



Your voice deconstructed

Part two: Are you inspired?



...or are you 'holding your breath'?

No breath – no voice. In fact, no 'anything'. Perhaps you have wondered about how it works? Perhaps you have experienced episodes of vocal fatigue or even strain – and wondered if there were techniques to help deal with it? Perhaps you know what it's like to have to squeeze that last bit out to get to the end of the phrase or sentence?

Apart from helping to put fuel in the tank to support your voice while you are speaking or singing, did you know that comfortable, deep-breathing can actually reduce the level of stress hormones in your system? This has to be a real plus when it comes to coping under pressure. Did you also know that, as artists, your creativity and imagination are 'inspired' by healthy breathing habits? There is more than one good reason to reinvest in how you breathe. So when it comes to voice work, I call it 'the hub of the wheel'.

As a voice coach working with actors and artists across the different demands of stage, screen and studio, I often find that voice problems can rear their heads when breathing is taken for granted. Often it is down to the fact that not enough physical ease and breath support is there to help keep the voice fit, flexible and healthy. In fact, I have come across far too many people who end up with limited range, or weak voice or depleted vocal stamina through a few bad habits linked to their breathing. It can even lead to more serious problems – but let's not go there in this particular article.

So how does breathing work and how can it be improved? There will be a day spent on voice in the autumn where I will work practically with those of you attending to deepen your experience of and delivery from your breath. It is huge. It is significant. What's more, it is fundamental to everything else because it is that basic, and we can't do anything without it.

'Air comes in... air goes out'

That's how simply Dr Meribeth Dayme (formerly Bunch) explained it on my anatomy and physiology course years ago.

The 'leading player' for getting the air 'IN', is the dome-shaped muscle – the diaphragm. NOTE: it does absolutely nothing about controlling the out-going air (contrary to a lot of poor teaching, if I can be really honest!... More about the OUT breath later).

Try this awareness raising exercise:

Sit or stand comfortably without either slouching or looking as if you are about to salute someone. Next, feel the bottom edge of your rib cage (it is like an inverted 'V' at the front and then continues down to your waist and around your back at that lower level. Have a look at the link to watch it moving: www.youtube.com/watch?v=hp-gCvW8PRY

