

THE POP SINGER'S WARM-UP KIT

by LIS LEWIS

Because Stardom Takes Practice

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The male vocal was sung by Scott Houghton; the female vocal was sung by Lis Lewis.
The audio was recorded by Keith Sterling at Straylight in Glendale, California.

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ISBN 978-0-634-04297-3

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PUBLISHING

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WARMING UP

You love to sing. Most of the time your voice sounds pretty good, but every now and then you can't make it do what you want. Sometimes you can't get the high notes, or a fast run of notes sounds out of tune. Some songs sound better than others. What makes one day different from another, or one song different from another? There are a lot of factors that affect your voice: your physical health, your emotional well being, how much sleep you get, the weather, what you ate yesterday and, most of all, your skill. Your voice is built into your body, so you might not think of it as an instrument, but it is. You have to learn to play it, to keep it in shape and to house and feed it properly.

There are many skills involved in playing this instrument. Your pitch must be very accurate: every time you sing a note you should be right in the center of the pitch, not a little under it (flat) or a little above it (sharp). You shouldn't slide to the note (unless it's part of the style). Other elements of singing besides pitch are breathing, range, endurance, tone, volume, control, and stability. These can all be strengthened and improved by exercise. You also need to understand how to pick the right key for each song. There is a lot to learn in order to sing well night after night, without getting tired or hoarse. That's why voice lessons are so important. A good voice teacher will help you learn about every element of singing and help build the muscles you should be using and release the ones you shouldn't be using. As with anything physical, the better shape your muscles are in, the better you'll perform.

Since I am not watching you and listening to you sing, I can't give you a voice lesson, but I can get you started by giving you some basic exercises that will help get your voice warmed up. Before you start singing songs, you should stretch out the muscles of your instrument and gently remind them of the work they are about to do and how to do it properly. This is what a warm-up does.

Singing a song is not warming up. When you sing, you concentrate on how you sound and your body does whatever it takes to sound good. But that might not be the right thing to do. For example, you might try to get the high note by tightening your throat, but it will make your voice tired and possibly even damage your vocal cords. When you warm up, you isolate one problem at a time so you can focus on it and correct it. Warming-up will get your muscles stretched out and ready to sing.

USING THE AUDIO

This warm-up will give you an exercise for each area of your voice, but it isn't a substitute for voice lessons. If you are going to start taking your singing seriously, you will have to train just like a professional athlete does. This warm-up will get you off to a good start and will also give you an idea of what voice lessons are like. You should warm-up before any occasion when you will be singing: a rehearsal, a performance, a recording, and even before a voice lesson. If there are any exercises on this warm-up that make you feel tight or tired, don't do them; they aren't right for you.

There are two sets of warm-up exercises: twelve for women and twelve for men. Each exercise begins with an example of how it should sound. After the example, there is no singer, just the piano playing the exercise for you to sing. In one case, there are two examples at the beginning of the exercise because you are going to do it twice. Listen to the first example and run through the exercise doing it like the singer. Then go back, listen to the second example, and do it again the second way.

Some of these exercises might get too high or too low for you. If your throat feels tight, if you start straining or you can't hit the note, just stop and wait for the exercise to come into your range. After some work, you might be able to go higher or lower; but remember: everyone's range is different. You might be a tenor and not be able to reach the low notes of a baritone, or you might be an alto and not be able to go all the way to the top in the soprano range. That's fine. Develop your voice to its "personal best."

EXERCISE THREE

Connecting the Two Voices

Sing this using the syllable “wee” (like the sound in “week”).



The top note of this exercise should be in your head voice and the bottom note should be in your chest voice. It takes some time before this exercise sounds smooth, so be patient. Don't try to push into your chest voice too early. Let it happen naturally.

- Relax your shoulders
- Lift the roof of your mouth for the top note
- Let your head voice cross gently to chest voice on the bottom
- Stop if you feel like you're straining
- Drop out when the range becomes uncomfortable; come in again on the way back down

It is not unusual to feel a “break” or a “crack” as you cross over from one voice to the other. Some people call it a “flip.” This will smooth itself out over time if you don't try to force it. Let your chest voice come in when it's ready. Don't push to get it to come in sooner.

Women
Track **3**

Men
Track **15**

EXERCISE FOUR

Connecting in Both Directions, Pitch, Flexibility

Sing this using the syllable “ee” (like the sound in “tea”).



As in the previous exercise, the top is in head voice and the bottom is in chest voice, but now you have to come back up to head voice again. This is usually harder. Try not to push your chest voice up too far. Let it go over easily into head voice. Also, pay attention to pitch: because the exercise is faster, the pitches are harder to hit accurately.

- Lift the roof of your mouth for the top note
- Let your head voice cross gently to chest voice on the bottom
- Lift the roof of your mouth as you go back up
- End at the top in head voice
- Stop if you feel like you're straining
- Drop out when the range becomes uncomfortable; come in again as it comes back into your range

The first note and the last note are the same, but it's hard to get them to feel the same. The first note is easier because you can lift the roof of your mouth as you inhale before you start singing. For the last note to feel as open, you must lift the roof of your mouth as you are coming back up the scale, before you get to the top note.

Women
Track 4

Men
Track 16

THE POP SINGER'S WARM-UP KIT

The Pop Singer's Warm-Up Kit gives you an exercise for each area of your voice. There are two sets of audio warm-ups: 12 for women and 12 for men.

Each exercise begins with a sung example, then the piano plays the exercise for you to sing.

The price of this book includes access to audio tracks online, for download or streaming, using the unique code inside.

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The exercises address:

- Warming Up Your Lower Voice
- Warming Up Your Upper Voice
- Connecting the Two Voices
- Vocal Freedom & Flexibility
- Pitch Accuracy
- Stabilizing the Tone
- Loosening the Throat
- Placing the Sound Forward
- Relaxing the Tongue
- Increasing Your Range
- Breath Control
- Volume Control

Lis Lewis, author of *Singer's First Aid Kit*, teaches voice in Los Angeles, California. She is the director of **The Singers' Workshop**, a complete online resource for singers.

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U.S. \$14.99



HL00315342

ISBN 978-0-634-04297-3



9 780634 042973