



Teaching Vocal Versatility

Myths & Facts About Range

The Powell Method is a simple method of singing which offers three masterfully crafted techniques that allow singers to be able to sing many genres of music with ease.

by Katti Powell

I'm Not a Soprano!?!

As you go through the basic vocal exercises with The Powell Method, you will notice they take you pretty high. Most beginning singers say that they “can’t sing very high” or that they are “NOT a soprano.” If you are a male singer, then no, you are not a soprano! However, if you are a female singer, there is a pretty good chance that you are a soprano.

Myths About Range

Most people think they do not have a very big singing range. One of the myths about range is that having a small range is some kind of curse that is unchangeable. People who haven’t done any singing think they don’t have much of a range because they haven’t exercised their full range. If the voice is only used for speaking (and occasionally yelling), then not much of the range gets used. Consequently, beginning singers usually believe they don’t have the ability to sing beyond the few pitches they use for speaking. This is a myth.

Along those same lines, another myth is that it is possible to increase the singing range. Actually, the range exists in its fullest form already and singers just learn how to access all of it through lessons. The exercises singers use help them to be able to consistently access all the notes in the range and to learn how to give them a more polished sound.

Another myth is that your range determines your voice type. Beginning female singers believe that if they don’t have much range then they are altos and that the only sopranos are the ones who can sing really high. This is not true at all. Actually, the timbre of your voice is what determines your voice type. Believe it or not, all females have the same approximate range. That’s right, ladies—you and an opera singer have the same range. So, if a soprano sings a high C, for example, it will sound very different than a mezzo soprano singing that same high C. Both singers have that note in their range, but one sounds very light when singing it and the other sounds much fuller and richer. It’s just like if a man and a woman sing the same pitch—each one sounds different even though they sing the same pitch. This difference in the sound is what determines a person’s voice type—not the ability to sing the note. So why didn’t I mention altos? Well, there are actually very few cases of actual altos in the world. So how do choirs fill their sections full of altos if there aren’t any? Choir is a great place to sing, but consider the part you sing in choir to be your “voice assignment” rather than your “voice type”. The treble section of a choir is usually filled with sopranos that have been divided among the 1st soprano, 2nd soprano, 1st alto, and 2nd alto sections and usually your assignment has nothing to do with your actual voice type. Most females are sopranos of one variety or another. The male voice is very similar with regard to voice type. Like the female

voice, the timbre of a male's voice is what determines his voice type more than range. Typically, males have a larger range than females because they have the natural male range and they have the ability to access the female range as well. Baritones and basses have slightly larger ranges than tenors because their chest voice is able to reach lower notes than tenors and both are capable of singing the same high notes. Even though there is a slight difference in range between baritones/basses and tenors, it is still the timbre that reigns supreme in determining a male's voice type rather than the range. Here's why: many baritones have impressive ranges but they lack the brightness of a tenor's voice. Just because these baritones are able to sing the same notes as any tenor does not make them tenors. The darkness of the baritone voice is what keeps these men from actually being tenors. Likewise, mezzo sopranos have the same high notes as lyric sopranos but the darkness of the mezzo soprano voice is what labels them mezzos.

The Registers

With The Powell Method, you will learn very quickly that the voice can adapt to many different genres of singing using the appropriate technique. Each technique (like each genre) is very different from the next. First we will discuss the legitimate, or "legit", technique. The range of the legit voice is broken up into several different registers based on where the sound resonates, or vibrates, in the body. Everyone has two basic registers: the chest voice and the head voice; and there are varying degrees to which these registers are expanded and categorized. Most people speak in their chest voice and are not very familiar with their head voice. When a singer goes from one register of the range into the next, the voice sounds very different and it feels very different as well. Sometimes, this transition isn't very smooth and there is a "break" or a "crack" that occurs. In the beginning this is very normal, but it is possible to learn to minimize or even eliminate these breaks in the legit voice.

The Break

So I told you that in the female voice, the range is the same among females. The other thing that is the same is the break. As the female voice transitions from the chest register into the head voice, the voice will break in about the same place on every female. As the voice continues on up in the range, another break will be encountered that is the same in every female. Females have another register above the head voice called their false voice. The false voice is higher in the range than the head voice and not every female has the same ability to access this voice with ease. Think Mariah Carey—those insanely high notes she sings are in her false voice. There is another break between the head voice and the false voice.

In the male voice, the break will vary depending on whether the singer is a bass/baritone or a tenor. Males spend the majority of their singing in their chest

voice. Like females, when they transition into their head voice, there is a break. For a bass/baritone, the break occurs earlier than it does for a tenor. A tenor's break is much higher.

When singing with a legit voice, it is important to be aware of where the breaks are and how to sing through them. Ideally, we want to be able to strengthen our head voice so when we transition from our naturally strong chest voice into our head voice, it isn't as obvious that a change has taken place. The head voice can be brought down below the break but the chest voice cannot (or at least *should* not) be brought above the break. Interestingly, the legit voice is the only one that is affected by breaks and registers; once we move into contemporary techniques none of this is even an issue.

Range and the Contemporary Voice

The contemporary techniques of belt & mix place the voice in a completely different resonance from legit. These techniques do not impose any breaks on singers at all which is why many singers enjoy using them! The contemporary voice does, however, have some limitations on the size of the range. The mix range is almost limitless but the belt range varies from person to person. So, because mix is designed to be able to be masked as belt, most singers will strengthen their ability to jump from belt to mix quickly and unnoticeably, allowing the song to seem as though it was entirely belted.

To study The Powell Method one-on-one with Founder, Katti Powell, [click here to register for Virtual Voice Lessons!](#)