

instrumental manner. That could be quite useful because we all know the multitude of different colors you can get if you have a full symphony orchestra in front of you.

As a kind of simile or metaphor, it's quite a nice thing to be thinking, "Well I'm going to sound like the winds here," or, "This is particularly *pastoral*, should we try and sound like the flutes and the oboes?" for example, or, "This is rich and lush, let's try and sound like a big string section." So, we will think of it that way, but actually, taking an instrumental work and turning it into a vocal work is not something we do too often. That's not, of course, to say that we shouldn't.

## The Care and Preservation of the Voice

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As conductors and singers, we work very hard over a period of weeks to prepare for performance. Concert week may include additional rehearsals and certainly a dress rehearsal. This added stress can cause the immune system to weaken, making the body susceptible to illness. It would be a pity to become ill right before the concert.

Below are twenty tips to help conductors and singers maintain excellent vocal health throughout the year.

- Strive for good general physical and mental health at all times through exercise, meditation, and proper diet.
- Get plenty of rest. If the body is tired, the voice is tired.
- Along with proper diet, a daily multivitamin, extra Vitamin C, or zinc may help you stay healthy. However, always consult with a physician before adding new supplements.
- Always warm up the voice before teaching or singing.
- Speak, conduct, and sing with proper alignment, which will allow breath to move more efficiently in and out of the body.
- Avoid loud talking, screaming, and wheezing or stressed laughter.
- Avoid speaking in loud environments.
- Those who must use their voices for an extended period of time each day, especially educators, should try to develop as many nonverbal ways of communicating as possible. In short, speak less and demonstrate your ideas more. Many resources and tips are available online.
- Constant throat clearing irritates the vocal cords. Swallow or take a sip of water in lieu of clearing the throat.
- Speak in a comfortable pitch range. Do not speak too high or too low, as this will cause wear and tear on the voice. If you find that your voice becomes tired, scratchy, or irritated easily from speaking, consult an ENT doctor immediately.
- Maintain hydration by drinking 8 to 10 glasses of water each day. Remember, the vocal cords are one of the last organs to receive the benefits of water. Drinks made with water such as tea or coffee do not count toward the daily recommended amount.
- Diuretics such as caffeine, alcohol, and artificially flavored beverages remove moisture from the body and therefore the voice. Avoid them as much as possible, especially before a concert.
- Medications such as antihistamines, allergy pills, and birth control pills may cause dryness in the throat. An increased intake of water will be necessary if such medications are prescribed for you.
- Don't smoke. Also, avoid second-hand smoke as much as possible. Not only does smoking rob the vocal cords of much-needed moisture, continued smoking damages the lungs, thus decreasing breath capacity and range.
- Food and drinks high in acids or sugar such as colas and citrus or tomato products should be avoided before singing. Also avoid dairy products such as milk, cheese, ice cream, or yogurt, which may cause the production of too much phlegm for comfortable singing. If you wrestle with acid reflux, as I do, I highly recommend the book *Dropping Acid*:

*The Reflux Diet Cookbook and Cure* by Jamie Koufman and Jordan Stern.

- Avoid spicy and salty foods in large amounts, as they may cause dryness of the throat.
- Chewing gum before a rehearsal or performance is not recommended. Keeping the gum moist uses saliva, which reduces the moisture level inside the mouth.
- Some singers are negatively affected by air conditioning, heating, mold, and perfumes. Avoid them as much as possible prior to a performance.
- Reduce the general usage of the voice before a concert. Speak less and enjoy periods of quiet reflection. Go through the music mentally.
- Do not try to sing over a cold, especially when a sore throat is involved. Lozenges or throat spray should not be used to numb the throat in order to sing. If the throat is sore, do not sing or speak at all. Whispering does not save or rest the voice. In fact, it is possibly the worst thing you can do when experiencing a sore throat. Rest the voice completely.

It is up to you, sometimes with the help of a doctor or voice professional, to assess your challenges and possible remedies to prevent sickness before a performance. Make sure to take the proper steps to the best of your ability, with common sense as your guide, to ensure a vocally healthy, enriching concert experience for yourself and your students.

