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- A Creative Initiative

Tongue and Soft Palate

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The tongue is much larger than you think because much of it is out of sight.

It has muscles attached to the skull, the hard and soft palates, the mandible, the hyoid bone and a very small slip of muscle to the superior constrictor of the pharynx.

The larynx sits just under the back of the tongue and is elevated and pushed up under the back of the tongue during swallowing – or when there is tongue tension.

The tongue plays a major role in shaping vowels and consonants.

Its movement can completely reconfigure the vocal tract, depending on the degree of freedom and flexibility, or of tension, that is involved.

One of the classic movements of the tongue that causes restriction and constriction is pulling the tongue back. This creates tension on the larynx, and generally happens because there is a lack of support from the body and this is one way that students “feel” they are supporting – but they are not – it is a false form of support.

It also means that they can hear a wonderfully deep sound in their heads and they think they are producing a fantastic sound. The problem is that this sound has no carrying ability and generally gets no further than the front row seats, if even that far.

Some tongue exercises:

- Lip trills (like blowing raspberries)
- Tongue trills - rrrrrrrrrrr
- Placing the finger on the lip making sure that the tongue returns to this position.
- Tongue rolls – rolling tongue forward and backwards.
- Round the Mouth - Put tongue on the front teeth; put tongue down behind the bottom teeth; put tongue firstly in the left cheek and then the right cheek. Then speed it up. This helps with tongue versatility.
- Clean teeth with tongue.

Now to look at the Soft Palate:

For efficient speech and singing as well as during swallowing, the soft palate must be raised to prevent extra air from escaping.

The lifting of the soft palate is also one way of stopping nasality.

Tip the head back and in that position wriggle the jaw. Now put two fingers in between top and bottom teeth. Suck up the breath in short bursts. Feel the breath on the soft palate at the back and try making this go higher and higher with each short breath. Lower the head and with fingers still in mouth, do the same short bursts.

If the tongue is tense it is nearly impossible for the palate to achieve enough elevation.

To relax the pharynx and get the soft palate moving:-

- With your mouth closed, chew with a lot of lip and tongue movement at the same time make a sustained ‘uuuuuuuuuu’. It will sound as if you are chewing the ‘uummm’.
- Still with your mouth closed, ‘umm & chew’ a whole song.
- Next – while still chewing – allow a word to pop out. This exercise will begin to break down any habits of holding on to the jaw or tongue as you perform.

When you open your mouth too wide, the pharynx and soft palate are unable to function normally. Try a silent Yell – as loud as you can get it BUT make no sound.

Creating Possibilities and Finding Solutions

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