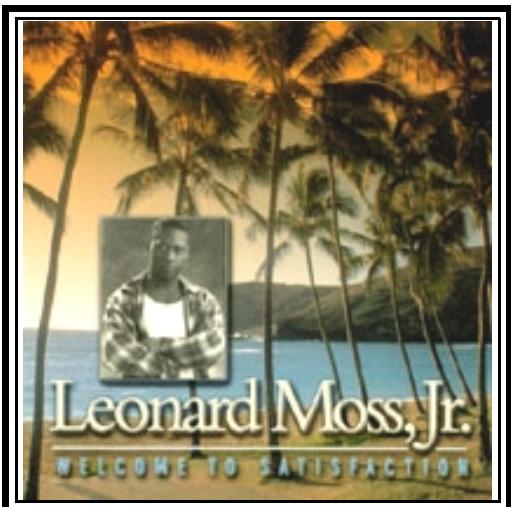


Volume Control [Dynamics]

(Techniques CD track 14-16 / DVD chap 7)



An exciting and versatile singer uses volume variation for emotional expression. In music, dynamics refers to the use of variety in volume level. You need to be able to sing full, rich tones, soft, intimate tones and all the possible variations in between. Balance is the key to vocal control. To sing with greater volume (*forte*, *f*) you need to:

- 1) Increase air pressure
- 2) Increase focusing strength to balance against the increased air pressure and
- 3) Increase resonating space; a yawn-like sensation will help. (see Resonance, page 47)

Be careful not to push too hard! When the air pressure is too powerful, you lose the fine balance necessary for good tone production. When the air pressure is perfectly balanced against the focusing vocal cords with open resonators, you experience a buzzing sound or *ring* in your voice. For singing softer (*piano*, *p*) and more intimate tones,

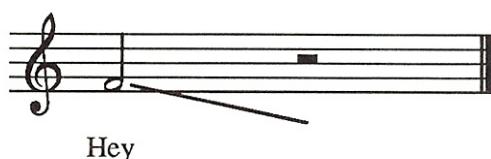
- 1) Use less air pressure, but DON'T RELAX SUPPORT
- 2) Use less focusing strength, but don't let the tone get breathy and
- 3) Keep the throat, mouth and nasal passages open.

For the softest tones, only the delicate fringes of the vocal cords should vibrate. A yawn-like sensation will help you relax the focusing strength. Be careful to maintain firm, steady, out and down support.

EXERCISES:

1. Higher chest voices sing on a not too loud *calling-out-like* sound. Let it drop off in pitch at the end.

Sing: (Tech CD track 14)



2. Follow this *calling-out-like* sound with a "*far-away call*" or "*echo*" of the calling-out sound.

Sing:

A musical staff with four measures. The first measure has a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a common time signature. It contains a single eighth note with a dynamic marking "Hey Loud". The second measure contains a single eighth note with a dynamic marking "Hey Soft". The third measure contains a single eighth note with a dynamic marking "Hey Loud". The fourth measure contains a single eighth note with a dynamic marking "Hey Soft".

3. Try this exercise in upper register.

Sing:

4. Use the word "Hello", first loud, then "far-away"

Sing:

A musical staff in 3/4 time with a treble clef. The first measure contains a single eighth note followed by a fermata over the second measure. The second measure contains a single eighth note followed by a fermata over the third measure. Below the staff, the lyrics "Hell - oo" are written twice, with a horizontal line connecting the two measures.

5. Now, in head voice, first loud, then "far-away"

Sing:

A musical score in 3/4 time with a treble clef. The first measure consists of two notes followed by a fermata over the second note. The second measure consists of one note followed by a fermata over the note. Below the staff, the lyrics "Hell - oo" are written twice, corresponding to the notes above.

Crescendo and Decrescendo

To crescendo { }, which is beginning soft and gradually becoming louder, you begin with a soft tone and gradually increase the focusing strength and air pressure. At the same time, keep the resonating space open and maintain firm support.

To decrescendo (underline), which is beginning loud and gradually becoming softer, you begin with a loud tone and gradually decrease focusing strength and air pressure. At the same time, keep the resonating space open and maintain firm support. Avoid the tendency to relax support during the decrescendo.

Although the cords relax to balance the decreased air pressure for softer volume, they must produce a clear tone throughout and the vowel must be kept pure and open. Note that the buzz is not as noticeable when singing softer. When using the yawn to help relax the focusing strength, you may feel as though you are opening the cords even though they are still focusing.

EXERCISES:

1. On a siren-like slide, first loud, then soft,

Sing: (Tech CD track 15)

Slide Slide | Slide Slide

Hey _____ Hey _____

Slide Slide | Slide Slide

Hey _____ Hey _____

On the downward part of the slide, be careful not to relax support. Use your fingertips to check. The jaw should gradually open slightly wider for the higher range and return to a slightly less open position for the lower range. Maintain a continuous focus throughout the slide without breathy interruptions of the tone.

Don't hold the cords so tightly that your throat squeezes and air has to be pushed through. Squeezing and pushing will cause you to lose the buzz and resonant ring in your tone. This kind of singing also irritates the vocal cords and usually causes hoarseness.

2. And now in *upper register*, first *loud*, then *soft*,

Sing:

Slide Slide | Slide Slide

ee _____ ee _____

3. On the word "Hey", use the siren-like slide, followed by a 5-note scale within a comfortable vocal range and slide your voice slowly up and down with medium volume. Keep the volume and vowel constant throughout. Maintain the cords in the focused position for a clear tone.

Sing:

Heh _____ ehy

4. Use the following 5-note scale with the words "on and on". First louder, then softer in the lower chest range (an octave higher for the female voice).

Sing: (Tech CD track 16)

Musical notation for singing on and off vocal folds. The music is in 4/4 time, treble clef, and consists of two measures of eighth-note patterns. The first measure is labeled "Loud" and the second "Soft".

And in the higher chest voice range.

Musical notation for singing on and off vocal folds in the higher chest voice range. The music is in 4/4 time, treble clef, and consists of two measures of eighth-note patterns. The first measure is labeled "Loud" and the second "Soft".

5. And in head voice or falsetto, first *louder*, then *softer*.

Sing:

Musical notation for singing on and off vocal folds in head voice/falsetto. The music is in 4/4 time, treble clef, and consists of two measures of eighth-note patterns. The first measure is labeled "Loud" and the second "Soft".

6. Let's sing that exercise loud to medium to soft (*decrescendo*), using "*Day by Day*".

Sing:

Musical notation for a decrescendo exercise using the phrase "Day by day". The music is in 4/4 time, treble clef, and consists of four measures of eighth-note patterns. The first measure is labeled "Loud", the second "Medium", and the third "Soft".

Day by day by Day by day by Day by day by Day
Loud Medium Soft

Musical notation for a second decrescendo exercise using the phrase "Day by day". The music is in 4/4 time, treble clef, and consists of four measures of eighth-note patterns. The first measure is labeled "Loud", the second "Medium", and the third "Soft".

Day by day by Day by day by Day by day by Day
Loud Medium Soft

7. Now decrescendo using your head voice.

Sing:

You and me and You and me and You and me and You
Loud Medium Soft

8. Use the above exercises and practice your crescendo, beginning softly and gradually increasing to greater volume. Give your entire range a good workout by beginning in a low, comfortable range and working your way up into the higher range. Be careful not to stretch too far too soon in either direction. Be particularly careful in developing the range upward. The higher range needs to develop gradually.

Initial Attack - "Silent H"

A slight, inaudible "H" before a vowel at the beginning of a word will help prevent an audible glottal attack, which is a cough-like beginning of the tone caused by squeezing the vocal cords together and releasing them suddenly to begin the tone. The cords should draw together to create the sound (lightly for the softest tone) rather than beginning in a closed position and popping open, as in a cough. Think the "H", don't sound it. Feel the open passage as you prepare to begin the sound.

With the following words, using the "*silent H*" on a single note,

Sing:

on / am / ease / and / or / ache / end / oh / own / all / as / is

Big VOICE / Small voice

Since most performances are electronically amplified, having a huge voice is not as essential as it used to be. In Opera and some Musical Theatre, the inherent size of the voice is still a significant factor in performance, but in Pop music (all non-classical), where the voice is almost always amplified, the singer depends more on individual style and expression.

Even though a big voice is usually necessary for a successful career in Opera, in other areas of Classical singing, such as solo recitals, chamber music and oratorio, vocal size is not as important as *artistry* and *interpretation*. Although some singers with large voices are fortunate enough to be able to perform in all areas of Classical music, others smaller voices, are limited to the lighter repertoire. Within the operatic field, there are singers who specialize in the lighter roles such as those of Mozart, Rossini and Donizetti, as compared to the heavier roles (and larger orchestras) found in the more dramatic works of Puccini, Verdi and Wagner.

Sometimes singers are over-ambitious, unaware or ill-advised and work on repertoire beyond the physical strength and endurance of their vocal instrument. A young singer should have patience and not sing the heavier, more dramatic roles until the voice is ready. A good voice teacher will be able to develop and nurture the voice as it matures and suggest appropriate repertoire.