. [næ — no — næ]

### Instructions:

1. Sing these exercises before a mirror! Be sure that the brights have a neutral mouth position and that the darks are well rounded.
2. Energize the consonants, then let the energy continue to flow through the vowels.



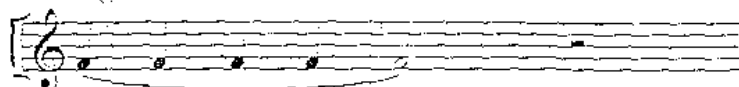
27. [zi — zu — zi — zu — zi]  
28. [ni — no — ne — no — ni]  
29. [ve — vo — ve — vo — ve]  
30. [læ — lo — læ — lo — læ]



31. [ni — no — ni — no — ni]  
32. [vu — ve — vu — ve — vu]  
33. [zi — zo — zi — zo — zi]  
34. [næ — no — næ — no — næ]

## Vowel Exercises

### Mixed Vowels



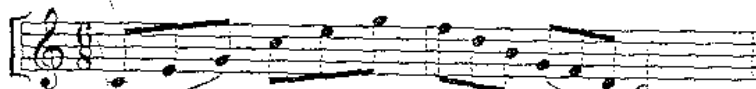
|     |    |   |   |   |    |
|-----|----|---|---|---|----|
| 35. | [u | y | u | y | u] |
| 36. | [u | y | o | y | o] |
| 37. | [o | ø | o | ø | o] |
| 38. | [ɔ | œ | ɔ | œ | ɔ] |

#### Instructions:

Mixed vowels are common occurrences in French and German. They do not occur in English. However the practice of mixed vowels has value to the singer in that they can enhance the sensations of "forward" tone quality.

1. Round the first pure vowel adequately.
2. Keep the initial mouth position and add the appropriate vowel, e.g. [y] is [u] + [i],  
 [ɣ] is [u] + [r],  
 [ø] is [o] + [e],  
 [œ] is [ɔ] + [e].

### Vowel Modification



|     |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 39. | [i | ɪ | e | æ | æ | e | i | i |
|     | [u | ʊ | o | ɔ | ɔ | o | u | u |
|     | [e | ɛ | æ | ɔ | ɔ | æ | e | e |
|     | [o | ɔ | ɔ | ɛ | e | o | o | o |

#### Instructions:

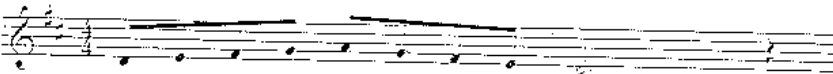
For comfort and for beauty of sound, close vowels must open, or modify, as they rise in pitch.

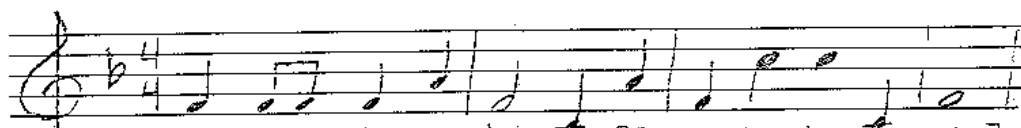
1. Make the first vowel sound very pure and close.
2. Open to the top pitches by smoothly, gently allowing the mouth to open.
3. Watch the mirror! Be sure that the opening of the mouth is smooth, not robotic.

## Articulation Exercises

Instructions:


1. Articulation exercises...need I say more?

40.   
[sleu bi du bi du bi du bi du] (etc.)

41.   
[zing big a ring a lo ha ai je ku ku ai je]

42.   
A cup of prop-er cof-fee in a cop-per cof-fee cup. (etc.)

43.   
Yel-low leath-er yel-low leath-er yel-low leath-er yel-low leath-er yay (etc.)

44.   
[po tu la pe do mi ni po tu la pe do mi ni po tu]

# Resonance Exercises

## Developing Awareness of Ring

45. 

[ŋ] ——— a ————— ]  
[ŋ] ——— ə ————— ]  
[ŋ] ——— o ————— ]

### Instructions:

1. The [ŋ] sound is like a hum with the mouth open. Instead of closed lips, this sound is closed at the back of the throat - the swallow spot.
2. Let plenty of breath energy flood the [ŋ]. You will feel a sensation of buzz and ring in the head and/or facial area.
3. When you open to the vowel, remember the feeling of the "Happy Gasp" ( ), and also flood the vowel with breath energy.

# Breath Exercises

## Yawn-Sigh



Men use falsetto on top pitch, and transition to chest voice as quickly as possible.

### Instructions:

1. Before you begin, repeat the Alexander mantra to yourself, "I release the neck....."
2. Inhale rather slowly with the feeling of the beginning a yawn. Allow the mouth to open gently, with a feeling of relaxation of the lips, tongue, and muscles of the face.
3. Begin the exercise rather high in the voice, above the second passaggio where you can get a light, little-girl sound. Let the breath flow freely as it does when you make the sound of a contented sigh.
4. Allow the pitch of the yawn-sigh to drop as low as you can comfortably go. Keep the sensations of relaxation and of openness throughout the exercise.
5. Sing the descending scale with the same approach as the yawn-sigh.

## The Happy Gasp

47.

[ha ha ha ha a \_\_\_\_\_ |  
 [he ha he ho e \_\_\_\_\_ |  
 [hã hã hã hã ã \_\_\_\_\_ |

### Instructions:

1. Inhale with the feeling of happy surprise.
2. Sing the first measure *détaché*, using contractions, or flexes of the abdominals to start the sound.
3. Sing the second measure very *legato*, with constant flow and energy from the breath.
4. The [ã] sound is a French nasal vowel in which the soft palate is lowered slightly to allow air into the nasal cavities.

# Vowel Exercises

## Coffin Exercises for the Vowel Register


48. 

|    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| [o | u | u | o | u | u | o | u | u | u] |
| [c | i | i | e | i | i | e | i | i | i] |
| [æ | ø | y | æ | ø | y | æ | ø | y | y] |
| [ɔ | o | u | ɔ | o | o | ɔ | o | u | u] |
| [æ | e | i | æ | e | i | æ | e | i | i] |
| [a | æ | ø | a | æ | ø | a | æ | ø | ø] |
| [ɒ | ʌ | u | ɒ | ʌ | u | ɒ | ʌ | u | u] |

Berton Coffin created a series of vocal exercises based upon a system called *Favorable Vowels*. By placing a vowel in the region of the voice where it acoustically gets maximum resonance, a singer experiences the sensations of "ring" in each vowel. These sensations can then be transferred to other music.

Instructions:

1. As the exercise moves up in pitch, use the next set of vowel sounds.
2. Mezzo-sopranos (altos) and bass/baritones should start with the second set of vowel sounds.

49. 

|     |     |     |     |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| [e] | [e] | [o] | [e] |
| [e] | [o] | [e] | [o] |
| [o] | [o] | [o] | [o] |
| [o] | [u] | [u] | [o] |

# Registration Exercises

## Identifying the Registers

### Yodels

50.

[i o i o i]  
[u a u a u]

[o i o i o]  
[a u a u a]

### Instructions:

1. Sing the upper note relatively softly, but with a generous air flow and a very pure vowel. The sound of the middle voice will emerge.
2. Allow the jaw to drop gently for the lower sound. Sing it more loudly. The sound of the chest voice will emerge.
3. Sing these exercises so that the lowest note is never higher than the D or Eb above Middle C. Take them as low as they are comfortable.

51.

[ma ma ma u ma ma ma i ma]  
[nae nae nae o nae nae nae nae e nae]

### Instructions:

1. Sing the eighth notes relatively loudly, but with very relaxed jaw, facial muscles, and tongue.
2. Energize the upper quarter notes with plenty of air. Sing a pure, ringing vowel sound relatively softly.
3. The lowest note in this exercise should be middle C.

# Registration Exercises

## *Exercises for Developing the Middle Voice*

52. 

|     |       |    |   |   |   |    |   |
|-----|-------|----|---|---|---|----|---|
| [ɒ  | o     | u  | ɔ | ɒ | ɔ | o] |   |
| [a: | e     | a: | e | æ | e | i] |   |
| [A  | ----- |    |   |   |   |    | ] |
| [a  | æ     | a  | œ | a | œ | ø] |   |
| [e  | e     | e  | e | e | e | i] |   |
| [œ  | ø     | œ  | ø | œ | ø | y] |   |
| [e  | e     | e  | e | e | e | i] |   |

Coffin writes:

"The female voice needs to be strengthened daily. Many have only a gasp in this register. This is probably due to an abuse of chest voice in speech, in pop, in yelling, in heavy breath support, or simply a lack of development."

Instructions:

1. Go down by half-steps on this exercise.

**Any and all of the vowel exercises will serve to strengthen the middle voice. The middle voice, that part of the voice between the first and second *passaggi*, is also called the vowel register. The best method for strengthening it is to develop the most efficient vowels possible.**





# Registration Exercises

## Bridging the Second Passagio

*pp*

|      |     |     |     |     |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| [u   | o   | u   | o   | u]  |
| [u   | A   | u   | A   | u]  |
| [ø   | a   | ø   | a   | ø]  |
| [e   | æ   | e   | æ   | e]  |
| [(A) | o   | (A) | o   | (A) |
| [u   | o   | u   | o   | u]  |
| [u   | (A) | u   | (A) | u]  |
| [ø   | e   | ø   | e   | ø]  |
| [u   | o   | u   | o   | u]  |

**Instructions:**

1. You should start this exercise in full chest, except when the first note is Eb or above. Then start in a full, resonant mix.
2. Slur lightly to the *pp* top note and hold it.
3. *Crescendo* very subtly as you descend.
4. Move up by half-steps on this exercise.

56.

|    |   |   |   |   |    |
|----|---|---|---|---|----|
| [ø | a | ø | a | ø | a] |
| [c | æ | e | æ | e | æ] |
| [u | A | u | A | u | A] |
| [y | œ | y | œ | y | œ] |
| [u | o | u | o | u | o] |
| [y | œ | y | œ | y | œ] |
| [o | o | o | o | o | o] |
| [ø | a | ø | a | ø | a] |
| [u | A | u | A | u | A] |
| [o | o | o | o | o | o] |

Coffin writes:

"Make a *crescendo* and *diminuendo* on the first three notes by changing vowels which give a register shift. A very valuable exercise for timbre exploration over the upper *passagio*."  
Move up by half-steps.

# Registration Exercises

## Bridging the Second Passagio

55.

|      |     |     |     |     |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| [o   | o   | u   | o   | u]  |
| [o   | ^   | u   | ^   | u]  |
| [ø   | a   | ø   | a   | ø]  |
| [e   | æ   | e   | æ   | e]  |
| [(A) | o   | (A) | o   | (A) |
| [o   | o   | u   | o   | u]  |
| [o   | (A) | u   | (A) | u]  |
| [ø   | e   | ø   | e   | ø]  |
| [u   | o   | u   | o   | u]  |

Instructions:

1. You should start this exercise in full chest, except when the first note is Eb or above. Then start in a full, resonant mix.
2. Slur lightly to the *pp* top note and hold it.
3. *Crescendo* very subtly as you descend.
4. Move up by half-steps on this exercise.

56.

|    |   |   |   |   |    |
|----|---|---|---|---|----|
| [ø | a | ø | u | ø | a] |
| [e | æ | e | æ | e | æ] |
| [y | ^ | y | ^ | y | ^] |
| [ø | o | ø | o | ø | o] |
| [y | ø | y | ø | y | ø] |
| [o | o | u | o | u | o] |
| [y | a | ø | e | ø | a] |
| [u | ^ | u | ^ | u | ^] |
| [o | o | o | o | o | o] |

Coffin writes:

"Make a *crescendo* and *diminuendo* on the first three notes by changing vowels which give a register shift. A very valuable exercise for timbre exploration over the upper *passagio*.  
Move up 1/2 half steps.

Coffin Exercises for Agility

57.

The musical notation shows a treble clef staff with a melodic line consisting of eighth and sixteenth notes. Below the staff is a vocal range chart with three columns of staves. The first column contains labels (A), C, G, A, and U. The second column contains labels B, C, G, and U. The third column contains labels C, C, and A. An upward-pointing arrow is located to the right of the chart.

Move up by half-steps.

Men should transition into falsetto when needed.

Coffin writes:

"Agility exercise on uncoupled Ah. Inhale through both the nose and mouth at the same time. Such imagery as inhaling a rose or thinking of the instant just before a sneeze can be used to accomplish the same thing. Sing the exercise on a very light Ah with a high degree of openness. This is uncoupled singing. Keep the voice light and flexible so that it will move."