

Nurturing the Young Singer

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"Did you see that little girl on America's Got Talent singing opera? Wasn't she amazing?"

I. Nurturing the Very Young Voice

- the child's voice is light and limited in range
- boys and girls voices sound virtually the same
- little dynamic control
- don't attempt to push range
- encourage heady tones
- breathiness is natural
- teach age appropriate repertoire both in vocal demands and content
- focus on teaching musical skills rather than vocal technique

II. Nurturing the Female Adolescent Voice (ages 8-15)

- the larynx grows by approximately 30%
- vocal tract (throat) enlarges, vocal folds grow
- the voice change takes 1 1/2 to 3 years
- chest and head voice -- sing into the break and don't push the chest!
- the role of tension and pressed phonation in belting (nodules)
- PMS
- encourage a "your voice is not separate from your body" mentality

- be careful with the young, talented soprano
- the muscle memory acquired during this period is extremely difficult to undo

III. Nurturing the Male Adolescent voice (ages 10-15)

- the larynx grows by approximately 50%
- the change may occur in as little as 6 months (up to 2 years)
- psychological nurturing crucial during this period
- how to approach the voice cracking/breaking
- encourage the use of falsetto; help boys with the "I don't want to sound like a girl" issue
- be willing to rewrite/reorganize parts and transpose frequently to avoid unstable notes (which may change weekly) during the transition

The Praise and Worship thing ...

- professionals are often untrained singers (bad vocal examples)
- nurture young sopranos away from this repertoire due to registration challenges
- intended for congregational singing so not a solo singing style to model
- postural issues for those simultaneously playing instruments

The Choir Thing ...

- To vibrate or not to vibrate?
- not every choir can sing every style well; make thoughtful repertoire choices
- teach students the importance of vocal pacing during lengthy rehearsals
- talking tires the voice just as much or more than singing; support the speaking voice!
- if possible, have middle school girls switch parts to avoid early classification