

ADEY'S TOP TIPS

1. Rebuild posture and stay relaxed to help the high notes.

We need to make sure that every part of our body, as an amazing instrument, is at peak readiness for anything we might call upon it to do. Legs, neck, arms, waist, shoulders, hips, feet – everything! Singing is a whole-body experience! All of our vocal ‘machinery’ is an intrinsic part of this greater structure and we always restrict our voices if we forget to connect all this together. Most of us bring certain ‘luggage’ to a rehearsal or performance and this needs to be set aside. The combined stresses of tension and inactivity in sitting at a desk for long hours, carrying a bag or handbag on one shoulder or a child on one hip, crossing our legs or slouching in a chair, lifting, scrubbing, pushing, even just naturally favouring one hand or the other – these are all part of small daily physical habits that we should try to drop when we prepare to sing. And let’s not forget the mental ‘luggage’ too. Singing time is the time to open our hearts and minds and feel ready to try new things and explore ideas further than we might feel able to when on our own.

Everything stems from a good ‘ready for anything’ posture. Starting at the feet using slightly raised insteps, begin an upwards ‘rebuild’ of your stance – knees soft, pelvis level, shoulders relaxed, neck long, with your head levelled at the eyes rather than the mouth. This remade stance means there is plenty of flexibility possible, nothing is ‘held’ or restrained and breathing should feel full and low.

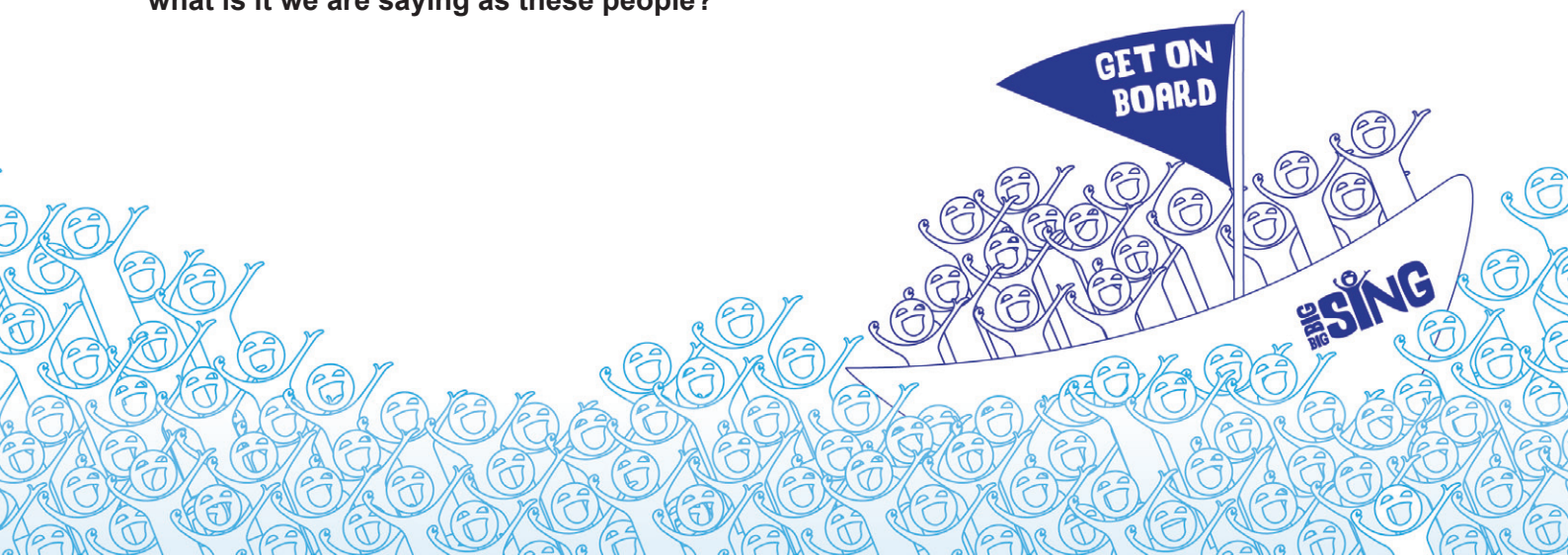
To make high notes feel more rounded and clear, explore all those resonating spaces behind your eyes, between your ears and at the back of your mouth in ‘yawn space’. Never ‘chin up’ to high notes. The higher they get, try thinking in the opposite direction and make your whole body get underneath the voice, even bending the knees at the top of the phrase. Would you believe, there is also a whole lot of useful resonance space under your arms!

2. Don’t just sing words.

**Sing the meaning of the words and agree what these are.
This helps with overall blend because everyone’s intentions are the same.**

The brilliant thing about singing is that we are able to communicate in two languages at once – one is the language of the music itself with all the expressive qualities possible in a wordless artform, and the other is the text of the song; telling a narrative, describing or inviting or invoking something. Each song you prepare for performance will benefit from some discussion on the following questions:

- what is it actually about?**
- which emotions does it dwell in?**
- who are we as we sing this song?**
- what is it we are saying as these people?**



If everyone is united in this important area of 'intention', this will, almost magically, inform our technical decisions in performing it. Vowel sounds will agree, breathing will come together, blend will be easy and dynamics will feel emotionally fuelled instead of just 'plonked' in. There is also an extra question to ask if any text is repeated – why are we singing these words more than once?

3. Change the sections of the choir around for different songs.

Mixing it up makes you listen in a different way.

Most choirs thoroughly enjoy exploring music with all sorts of different influences and it is exciting and rewarding to spend good time in rehearsal working out how we can change the character of our sound, crafting it to make our expressive palette as colourful as possible. I often find that actually moving the choir around – placing basses nearer sopranos to solve pitching or tuning problems, placing tenors in the centre of a group so that they really start to blend, bring basses to the front for a really full, rich anchoring of the sound, mixing the whole choir up so that each member listens in a chordal way rather than a sectional way as they sing – these ideas can give each item in a programme a different flavour. And it is always good to have a reason for a wriggle and a shake before beginning each piece!

4. Don't leave your body out of your singing.

(à la *Song of the Goat*). Try giving each other the words and pulse in your bodies – this clarifies intention and makes physical and emotional connections between choir members, which audiences love!

Don't forget to be generous as you sing! Catch each other's eyes regularly. Hook up with someone you are singing a particular moment or harmony with. If a piece is constructed with answering phrases, then really hand them over to each other – actually do it with a gesture. Watch each other. Be ready to receive cues, signals, shared moments. Try singing a piece without the conductor and see how that changes how you communicate with each other. Try beginning a piece by simply breathing in together. Don't feel you have to stay ramrod straight – it's good to move a little with the music, to share the rhythm physically. Always keep your knees soft and your waist mobile. This sort of on-stage communication makes a performance come alive in real HD colours!

And always sing with your whole heart. Music is an art form that is totally experiential and transitory. Live and sing each moment of the music as a wondrous, glowing, fleeting and precious thing.