

## ***Breathing***



A free-flowing and open breath is essential for good singing and health. Breathing is one of the major aspects of voice development, and a vast subject. In *Sounds Easy* we work with two main groups of breathing exercises. The first are for freeing-up and expanding our breath. They will benefit everyone whether you are a singer or not.

The second group are specifically to support our singing. The two groups essentially go together and support each other. Both must be worked on to obtain a free, healthy and easy flowing breath for your voice.

The best posture for the following exercises is standing (some of them you can do while driving and listening to the CD, but please **do keep your hands on the steering wheel and your eyes open** ☺)

In essence, what we are after here, is to gain more awareness of our breath, expand it physically and make it flow more freely. The majority of people have a narrow and limited breath. That is not the way we were born. We have an enormous natural capacity for breath which we are aiming to re-discover through these exercises.

The two main places where we hold tension in relation to breathing are in the abdominal area and the area in and around the ribs. For more information about these tension areas, refer to the chapter '*Breathing - The Foundation of Good Health and Singing*'.

## ***Yawning***

It is a good sign if you start to yawn during these exercises! Go for it and enjoy it ☺ Please do not stifle it, that goes against nature and the purpose of the yawn. Yawning is good for you and your voice. It opens up your breathing, throat and jaws, an openness that is essential to good singing.

Try this little experiment: watch your 'Adam's Apple' in a mirror or place your fingertips at the tip of it. Now yawn or pretend to yawn. What happens to your 'Adam's Apple' (the voice box)? It moves downwards. Now swallow and watch

what happens. It moves upwards. In singing we are mostly aiming at having the voice box in the yawning position.

**Take a big breath – let-go - ahhhhh ☺**

### ***Hands-On Breathing***

In this wonderful breathing exercise we use the magic of visualisation combined with the use of our hands. This exercise can also be done together with another person, using his or her hands instead of your own – an excellent way of extending the exercise.

Stand in the ‘horse position’ or sit down. If you are sitting, make sure to follow the guidelines described in the section on **Posture**.



#### **‘HANDS-ON’ BREATHING**

*These photographs illustrate the correct technique for ‘hands-on’ breathing. The hands in the photographs at left and centre show ‘touching’ the diaphragm at the front and back. The photograph at right shows ‘touching’ the diaphragm on either side.*

Place one hand on your tummy and the other on your lower back (using the back of your hand). Start breathing very deeply and slowly, feeling the movement of your breath in your hands by ‘touching’ the diaphragm. The movement in the back is much less than in the front. Some people find it difficult to detect a movement in the back. If this is the case for you, keep working at it - it’s there! Breathe deeper and focus. To make it a bit easier, you can remove the hand in the front for a few breaths.

Now imagine the space between your hands as hollow. If you wish, fill it with a colour of your choice. Then imagine filling that space with air and allow it to expand with each in-breath. Have a sense that the hands are supporting your breath. Breathe like this for a minute or so.

Then move both hands to the sides of your body, placing them just below your lower ribs. Feel the sideways expansion into your hands as you breathe in. If your ribs are open and tension free, you will feel a large sideways expansion on each side of your lower ribcage. If that is not the case for you at this moment, don't panic - it wasn't for me either in the beginning. This exercise will help to bring more awareness into this area and that will in turn expand your breathing and open up your ribs.

Now imagine the space between your hands as hollow and breathe into that. After doing this for a short while, let go of your hands, but keep the deep breaths going. Imagine that your hands are in all of the previous places (front, back and sides) and that your whole upper body is hollow. Enjoy the feeling of your breaths filling it with air. If you have another person present, let him or her place their hands in these four different positions. This will make it easier for you to focus on getting your breathing right.



#### **'HANDS-ON' BREATHING WITH A PARTNER**

*These illustrations show this exercise with hands at front and back. Your partner should stand behind you when 'touching' the sides of the diaphragm.*

After this exercise, let your breathing return to its own way. Notice if it has changed from before you started the exercise, and if so, what has changed. You may want to lie down for a while, feeling your body and enjoying your breathing 😊

### ***Breathing the Earth***

Stand in the 'horse position'. I recommend that you do the Swinging Exercise prior to this to make your body as loose and relaxed as possible.

Slowly move your hands up in front of your body - palms up and fingertips nearly touching each other. The hands come up as high as the solar plexus. Breathe in slowly and deeply during this movement. In your imagination, let your fingertips guide the in-breath, as if it was coming in from under your feet (the earth), and drawn up through the body. Do not breathe into your chest in this exercise.

Turn your palms around - facing down - and reverse the movement for the out-breath. The out-breath has a sound to it - a soft sigh or groan. It's like letting-go (see the section on '**Letting-Go**' at the beginning of this chapter).

**Keep doing this breathing for at least two minutes.**

