

# OPERATION SOAPBOX SPARKER

Operation Soapbox is all about getting your voice heard, so how can you get the most out of your vocal chords? **Mary King**, internationally acclaimed vocal artist and star of Channel 4's *Musicality* and *Operatunity*, tells you how.

I am a singer, who now teaches a lot of people how to sing. There are so many different styles of music, and therefore styles of singing: each person has to discover what their voice is best suited to. Some people never want to sing in public, but love to sing in the shower; some have a burning ambition to become a big star! What styles of music do you know? What can you hear in the music? Do you notice any difference between the *voices* in different styles of music, and can you describe them in words? Are they warm, comforting, exciting, breathy, round, bright, dark? Some are more than one thing.

Speaking voices also have very distinctive features – what can you recognise? Do some people speak higher than others? How does an accent affect a voice? If you close your eyes, and listen to your friends speaking, can you recognise them? How do you know who is speaking? Can you recognise the similarities or differences between someone's singing and their speaking voice? Some people sing and speak alike, some completely differently.



Your voice is one of the first things that other people connect to: it is uniquely yours, just like a DNA print. We all express ourselves through our voices – just think of the different ways you speak to different people: you can use the same words, but imply a thousand meanings, according to whether you like a person, respect them, love them, fear them.

Spreading the word that looking after your voice so that it stays fit and healthy, and continues to serve you for your entire life, is really important to me. I see many people who cannot express themselves in the way they want to: their voice doesn't have power and cannot project large distances; they are shy to use it; they cannot find the words and the expression that they need; they have lost some of the qualities that they prized. Don't let that be you!

Your voice is a tool - you use it to get your opinions and thoughts across: each of us wants our point of view to be heard! With a bit of training you can make yourself heard without resorting to force or becoming aggressive.

## **Here are some very simple things to try:**

1. Keep your voice supple by never allowing it to dry out. This means making sure you drink enough water every day. Sip, don't gulp: adults need to drink 2 litres a day and mostly don't: children should get into good habits! You make your whole system work more efficiently if you drink water.
2. Slide up and down your whole range – high to low – and see how smoothly you can make the transitions between different parts of your voice.
3. Imitate different kinds of accents – see how good a mimic you can be. Why not record everyone in the group saying the same thing and play them back - can you recognise who is who? How does it change if you say the same thing with different emotions: anger, sadness, fear?
4. Sing a note, low in your range, and register where you feel vibrations in the body: you could be aware of sensations in your throat or your chest. Then try a higher note, and see if those sensations have moved to other parts of the body – it may be that you now feel some sensations in your head.
5. Try to avoid shouting in a very noisy atmosphere – loud clubs, the playground, over loud background noise. If shouting is essential – and how are you meant to support your favourite football club if you don't shout a bit?! – then make sure you keep your throat open: no gripping (if you start to sound like Kermit, you know you are tense in the throat!)
6. Deep breathing is very important both in singing and speaking. It is also very good for letting go of all tension and making you feel relaxed. Practice by letting go of all your breath and holding on "empty". When you feel you really need to take a breath (and before you actually faint!), let your breath come into your body at the very bottom of your lungs. Feel your tummy muscles go out and your ribs spread wide: and above all, don't lift your shoulders! Can you breathe in low, and really silently?

**Take pride in your voice as being a big part of who you are, and how you come across to the world – make sure that you will be a person who is listened to.**