**The Singer’s Face in Three Parts.**

In this article I will cover how to identify facial tension. More specifically tension in the lips, the tongue and the jaw. I will give you, the singer, a way to identify if you have tension in the lips, tongue, or jaw and I will show you ways to loosen those parts of your face through exercises and vocalises.

**Part 1: The Lips.**

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The lips are used for articulation of consonants and for shaping various vowel sounds. The lips are used in what is referred to bilabial consonants such as the “b”, “p” or “m”, where the upper and lower lips connect to form them, or for labiodental consonants such “f” or “v”, where the lower lip forms the consonants by touching the upper teeth. The lips are also used in vowel rounding, mostly in pronouncing the “u” vowel as in “put” or “flute” or for the “o” vowel as in “boat”.

In order to check if you have lip tension use the lip bubble or lip trill exercise. These two names refer to the same exercise. To do this exercise your lips are together and you blow air through them until they vibrate. If this doesn’t make sense, then please watch my YouTube video where I will demonstrate. The link is attached here: <https://youtu.be/1C85idEKT0U>

After you understand what the lip trill is and you can do this exercise without phonation, then use it with your vocalises. Here is a standard vocalise that should work well:

Exercise #1

1 3 5 8 5 3 1 (TONES OF THE MAJOR SCALE)

C E G C G E C (In C MAJOR, continue this pattern throughout your range.)

(Lip Bubble)

Once your lips and also your jaw are both relaxed enough to accomplish this exercise, it really is a good way to exercise your high range as it thins your vocal folds. In order to be successful at doing the lip bubble exercise, your jaw also needs to be unhinged and without tension. Keep the resonance in your mask, which is the cavity that resides behind your nose. Keep the resonance in your mask verses in your mouth. If you are having trouble visualizing what mask resonance is, again please watch my YouTube video for a demonstration.

Here is another couple exercises that may help you work through tension in your lips:

A note on the vowels used in the exercises throughout this article. They are from The International Phonetic alphabet used in singing. “i” is the vowel found in the word “eat”. “e” is the vowel sound found in the word “vacate”. “a” is the vowel sound used in the word “tall”. “o” is the vowel sound found in the word “note” and “u” is the vowel sound found in the work “food”.

Exercise #2

1 1 1 1 1 (All notes are the same in this exercise, then work up the scale.)

C C C C C (C Major)

i e a o u

Transition between these five vowel sounds. Notice your lips rounding on the ‘o’ and ‘u’ vowels. Keep your lips relaxed.

Exercise #3

5 5 4 4 3 3 2 2 1 1 (Work up the scale, do this exercise in your range.)

G G F F E E D D C C (C Major)

bu -ti bu -ti bu -ti bu-ti bu- ti (or use **pu- ti** instead of bu- ti)

Work on keeping your u-vowel focused.

**Part 2: The Tongue.**

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The tongue is a muscular organ in the mouth. For singers it has the major function of enabling speech and vocalization. The back of the tongue is connected to the hyoid bone, the epiglottis, the soft palate and the pharynx. In phonetics the consonants formed with the tip of the tongue, such as “t” or “d” are called apical. The consonant sounds made with the back of the tongue such as “k” or “g” as in “goat” are called laminal.

Tongue tension will affect the ease of the vowel sound. The singer will sometimes have tongue tension in their higher register to compensate for not enough breath support to the sound. Use exercise #2 above to check for tongue tension. Use the vowels a,e,i,o,u. Again, stay on the same note throughout the changes to your vowels. While doing this exercise push your thumb behind your chin into the base of your tongue. The base of your tongue should not tense up or engage with changes to your vowels. Particularly when you are singing your “e” vowel and “i” vowels. The base of your tongue should remain relaxed.

Another good check for tongue tension is to roll your “r” consonant like the Italians do. Use the tip of the tongue, not the back. Can you roll your r’s? And if you can’t, it’s a skill you should learn if you want to be a singer. Once you can roll your r’s, use it in your vocal exercise. Here is a simple exercise:

Exercise #4

1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1 (Work up the scale.)

C D E F G F E D C (C Major)

Roll your r’s throughout this exercise. In order to roll your r’s throughout this exercise, you also need a relaxed jaw.

Here are a few more exercises to help you with tongue tension:

Exercise #5

1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1 (Work up the scale.)

C D E F G F E D C (C Major)

La la la la la la la la la

This is the same exercise as above, except use La on each note instead of rolling your r’s.

Exercise #6

1 3 5 8 5 3 1 (TONES OF THE MAJOR SCALE)

C E G C G E C (IN C MAJOR, continue this pattern throughout your range.)

Vra vra vra vra vra vra vra

This is a repeat of the first exercise in the article. Only, now use Vra on each scale tone. Roll your r’s when saying the “vra”. Again, use the tip of the tongue when you roll your “r’s”.

Exercise #7

1 3 5 4 3 2 1 3 5 4 3 2 1 (TONES OF THE MAJOR SCALE)

C E G F E D C E G F E D C (In C MAJOR, continue up through your mid voice.)

Fla fla ni-----------------Fla fla ni---------------------

On « ni », hold the “i” vowel out throughout the descending scale tones.

Exercise #8

1 3 5 8 5 3 1 (TONES OF THE MAJOR SCALE)

C E G C G E C (IN C MAJOR, continue this pattern throughout your range.)

Ni a i a i a i

This is again a repeat exercise. This time switch between singing your “i” vowel and “a” vowel. Check the base of your tongue muscle, behind your chin. Again, this muscle should not engage as you rotate between your “i” vowel and “a” vowel. Your jaw should be relaxed.

Exercise #9

5 4 3 2 1 (Work up the scale, do this exercise in your range.)

G F E D C (CMajor)

Ki ke ki ke ki (or use **di- di**-**di-di-di** coming down the scale.)

In all of these exercises, your focus is tongue relaxation. You can also check your tongue muscle by looking into the mirror as you sing. Is your tongue lying flat, or is it raised and tense? The tongue is anchored into the hyoid bone. The hyoid bone is attached to the larynx. A tight tongue muscle can also lead to tension in your larynx or voice box, which houses the vocal cords.

Please check out my YouTube video on Tongue Tension: <https://youtu.be/ULVrSxK7xqQ>

**Part 3: The Jaw.**

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The jaw is a pair of bones that make up the framework for your mouth and teeth. Your upper jaw is fixed (maxilla) and your lower jaw is moveable (mandible). It is the lower jaw that can cause issues to the singer, if your lower jaw is holding tension. Your lower jaw can be affected by T.M.J. (Temporomandibular joint disorder.) Massage your jaw and get it to unhinge.

Try the following exercise to gauge whether you have jaw tension. It is called the “raspberry”. Basically, you stick your tongue out and blow until your lips and tongue vibrate, like a baby would do. Please watch my YouTube video on Jaw Tension at the following link: <https://youtu.be/UBYDdKughII> for a demonstration of this exercise. This exercise requires relaxation of your lips, tongue and jaw to do. Your jaw needs to be unhinged and relaxed, as does your tongue and lips. It’s a good overall measure of whether your face is generally relaxed.

Once you can do the “raspberry” exercise comfortably, there are additional exercises that you can do with phonation to warm up your voice while relaxing your jaw.

Exercise #10

8 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Work up the scale)

C -------------------------------------- C B A G F E D C (Notes in C Major)

“Raspberry” sound on upper C tha ----------------------------

In the above exercise you do the raspberry sound on the upper C, and then say “tha” on that upper C and come down the scale to your lower C.

Repeat exercises #6, #7 and #8 above with jaw relaxation in mind.

The following exercise can be done with the lip bubble, the raspberry and the Italian rolled “r”.

Exercise #11

1 3 5 8 7 5 4 2 1 (TONES OF THE MAJOR SCALE)

C E G C B G F D C (IN C MAJOR, continue this pattern throughout your range)

Lip Bubble on phonated steps of the diatonic scale.

Raspberry on phonated steps of the diatonic scale.

Rolled “r” on steps of the diatonic scale.

If you can do the lip bubble, raspberry and rolled “r” you should be well on your way to having a relaxed face in singing. If you are having trouble getting the hang of these three face relaxing skills, then massage your entire face. The temples, cheeks, jaw, neck, tongue base. Also stretch your face by making faces. Please don’t hesitate to check out my YouTube videos under the playlist The Singer’s Face for a demonstration.

Good luck in your singing! (And good luck with relaxing your FACE)!

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