

Building Your Optimal Daily Practice

Daily practice depends on what you want to do, and what will help you be ready to do that.
This requires experimentation and deep play.

What is a warm up?

What's it for?

What do I want? What's my plan to respond to that?

What's my criteria for whether something works?

All expert performers have a routine that is designed to help them access their responsiveness and their studied, rehearsed skills. It is how they say "I'm ready."

Your whole life can support your art and performing.

Your entire life, and all your values are included in your plan to respond to your creative desires.

Everything that is good for you on the whole, is good for your art.

Linking your values and priorities can help you organize all the parts of your life in a supportive way, giving you a unified field of attention.

Hygiene/ Overall Health and Well-Being

Exercise

Nutrition

Sleep

Anything that you define as taking care of yourself

Experiment to find what works for you.

Re-thinking "have to" and "want."

I may not enjoy something, but I do want to do it if it supports my well-being, my life and my art. You can often find ways to enjoy those things more when you've redefined them as a choice that is related to a larger "yes."

Vocal Hygiene

Gives you a baseline from which to operate

Humidifier, Air purifier

Steam

Gentle, coordinated vocal use in all of your life

Warming Up

Warming up is a kindness to myself that helps me become responsive so that I can do what I wish to do with quality. It means "I am ready." It is a whole- self, present- moment choice, that is a verb that is a yes. It is flexible and can be adapted at will.

Can include:

Whole self movement, asking to coordinate

Coordinating airflow and respiratory movement

The supple glide of the jaw

Anything you want to include in your preparatory steps to create the conditions that help you do what you care about

Flow/ Challenge State

Defined as:

1. There are clear goals every step of the way
2. There is immediate feedback to one's actions
3. There is a balance between challenge and skills
4. Action and awareness are merged
5. Distractions are excluded from consciousness
6. There is no worry of failure
7. Self-consciousness disappears
8. Sense of time becomes distorted
9. The activity becomes autotelic (enjoyable for its own sake)

The condition and quality of your flow state can be improved as your skills and coordination improve.

Warm Up Template

Singing is movement. If I'm already moving in a coordinated way, it's a continuation of what I'm already doing. Gentle coordination (not sound) helps me get the movement quality I want. Sound will follow. What I wish to practice is coordinated, reliable singing that is responsive and adaptable. There is something deeply satisfying about working authentically, where you actually are with your current capabilities.

1. Whole self, coordinated movement

Move everything

Stand on one leg and move your arms

Walk/ jog/ run

Dance

Bounce

2. Bring coordinated breathing into your movement

A useful way to do this is to invite anything that wishes to move with breathing to do so.

3. Sound making as an extension of movement that is already happening; gentle, continual movement that is expressly not challenging.

- Steam/ humming (hydrates the surface of the vocal folds)

- Rolled R: gliding, then cascading with more articulation

(Semi-occluded phonation requiring a significant degree of freedom in the tongue and jaw, continual airflow, and bringing about efficient vocal fold approximation.)

- Slowly starting to extend the movement as I have the sense that it is inevitable, easy and playful to do so

- Moving to vowels, oo and ee, allowing for the emergence of optimal resonance

4. Choosing the kind of movement to do next:

Agility, legato etc, gradually increasing the challenge level.

5. Choosing to work with repertoire

OR to do technical, skill-building work (intentionally going beyond my current skills)

Daily practice is about what will support your needs and desires, and having explored how you do your best work.

“I think that part of practicing is great because it unites what you want to do in engineering, as in technically, where do you put your arms and your fingers and your body—micro movements—with that desire and the feeling of what it needs to be. That’s a wonderful process because it’s a constant of going toward something bigger than the notes and yourself, and very lovingly so.

Whenever I catch myself playing something that sounds mechanical but dead, it’s because either I’m not paying attention or it’s something difficult that I haven’t solved. Sort of like a physicality issue that, you know, sudden tension, so I freeze up and become more internalized, so I can’t love it. [...]

When someone performs, you want that person to be open and not to have any barriers. Any barriers that are set up between the performer and the audience actually impedes the communication of what needs to be.”

Yo-Yo Ma