

INTRODUCING PROFESSOR LAWS' CORNER!!!

Hello curious friend :)

I guess since I did good in school and stuff, people always ask me for tips about how to improve their musical ability, just like I would ask one of the hundreds of musicians in my life who I look up to. I'm delighted to be honored with such respectful and flattering questions! It shows that time has passed...and I am slightly seasoned ;)

So today I'll start with a few ideas about vocal maintenance, technique and practice routines:

1. THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTUE FOR DAILY PRACTICE.

(If you're a full-time musician, playing shows everyday, then you are there, that *is* your practice. If you're off the road, or still-in-training, then 6-8 hours a day of playing and/or making music minimum, but that's if you don't have a full or part time job unrelated to music. If that's the case then if you can squeeze 30 minutes to 2 hours of training in then you can still make a big difference with some effort and consistency. I often fall off this too, I admit, since I'm currently an independent artist, having to promote myself, well, kind of--I've never been good at promoting myself! Plus now I have a part time job for a few months, working at a bookstore. Anyways, I'm always in the zone still, listening, coming up with new tunes as I do my daily things, yearning until I can play my guitar or piano again...)

2. Okay, on studio days, it's probably best to **stay away from caffeine, dairy, sugar, alcohol and smoke**. A little bit of cheese in your breakfast won't hurt ya, but ice cream, coffee and chocolate bars can dry you out or give you phlegm. Cigarettes, marijuana and booze will also burn your voice and cloud your mind, although, I do know an incredible vocalist who believes in a good shot of whisky before you sing! (and a little rock 'n' roll in your life can be good for a you ;)
3. **"A little stretch before you sing is always a good thing."** Haha. Really though-- neck rolls, shoulder rolls, wrist rolls, reaching for the sky, ragdoll, and massaging your face are all great ways to loosen up your vocal cavity, your instrument--your body! (Remember to go slow as you stretch, especially with back and neck stretches.)
4. **Good posture will also open up your airway and lungs.** Try this exercise: interlace or clasp your fingers behind your back, arms straight, behind your butt. This should automatically correct your posture. Head looking straight forward, eyes, cheeks and jaw relaxed, stay in those pose for a while to really feel the results.
5. **Breath *LOW* and *FULL*.** How do you know you're breathing *low* and *full*? Place hands on hips, with your fingers on your stomach and your thumb on the back of your lungs, practice breathing so low and so full that your ribs expand

both in front and in the back. Okay, this is easier said than done, it may take time. Try not to focus on the back of your ribs until you've mastered breathing *low* from your abdomen, or diaphragm, as it's often called, keeping your chest and shoulders down. Deeper into your lungs we send our air, not just halfway down, as we seem to learn as a child. One way to know that you're at least breathing lower than your chest: try lying down on the ground and placing a Kleenex box on your tummy. As you breath in, allow your tummy to expand, even if you have to sort of force it out at first. The more you breath like this as you practice and perform, concentrating when you can on sending air down there and filling up your whole belly, the more air and therefore control and strength you will have to sing! If that doesn't work, I find that most people can make the connection with their abdomen when they slouch over a bit like a ragdoll, standing up, trying to sing or breath deeply. This should automatically connect your voice with your abdomen. (*Try letting out absolutely all of your air when you do breathing exercises for maximum results*)

6. To **connect your breath with sound**, try short and long hisses as an exercise, like: breath deeply, filling up your lungs all the way to the bottom, then let out a long hisssssssssssssss, saving your air, slowly, like a balloon with a hole in it. Make sure you continue until you feel that you have absolutely no air left in your lungs. Or, breath deep and full, and let out as many short hisses as you can, flexing your abdomen with each one, thrusting almost, gently, until you run out of air.
7. **Long tones are great warm-ups**, especially early in the day to get you off on the right foot with your voice. "Aum," "Ah," "Hum," "Oh," or even "Amen" or "Amin," are great sounds to use to open up your voice and promote healthy vibration in your body. Start in a comfortable range, taking a deep, low breath and holding your note steady for as long as you can, relaxing your face and throat. Continue to repeat at lower intervals, say, by half steps, until you are singing lower than you thought you could, then turn around and continue until you are singing higher than you thought! (The trick is to push it a bit further everytime, massaging your voice and expanding your range.) I try to stay in a relaxed "natural" or "chest" voice for as long as I can, until I have to switch to "head voice" or "falsetto" and sometimes modify the vowel sound to "Ooh" or "Eeh." It's best to keep your tone *straight* for this exercise, *without vibrato*. (Patience is the key here. And by the way, I didn't make this exercise up, or any of this really, I'm simply passing along information I've gathered over the years! This particular exercise is an ancient Indian vocal technique, guaranteed to change the way you sing in a week if done everyday.)
8. Singing **different scales and patterns** when you warm up will **open up your ear**, like an Indian or Arabic scale for a change, or Phrygian, which is easily recognized as the Flamenco progression. **Outlining chords** with your voice too, of different types and different intervals (*this is where playing an instrument helps, highly recommended by the professor to take you to the next level as a

vocalist and writer*) or simply riffing in the blues and just vibing it out! I'll try to put up some specific examples soon for those who read music. Otherwise, singing along to records you love or playing an instrument will also give you a great reference when you're warming up.

Also, check out some of the excellent warm-up CDs and books that are out there if you still want to sharpen your skills, like:

Elaine Overholt's Big Voice (www.elaineoverholt.com)

Anne Peckham's Elements of Vocal Technique

(http://www.berklee.com/catalog/product?product_id=11276&category_id=23)

or **New Vocal Techniques by Niranjan Jhaveri**

(<http://www.jazzsingers.com/JazzIndia/>)

Just remember to stay creative always and keep on shining that big bright light that the Universe gave each and everyone one of us!

Professor Laws :)