



# Virtuosity The Voice



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## Virtuosity: The Voice

The voice was the first musical instrument and is still prominently used in all cultures for folk music traditions, to teach oral history, for community, spiritual and cultural celebrations, and is often combined with instrumental music, theatre and dancing.

As a passionate music education advocate, Richard Gill AO, believes that everyone has a voice and everyone can sing. In this [interview](#), Richard Gill discusses:

*“that **singing should be the basis of all music learning**, irrespective of the method chosen. Dalcroze, Orff and Kodaly, were they alive, would offer a chorus of approval for this idea. Before children can hold instruments, even simple hand-held percussion instruments, they can, given the appropriate assistance and examples, sing and reproduce pitch in some form or another. This requires the simultaneous learning of the texts of songs, nursery rhymes, games and the like, from which they build a huge repertoire of music they can perform alone and with others. From singing they can also learn to analyse sound, learn to discriminate ways in which pitch and rhythm are used, learn how pattern and repetition work in music and subsequently build a vocabulary of sounds and ideas which they can use in their own compositions. **Every child should have the opportunity to make his or her own music**: it is the prime reason for teaching music in the very early years.”*

In Western music, there are four main voice types for classical vocal performance (in order from highest to lowest) - soprano, alto, tenor and bass voices. The musical term *tessitura* (the Italian word for ‘texture’) refers to the most comfortable vocal range for a singer, or the number of notes that he or she can reach from within a low to high pitch range. A female mezzo-soprano will have a range in between the alto and soprano, and a counter-tenor is a rare male voice type with a similar range to a mezzo-soprano. The range of a male baritone voice sits between the (lowest) bass and (higher) tenor voice.

*“To sing opera, one needs two things: the voice and the passion - and above all, the passion.”*  
[Andrea Bocelli](#)

In the fields of Opera and Musical Theatre, male and female voices reach their full tone, strength and maturity in their late twenties or thirties, after many years of training in vocal technique, voice care and production. Younger voice students should take care during their teenage years to avoid misuse or overuse of the vocal cords, and to learn control of the ‘head’ voice (in general terms, the comfortable and supported production of high notes with good vocal tone) and ‘chest’ voice (where the vocal resonance is produced and felt in the chest area) to effectively perform a range of contemporary and classical vocal styles. The ‘belt’ voice (used for loud vocal production and for dramatic or emotional impact) is increasingly common in contemporary popular music, but may cause vocal damage if used inappropriately or excessively in performance.

The fragility of young voices and the maturity required for demanding operatic roles are described in this [article](#).

*“Technique is the basis of every pursuit. If you're a sportsman or you're a singer or a swimmer, well that comes under sport but you have to develop a basic technique to know what you're doing at any given time.”* [Joan Sutherland](#)

The flexibility of the voice is suitable for solo and chamber performance, as well as choral music. Many vocalists perform in choirs as a formal part of their training, to learn a cappella singing (without instrumental accompaniment) and to sing harmony parts in a blended ensemble with accompaniment. An innovative online project that has engaged the global vocal community is composer Eric Whitacre's 'Virtual Choir'. The latest project - [Virtual Choir 4](#) - received 8409 video submissions from 5905 singers from 101 countries.

The use of the voice and singing for physiological and emotional benefits in mood and wellbeing is documented in research literature and the field of music therapy. Dr. Jeanette Tamplin is a proponent of the benefits of therapeutic singing on mood, motivation and quality of life, and her work is described in this [article](#). For more information, go to [Music, Mind and Wellbeing](#) at The University of Melbourne.

## RECOMMENDED VIDEOS

[Music on the Mind: Podcasts](#)

[Carnegie Hall: Masterclasses for Singers](#) (11 videos)

[Joyce DiDonato: The Art of Recital and Singing in Carnegie Hall](#)

[How can we loosen you up to sing more freely?](#) (Musical Exchange)

[James Taylor "Singing"–Carnegie Hall](#) (3 of 9)

[Bobby McFerrin's Ted Talk](#)

This interactive vocal demonstration uses the pentatonic scale to create an improvised participatory experience for audience members.

*“Listening to [Bobby McFerrin](#) sing may be hazardous to your preconceptions. Side effects may include unparalleled joy, a new perspective on creativity, rejection of the predictable, and a sudden, irreversible urge to lead a more spontaneous existence.”*

## Recommended Teacher Resources

[noteable.com.au](#)

Great Relief - Senior High School, Song Styles, page 47