The Kate Conklin Foundations Course for Professional Singers

Coordinated Breathing

Natural Respiration

Breathing is a whole self movement. It effects our state of mind and is effected by it. It varies according to the activity we are doing. The breathing process is autonomic, or automatic.

Breaths are like ocean waves- the are different sizes and rates, and they keep coming. They also indicate a whole living system that is not necessarily empirically observable- you can't see the wave building beyond the breakers, but it is. You can't see or feel your breathing in all the ways it lives in you- but it does.

Structure and Skeleton

Spine: support structure for ribs; a mobile column

Ribs: attach and articulate around the spine; emanate from the back out and around to the front. There are 24 ribs (12 pair) designed for flexible, multi-directional movement.

Arms: attached in the front to the vertebral column at the sternoclavicular joint. The shoulder blades are part of the arm, and glide smoothly over the ribs in movement and with breathing.

Primary Respiratory Muscles and Organs

Diaphragm: dome- shaped partition between upper and lower torso
attaches to all the lower ribs, the pericardium, L3 up to T4 or 5, (slightly higher than the xiphoid process.)

Lungs: extract oxygen from the atmosphere and transfer it into the bloodstream, and to release carbon dioxide from the bloodstream into the atmosphere, in a process of gas exchange.

Secondary Respiratory Muscles

Intercostals: mainly involved in the mechanical aspect of breathing. These muscles help expand and shrink the size of the chest cavity to facilitate breathing.Internal intercostal muscles aid in forced expiration (quiet expiration is a passive process.)

Scalenes: elevate the first and second rib; flex and laterally bend the neck to same side.

Serratus anterior: acts to move the scapula forward around the thorax. (If SA is tight, the scapula can't glide, and breathing is restricted.)

Abdominals: There are four layers of abdominal muscles. The deepest layer, the transverse abdominals, interdigitate with the diaphragm.

All abdominals participate in, but never initiate respiratory movement.

Jessica Wolf's Art of Breathing Animation: http://
www.jessicawolfartofbreathing.com/rib-animation/

Extraordinary Respiration

Professional breathers need more freedom and control in order to tell the story.

Airway/glottis: There is always air moving through the vocal folds. You do not need to ensure this, the design of nose and mouth do this.

Air flow brings the vocal folds together, along with the intention to communicate. Air moves first, then the approximation of the vocal folds.

Air goes up from the respiratory system through the airway and vocal folds. It is then turned by the roof of the mouth.

Singing is exhaling in a relatively slow manner, with variation in velocity and intensity, guided by intention, flexibility and the ability to respond.

Appoggio

Appoggio is the flexible tonus that follows the lengthening of the spine and the appropriate ascent of the diaphragm which is organized by the intention and practice of appropriate coordination- it is an emergent property, not something you make happen to initiate sound. Ask to coordinate and do what you are doing, then see what happens.

Control: Using the principles of aerodynamics and human design to work the sails- guiding your coordination in cooperation with your design and congruent with the activity you are doing,

Training the ask: Developing specific skills, gaining fluency and working within the context of the whole. The skills are there for you because they have been accurately and adequately rehearsed.

Air moves. Air cannot be held and move at the same time. Conservation or management strategies can get us trying to do exhale in a mechanistic way. This can happen by trying to manage the airway in conflicting ways, or by restricting the movement of the torso and whole respiratory system. The system is designed to respond appropriately to your intention to communicate will organize the whole system to give you the appropriate rate and quality of exhalation for what you are doing moment to moment.

Analyzing Typical Strategies

We are psychophysically whole; we always try to carry out what we believe to be true. If we have a faulty idea, we will try to embody it.

An artist must take charge of their own process and design features.

Managing VS Leading

Leading is asking and assessing whether the system is equipped.

Managing tends to indicate saving or holding, which works against the system, which needs to be flexible and moving to respond.

Warm ups and Experiments

1. Stand on one leg, noticing the tiny movements throughout your whole self as you breathe. Stability and balance are continual, tiny movements.
Ask to coordinate to switch legs.

2. Ask to coordinate for continual flow of air through the airway. “My head moves continuously, so all of me can move continuously, so that air can move continuously."

3. Yummy Inhale
Using the imagination to activate coordination, a whole self, present moment constructive that is a choice, a verb and a yes. Imagine the scent of something you love and breathe while imagining you are breathing in that scent.

4. Glottis release/ Seamless breath cycle:
Erasing the border between inhale and exhale by asking the airway/glottis to fall open.

5. With a piece of music:
Listen to a recording and breathe out of time with the piece.

6. Breathe everywhere:
Practice freedom of choice by choosing to release the glottis to interrupt the sound, but knowing your movement and airflow is continuous.