

pushed out of the way by the descending diaphragmatic muscle, you benefit in the following ways:

- you reduce the risk significantly of damaging your voice
- you promote breath support to fuel your work
- you help to reduce levels of cortisol and other 'stress' hormones in your blood
- you enable the 'creative' parts of your brain to run at a greater capacity

Exercise:

Corset On/ Corset Off' to release abdominal tension

- Put your hand over your abdomen (just below your naval) and pull it in to create tension and a holding pattern about 3 seconds. While doing so, tell yourself that this is NOT what you want. Keep your hand over this area and gently release the tension. The 'corset' is now 'off'.
- Feel the difference in the same muscles now that they are relaxed. This is how you are when relaxed, asleep or in passive breathing mode. The same muscles are released from work (until you need to breathe out, of course, to sing or speak). In time you will notice that it affects your state of mind too.
- Practice breathing in effortlessly and comfortably though your mouth (good practice of course for you as a voice artist to avoid lip smacks that the microphone will pick up). You should make sure that your shoulders are not going up and down as you do so. The movement should be in the abdomen and the sides of your body where the lateral ribs like to join in for those bigger breaths.

Voice

Now the body should feel at ease and ready to work with the abdomen slightly expanding with every breath in. We move onto the voice.

First check your vocal range. Like the keyboard on a piano, yours has an impressive range that needs gently warming up and switching on.

Exercise:

- Use the NG sound at the end of the word 'song' to gently glide up and down your pitch range. This should never be loud or pushed. If notes are missing, don't force them to appear with increased effort. Allow your voice

to tell you where it needs to be today. Keep the pitch glides going for a couple of effortless minutes.

- Next, to make sure that you have opened your resonating spaces which are in your throat, mouth, nose and sinuses, put a hand onto your upper chest and imagining smelling delicious food with a lovely warm 'Mmmmmmm'. Repeat with your hand on your throat. The aim is to feel vibration, or resonance, in these places. Try chewing and humming to see if you can feel vibrations around your mouth and in other parts of your face. Also try gently tapping your upper chest to 'break up the sound'. If you have additional time try gently intoning some of the words you are about to record.

Speech

There are key areas to warm up. It is all about effortless agility and precision to keep you clear and fluent. Spend longer on any areas that you know need extra work.

Exercises:

The essential work is for:

- **Lips** – trills, exaggerated chewing movements and tongue twisters with P, B, M and W in.
- **Soft palate** – K, G and NG in repetitious patterns of your choice then onto tongue twisters with the same sounds
- **Tongue** – stretching towards nose, chin and each ear, circling inside and outside the mouth in both directions, hunches (tuck your tongue tip behind the lower front teeth and allow the rest to gently push forwards and out of your mouth. Repeat with your tongue tip behind the upper teeth). Try tongue twisters with P, B, M, W, T, D, N, L, S, Z, R, K, G, Th, Ch, J, Sh, Zh (as in Dr Zhivago). Loads are available on line but here are some to keep you going:
 - The tip of the tongue and the teeth and the lips
 - Unique New York
 - Are you copper-bottoming 'em, my man? No I'm aluminising 'em, Mum
 - When does the wrist-watch strap shop shut?
 - Jean, Donald, Rachael, Lotte and Cheryl judged generously

Generally you need to consider the work in front of you. The preparation will be very different from one piece of work to the next. Long-form narrative text, such as a book, demands something entirely different from creating a range of voices

for a computer game. Selling that product as distinct from playing opposite other artists in a journey through a radio drama will need different skills in your repertoire. The list – as you know – goes on.

So ask yourself how you can manage your energy and stamina for the best results. How you can keep your body and breath comfortable and ready to perform (with 'corset' off). How you can avoid work going into your shoulders, neck, jaw and tongue root?

On the whole, a good warm up will take 20 to 30 minutes. The more you embrace it as habit, the stronger your muscle-memory becomes and the faster the results arrive. Once you are practiced in the key areas, your warm up can be switched on in just 10 minutes with the multi-tasking approach that I generally recommend after a while.

Over time you can build up a selection of exercises, gleaned from various workshops and good voice books. The principle, like most things in life, hinges around preparation and getting out what you put in. A musician doesn't expect their instrument to just play itself; an athlete doesn't just turn up to the stadium expecting to be stronger or faster by just being in that place.

As a professional voice artist, you are your instrument; you are the vocal athlete.

So... keep in peak performance to deliver your work. Keep warm, keep working.

Yvonne Morley

