

CHRISTIAN SCHOOL FINALS COMPETITION

vocal technique and stage performance



The goal of a vocal performer is similar to other performers—to pull something from inside themselves that will engage and have a lasting impact on their audience.

While all vocal performances are an arrangement of several elements, including some non-vocal components, each outstanding vocal presentation builds from a solid foundation of three basic fundamentals—posture, breathing and support.

Keep the ultimate goal of completely capturing your audience in mind while we take a deeper look at each of the three foundational pieces of an outstanding performance.



VOCAL TECHNIQUE AND STAGE PERFORMANCE

By Michele Ross

POSTURE

A vocal performer's posture should give the appearance of a straight line from head to toe. The only deviation from this straight line should be a slight bend in the knees. The chin should be parallel to the floor. Place feet shoulder-width apart with the left foot slightly forward for stabilization. After acquiring a straight body posture, pull up in the body to open all the breathing components of the body.

A simple exercise for maintaining a straight upward body position is to stand against a wall pressing your back firmly against the wall to acquire a straight, comfortable (not awkward) posture. Next, walk away from the wall while maintaining this posture. Practicing this exercise develops the feel of a straight, upward body posture as well as an awareness of when your body is moving away from the appropriate posture.

BREATHING

The goal of breathing during a performance is to get as much air in as possible with the least amount of effort. This is accomplished by a method I like to call “filling the barrel.” This process involves taking air in quietly through both the nose and mouth, opening the abdomen and the chest and filling them with air until the barrel is full. This process should not cause tension; relaxation is the key to proper breathing.

Timing with breathing is important. Breathing must begin before your introduction into your vocal performance. Tell-tale signs of inappropriate breathing techniques include audible gasps for breath at the first notes of a performance and lifting the shoulders quickly while breathing in. Both of these breathing errors can cause late entrances into your presentation and create such tension in your neck and shoulders that vocal faults and long-term strain on the voice can result.

During a performance, the same method of breathing is used; however, a performer must learn to fill their barrel more quickly during the performance than is needed at the beginning of their performance. During rest periods, remember to “buy back” air that has been spent by refilling your barrel.

SUPPORT

Sound is created by air going through the vocal chords. Support enables a performer to hold and control this air. Controlling air prevents breathy sounding performances. To control air, squeeze all of the abdominal muscles with a full barrel of air. Remember though, relaxation is the key to breathing. So be sure the only tense muscles are those under the rib cage. Additionally, your neck should not be tense.

To develop abdominal muscles for support, try holding a heavy object on your stomach while lying on your back. Also helpful are sit-ups, swimming and pilates. The goal for your support muscles is to develop adequate strength to continue to hold air even if you received an unexpected punch in the stomach.





BEYOND THE BASICS NON-VOCAL PERFORMANCE COMPONENTS

Developing the basic techniques of posture, breathing and support provides a sound foundation upon which to build the rest of your performance. As stated earlier, a vocal performance consists of several components all coming together at the same time. In addition to perfecting your basic techniques and developing your vocal skills, a solid vocal performance includes several non-vocal pieces such as attention to music selection, appearance and audience evaluation.

MUSIC SELECTION

When selecting music for your performance it may be tempting to choose one of the current hits, but there are disadvantages to selecting a song that is played often. Remember, music selection includes choosing a song that is good for your own voice category. Knowing your range and opting for a selection within your range gives you an edge on obtaining an overall solid performance. Determine whether or not the latest top hit is a good match with your range. Similarly, selecting a song your audience and judges associate with a particular artist can hinder your performance by natural comparison to the original artist. A simple way to avoid this is for females to perform a song that is original to a male artist and vice versa. Lastly, remember all other competitors will be considering performing the latest hit also. Your goal is to stand out from the crowd—let your music selection help you do this.

APPEARANCE

When considering appearance, I like to refer to a list of notes on stage deportment for singers prepared by Judith Pannil Raiford, voice instructor at Oral Roberts University. She recommends performers practice singing, walking and bowing in their performance clothes prior to their performance. All performers are susceptible to shoe, belt, collar and accessory issues that take away from their performance. Also, she encourages performers to think about their hair. Nothing is more disconcerting to an audience than watching the same lock of hair fall across the performer's eyes or face over and over again. Appearance is included as one of the judging criteria at Christian School Finals Competition.

AUDIENCE EVALUATION

One of the most vital components of your performance is your audience. It is crucial to gather as much information about your audience as possible. For Competition this

includes reading the guidelines for your event, knowing the criteria judges will use to critique your performance, checking the Competition Web site for tips and talking with past competitors and sponsors. Knowing the expectations of your audience allows you to focus your preparation to deliver the performance they are expecting.

General guidelines for audience engagement include making eye contact, smiling and exuding confidence. At the moment of your performance you must take command of the room. You may be tempted to hold back and play it safe. Instead, overcome feelings of nervousness or apprehension by respecting your audience enough to give them the performance they came to see. Step out of your comfort zone and sell your performance. Be willing to do the unusual, be energized and make your performance personal to the audience.

When you are willing to put in the time to develop your skills, perfect the fundamentals and pay attention to the non-vocal aspects of your performance, you will be well on your way to accomplishing your goal as a performer—capturing your audience with a performance they will remember and talk about long after it is over.

Bio: Michele Ross has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music from Oklahoma City University. She is a four-year member of the Oklahoma Opera and Music Theater Company and has performed professionally for 28 years. Currently, Ross is the music librarian at Oral Roberts University and a private voice and performance instructor, songwriter and music publisher.

CHRISTIAN SCHOOL FINALS COMPETITION DATES

The ORU Christian School Finals Competition is the week of May 17-22, 2009.

COMPETITION HANDBOOK 2009

The 2009 Competition Handbook is available online at the Competition Web site at <http://competition.oru.edu>. The password to access the Handbook is **faith2live**.

GROUP I FORMS

Group I registration forms are to be electronically submitted online through the Competition Web site at <http://competition.oru.edu> by April 1, 2009 for final registration. We suggest the use of an overnight carrier which provides tracking capabilities when sending in fees and event entries.

- Form A - Checklist for a Successful Registration
- Form C - Statement of Faith
- Form D - Master Registration
- Form E - T-Shirt Order
- Form M - Consent for Medical or Dental Care of a Minor
(Please submit Form M online and then make 2 copies and bring the signed copies to check-in at registration.)
- Science Project Forms (see event guidelines for more details)
- Deposit of \$75.00 per person and team fees due when submitting Group I forms

GROUP II FORMS

Group II registration forms are to be electronically submitted online through the Competition Web site at <http://competition.oru.edu> by April 15, 2009.

- Form F - Designated Person for Emergencies
- Form G - Adult Sponsor Information Form
- Forms H & I - Boys and Girls Residence Assignments
- Event entries for the following categories should be received in the Competition office by April 15, 2009:
 - Essay Writing - 115
 - Poem Writing - 120
 - Short Story - 125
 - Yearbook - 146

TRACK AND FIELD TIMES/GOLF SCORES

- Form J - Track and Field Times and Records/Golf Scores are to be submitted electronically online through the Competition Web site at <http://competition.oru.edu> by May 1, 2009.
- Runnercard software will be used to schedule the meet. Instructions to enter your athletes in track events will be given closer to the Competition date. Please note that it is very important for each school to include the track and field entries on Form D as well as in the Runnercard software. This will prevent unnecessary added event fees.

ADD/DROP EVENT FEE

Schools are required to submit Form D, the Master Registration form, by April 1, 2009. Plans for each event are made in accordance with each school's registration. Judges and other staff are contracted as a result. Adding, dropping and/or missing events will incur an additional fee of \$10 per instance.

CONTACT US

We are available to assist you with your Competition preparations. Please do not hesitate to contact us by e-mail at competition.oru.edu or by phone at 918.495.6856.

When sending correspondence through the mail, please put it to the attention of Cindy Lewis.

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