

Skills Song Ladder for Vocals

These songs are from our Soundtracks' Song Bank, feel free to click this link and use the sing along tutorials!

<http://boltonmusicservice.com/online-learning/soundtracks/soundtracks-song-bank/>

BUT instead of the difficulty rating on there, we have divided them up according to what level they are for singers, because different music is harder/easier depending on the instrument...

Beginner Songs for Vocalists

'Mr Brightside' - The Killers

- This song requires the pitching of the vocals to be consistent as well as a clean transition from the main vocal line to the higher outro section of the song. The phrasing of the lyrics also needs to be punchy, upbeat and staccato, which is achieved through breathing correctly and clear pronunciation with vowel sounds.

'A Thousand Miles' - Vanessa Carlton

- Throughout this song, breathing is vital to reach and sustain all the notes within the lines, as well as smooth transitioning between notes and registers to reach all the notes used throughout the piece.

'Wake Me Up' - Avicii

- Pitching is very important with this song as it covers lower registers before clearly transitioning up to higher ones, showcasing accuracy when reaching notes and utilising different areas of the vocal range.

Intermediate Songs for Vocalists

'Pompeii' - Bastille

- Breathing is especially important in this song. Be sure to use your diaphragm to hold those longer vowel sounds and to take supported breaths before the faster pre-chorus.
- The song has a siren effect to the longer notes - be supportive in your breathing to achieve this technique. An exercise to locate your diaphragm is to imagine a sleeping animal, when they inhale their stomach inflates massively, try to replicate that whilst also pressing your fingers in between your ribs, the muscle that tenses is your diaphragm.
- Practice the different vowel sounds and mouth shapes while inhaling.

'Photograph' - Ed Sheeran

- Wide range of notes for example to change between the pre-chorus and chorus.
- Warm up properly, using vocal slides and sirens if not scales and arpeggios to exercise your range. If some notes are too high, you can lift your soft palette - quick ways to do this are yawning or singing with your thumb in your mouth.

'Yours' - Ella Henderson

- Stay in tune for the belt-like chorus as well as the vocal riffs and runs throughout the song.
- To achieve these embellishments it's important to pick out where the different notes change quickly, for example in the "I'm" of "I'm Yours". A good exercise to achieve this is to slow the pattern down, so you can make sure you are in tune for all of the notes, before speeding them up.
- To belt, you need to use your diaphragm more intensely and close your soft palette slightly to make a more isolated sound.

'Marry You' - Bruno Mars

- Higher range - especially in the "I do" section - practice breathing from your diaphragm and lower lungs rather than throat or shoulders (your stomach should inflate when you inhale and shoulders should stay level- imagine there is an elastic band around your waste and try to snap it when you inhale).
- Warm up properly to exercise your range (Scales, Slides, arpeggios, sirens) and lift your soft palette (yawning with or without vowel sounds).
- Pay attention to the embellishments, slowing them down to pick out the changing notes in a riff or run as well as the more intense use of the diaphragm when belting or softening for example for the high notes in this song.

Advanced Songs for Vocalists

'Valerie' - Amy Winehouse

- Jazzy sound
- Add breath back into the voice, but this needs to be controlled and is quite hard to do.
- Lifting the soft palette to stay in tune but not adding power to the voice, instead adding a whispering quality.
- Sliding technique between notes. Vibrato (a rapid, slight variation in pitch in singing or playing some musical instruments, producing a stronger or richer tone) is also a technique that is important in this kind of music. It is dragged out to add a soulful sound.
- In jazz or blues singing many singers widen the mouth shape. This means "me" turns into "may", and also means that "l"s are not pronounced strongly. The widening of mouth shape causes lots of other changes in sounds so listen out for those, if you replicate them slightly you should be able to create more of a jazzy tone.

'Feeling Good' - Muse

- Changing dynamics
- Pitch Slides - practice sirens/slides as well as different mouth shapes and humming

- Needs a lot of power - this comes from supported breath from the diaphragm.

'Skinny Love' - Birdy

- Ensuring enough breath support for this song is vital in achieving the light, soft sound. The Balloon Exercise (trying to fill up a balloon inside you with air until it pops) helps to develop control of the diaphragm muscle which helps to manipulate the airflow.
- Transitioning between chest voice and head voice is also present to give more dynamic change and interest to the choruses yet keep the sound breathy and using falsetto/head voice.
- Another characteristic throughout phrases in this song are the ad libs at the end of lines in the chorus, with the lyrics "my, my, my", covering several notes in a short duration. The five-note pattern exercise can be helpful with elements like this, beginning with a broken down, slower note pattern, then gradually speeding up to the original song's tempo and adding the phrases to the notes you are singing.

'Feel Good Inc.' - Gorillaz

- Rap section - slow the lyrics down until you know them from memory
- Over-pronounce / accentuate the letters to be understood - to warm up pretend you are chewing a toffee or choose letters to REALLY over-pronounce.
- There is a jump in range from the start of the song to the 'Windmill' section and well as in the "Feel Good"s and other high pitch fillers - when you warm up make sure you are exercising your whole range (through slides, sirens, scales, arpeggios) this is important so your voice can reach them during the song as it has already practised.
- Also make sure your breath is fully supported by your diaphragm so you can reach those higher notes as when your voice is breathy and unsupported it becomes out of tune (you can do this by imagining there is an elastic band around your waste that you need to snap when you inhale).
- You should also remember to lift the soft palette to access head voice / falsetto and reach those higher notes (fast ways to do this are yawning, singing with your thumb in your mouth, or pushing your tongue downwards to the bottom of your mouth).