

the Powell method

Teaching Vocal Versatility

The Basics, Part I Breathing

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

The Basics

Before we can get started, we must first understand how the body of a singer needs to work. First we will learn the basics of breathing, then how to connect the voice to the breath, and lastly, the basics of supporting the sound. You will want to place yourself in front of a full-length mirror so you can observe what your body needs to look like as well as what it is doing wrong. In addition to looking in the mirror, pay special attention to what it feels like when you have done something correctly—most of the time you will not have the ability to watch yourself singing so it is important to be aware of how everything feels.

Basics of Breathing

If I were to ask you to take a deep breath, what would that look like? Would your chest puff up and your shoulders rise up to your ears? Would your lower belly suck inward? If so, congratulations! You are not alone—most people respond to this task exactly the same way you would! The only problem is: it isn't the correct way to take a breath. I know what you are thinking—this is the first and most basic step and you've already made a mistake—singing is not going to be as easy as you thought. Well, it probably won't be as easy as you might have thought, but breathing really is a lot easier than you might be thinking it is right now. In fact, I bet you breathe correctly when you aren't asked to demonstrate your breathing abilities.

Now, I'd like you to lie down on your back on the floor keeping your knees bent. Flop one hand on your chest and another hand on your belly and then close your eyes. I want you to pretend that you are sleeping; so you will need to relax as much as possible. Start to pay attention to the hand on your belly and the hand on your chest. Which one moves and which one stays mostly still? In which direction does your belly go when you inhale? If you are completely relaxed, everything should be the opposite of how it happened the first time—in other words, your lower belly should be moving up and down when you breathe and your chest should remain mostly still. When you inhale, your belly should move out and when you exhale, it should move in. If your chest moves at all (and it should move minimally at the most), it should only happen at the end of an inhale—after your belly has expanded to its capacity. (insert graphic)

Now that you know what that feels like, stand up again and see if you can repeat that process without the aid of gravity. Remember, the most important part about being able to breathe “from your belly” is to relax your abdominal muscles. As long as those abs are tightened, you will breathe shallowly from your chest and singing will feel much more like a chore.

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