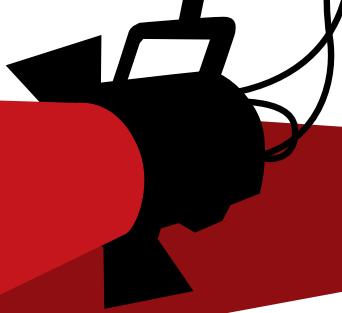


CHAPTER TWO

THE VOICE



Just as you need to become highly skilled and knowledgeable in the use of non-verbal communication in order to create characters effectively, you also need to learn how to make full use of your voice in order to communicate a range of different characters vocally. You need to investigate how your voice works and how you can develop and enhance its quality and range.

Your voice is an important instrument that you should investigate and prepare.



2.1 SOUND

All sound is caused by vibrations and these vibrations occur when one object hits another. When you clap your hands, the air around them is disturbed and vibrates. Your ears pick up these vibrations or sound waves and your brain interprets them as a particular noise.

Usually, the harder the object being hit, the louder the noise. However, some objects vibrate more than others and this also affects the sound. The vibrations produced by glass being smashed are much stronger and sharper than those caused by plastic being crushed, even though the plastic is tougher than the glass. So sound depends on an object being struck or hit and on the kind of vibrations that object produces.

RESONANCE

Musical instruments produce regular vibrations, but they also have something else that makes their sound louder and last longer—a resonator. A resonator is something that amplifies and sustains the original sound: a good example is the body of a drum. When a stick strikes the drum skin, the sound vibrates inside the drum, making it much louder and sustaining it. The deep, vibrating sounds of a giant bass drum are very resonant; the vibrations are very strong and they last a long time. Think of a resonator as a hollow object with room inside for the air to vibrate.

Sample pages

Resonators are made of materials that produce certain kinds of vibrations. A cave is a marvellous natural resonator. If you shout into it, your voice is amplified and sustained, echoing on and on.

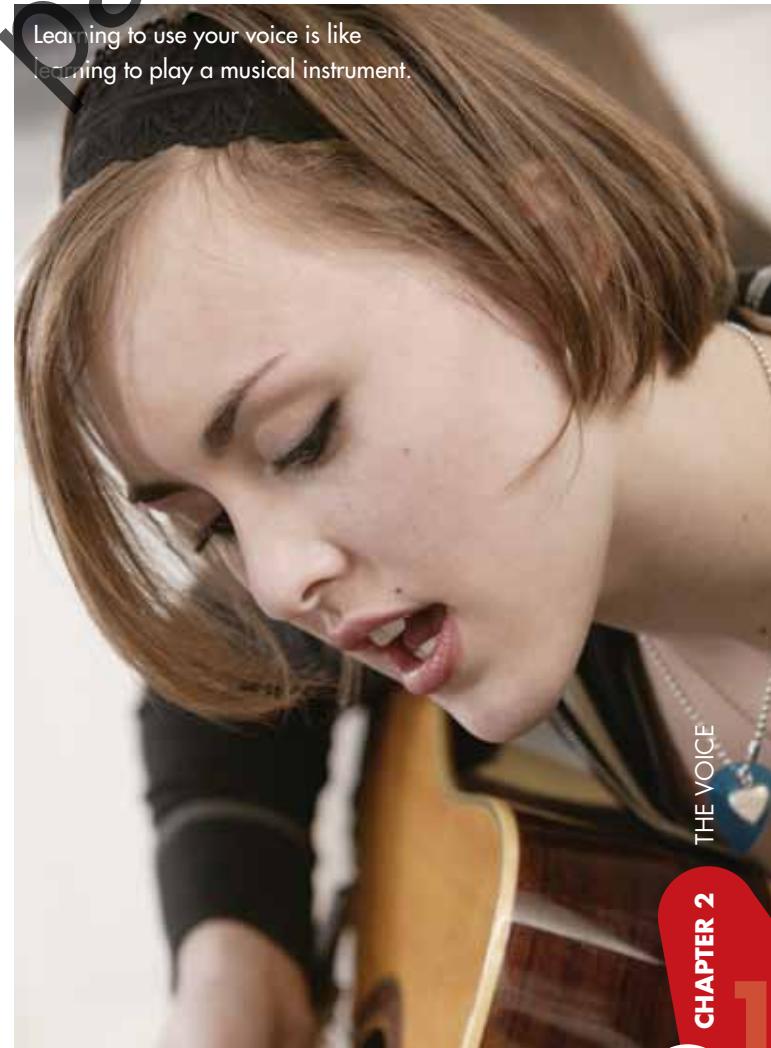
PLAYING YOUR VOICE

The human voice is a musical instrument and works like one. When you play a guitar, you hit or strum the strings to make them vibrate and create sound waves. In the same way, the breath from your lungs hits or strums the vocal cords in your throat (or larynx) and makes them vibrate, producing sound waves.

The body of an acoustic guitar is a resonator. The sound vibrates inside and sets up sound waves that amplify the original sound of the strings being strummed. If you don't know how to play a guitar, you hit the strings awkwardly, making unpleasant, discordant sounds, and it is quite possible to break a string by strumming it carelessly. The quality of sound you get from a guitar depends on how well you can play it, on the actual movement of your fingers and hands.

The human body is also a resonator: the sound made when air hits your vocal cords vibrates in your chest, throat, mouth and nose. We all have different voices. The important thing with any musical instrument is how well it is played, and this applies to your voice as well. You can use your voice clumsily and even damage your vocal cords by treating them harshly when you speak. When you speak, the skill with which you use your lips, tongue and palate to shape words will decide how effective your voice sounds. So learning to use your voice is really like learning to play any musical instrument. Once you understand how it works, it is simply a matter of practising with it until you are really expert.

Learning to use your voice is like learning to play a musical instrument.



2.2 HOW YOUR VOICE WORKS: BREATH

The sounds you make begin with breath striking your vocal cords, like guitar strings being strummed, so let us examine where your breath comes from and how to make the best use of it.

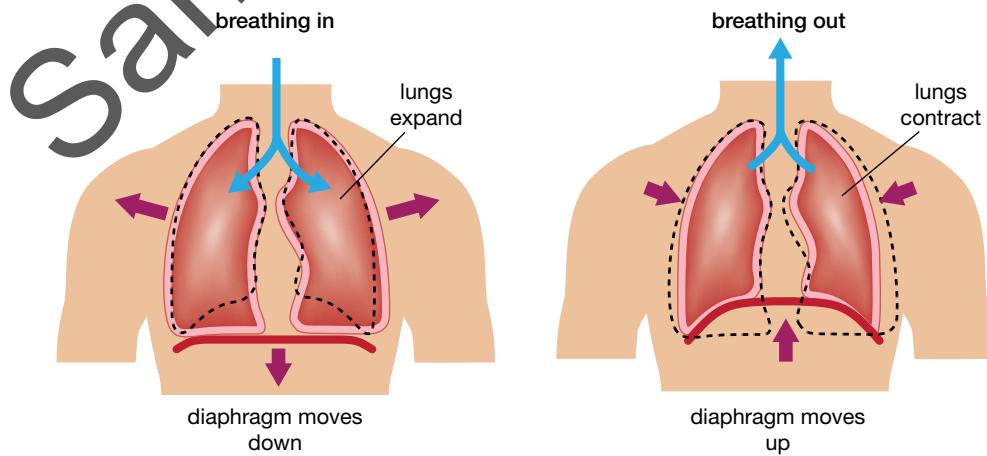
MORE AIR, LESS EFFORT

Your lungs sit inside your chest like two air bags, expanding and contracting as you breathe in and out. Their movement is controlled by the ribcage and the muscles of your chest, so this is where breath control should start.

You can check for yourself the way the ribs at the top of your chest are joined at the back to your spine and at the front to your breastbone, or sternum. Breathe in and feel the way the whole top of the ribcage has to move to let your lungs expand. This involves a lot of effort just to breathe in a small amount of air.

There is much more room available at the bottom of the ribcage, because there the ribs are only directly attached at the back, to the spine. In front, they are connected to each other and joined by muscles that can expand and contract them. The very bottom ribs are free at the front and are called floating ribs. So if you use the lower part of your chest for breathing, you can take in a lot more air with a lot less effort.

You can use your diaphragm to make even more room available for your lungs to expand downwards. The diaphragm is a curved sheet of muscle below the lungs, and it is attached to the ribs. When the ribs expand as we breathe in, the diaphragm stretches and flattens, leaving more space for the lungs to fill up at the bottom. So it is the diaphragm and the muscles between the ribs that you have to exercise to get the breath control you need to make full use of your voice.

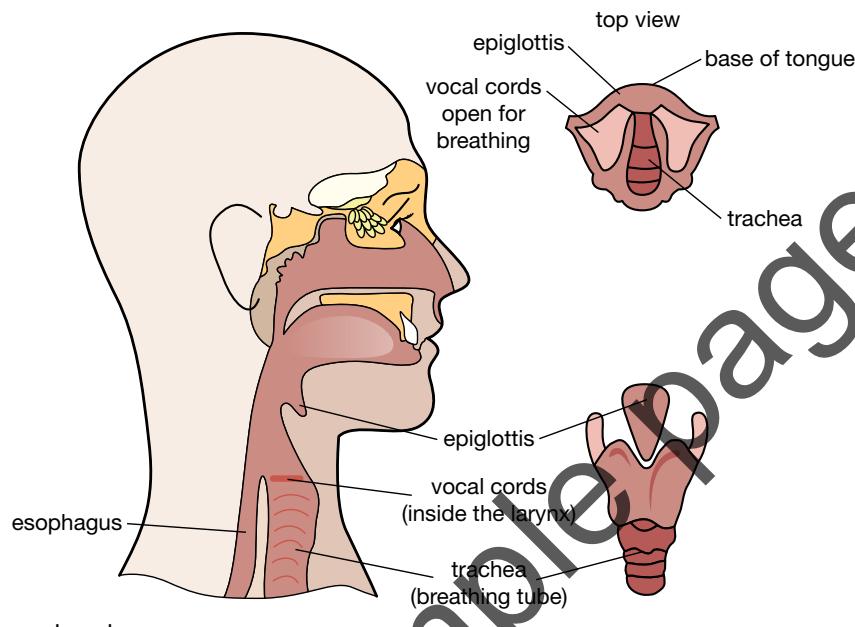


The respiratory system

VIBRATING THE VOCAL CORDS

All the sounds you make in speech begin with your breath passing between your vocal cords and making them vibrate. Unfortunately you have no direct control over your vocal cords. You cannot actually feel them working or make them move as you want. When you are breathing normally, they stay apart and the air passes easily through them. When you are about to speak, they come together automatically and the breath from your lungs touches them and makes them vibrate.

Your only way of controlling your vocal cords is to control the flow of air to them. If you force sound out without enough breath behind it, or breathe out too harshly or suddenly while you are speaking, your voice will sound strained and unpleasant, and you could even damage the vocal cords. You need to concentrate on producing a strong, steady flow of air that makes the vocal cords vibrate smoothly and efficiently.



The vocal cords

INTERCULTURAL

Circular breathing is a technique that can be valuable for actors. It is used by musicians who play wind instruments, especially Indigenous performers who play the didgeridoo. This technique allows performers to play continuously without stopping for breath. Circular breathing involves breathing in through your nose while breathing out through your mouth. With practice you can control the flow of air over the vocal chords very effectively.

WORKSHOP: MORE AIR, LESS EFFORT

Exercise 1: Lie on your back on the floor, letting all your muscles relax. Stretch and flatten your shoulders and back so they are resting completely still against the floor.

Exercise 2: Put your hands flat against the sides of your chest where the ribcage is widest and breathe out, emptying your lungs.

Exercise 3: Breathe out to a count of ten, controlling the flow of air through your mouth so that your lungs are completely empty when you reach ten. Repeat this exercise twice.

Exercise 4: Take a long, deep breath in, then breathe out to a count of fifteen, controlling the flow of air the whole time. Repeat twice, then see if you can breathe out counting up to twenty on the one breath.

Exercise 5: Breathe in deeply, filling the whole chest cavity. Put one hand on your stomach in the space between the bottom ribs, and press gently. Now breathe out just a little air and breathe it back in again. Feel the movement of your diaphragm rising and falling under your hand.

Exercise 6: Breathe out, counting aloud up to six and pressing gently on the diaphragm area as though you were pushing the numbers out from there. Now repeat this exercise a number of times, first with your hand on the diaphragm area, then without. Concentrate on making your breath flow up from the bottom of your lungs, so the sound you make when counting seems to begin in the diaphragm below your ribs.

WORKSHOP: VIBRATING THE VOCAL CORDS

Exercise 1: Stand up straight but relaxed with your back stretched and widened, the way it was when you lay on the floor at the beginning of the previous workshop.

Exercise 2: Relax your head and neck muscles by letting your head drop gently forward then back, then turn it slowly from side to side, letting it roll down and up on each turn.

Exercise 3: Lift your shoulders up towards your ears, then let them drop slowly back down. Repeat twice.

Exercise 4: Take a deep breath in, then breathe out to a count of ten. Repeat, counting up to fifteen, then twenty, as you breathe out.

Exercise 5: Put one hand on the diaphragm area between the bottom ribs and breathe in deeply. Now speak the long vowel sound AH (the ar sound in words like bark and dark). Make sure your throat and mouth are open and relaxed, and the breath for the sound rises smoothly from the diaphragm area.

Exercise 6: Take a deep breath and make the AH sound again, this time continuing it until you run out of breath. The sound should flow out steadily and evenly, as if you were singing a note. Repeat this exercise four times, keeping the flow of air smooth and strong, so the AH sound is clear and unforced.

Exercise 7: Now do the same with the vowel sound AY (as in day and boy). Keep the sound flowing all the time you are breathing out, making sure the energy for the sound begins in your diaphragm. Repeat four times, then try the vowel sound I (as in die and lie).

2.3 MAKING YOUR BODY RESONATE

As you have already seen, you have spaces in your body to make your voice resonate, just like a musical instrument. The quality of sound you make depends on whether you use these resonators properly. If you slump forward when you talk, you reduce your chest resonance. If your shoulders are tense, you cannot get much resonance in your neck space. A tight, restricted throat cuts down the supply of air to your mouth and head resonators.

So if you want to use your resonators properly, you must concentrate on using each set of muscles effectively. To do this requires good posture—standing or sitting correctly—and the ability to relax and control your muscle movements.



WORKSHOP: POETRY TO RESONATE THE BODY

For this workshop you will need a page from a book or a poem to use in practice. Poetry is extremely useful in voice work because of the rhythm and intensity of the language.

Exercise 1: Lie on the floor and do the breathing exercises you have already practised.

Exercise 2: Still lying relaxed, speak the poem you have chosen. As you say it, have one hand against your ribcage so you can feel your chest vibrate or resonate as you speak.

Exercise 3: Stand up and speak the poem, gradually increasing your projection until your voice is loud and clear but without any sign of shouting or straining.

Exercise 4: Stand in a corner with your face to the walls and speak the poem. Listen to the way the walls bounce the sound back to you. Deliberately try to increase the vibrations, but do not strain your voice or yell.

Exercise 5: Exercise your mouth and jaw by letting your jaw drop and saying AH five times. Each time, try to open your throat and mouth wider and relax them more. Now say the poem, concentrating on keeping the same relaxation and width in your mouth and throat.

2.4 HOW YOUR VOICE WORKS: SPEECH

The second vitally important element in using your voice effectively is the way you actually form words—your speech. Good speech does not mean changing your voice or your accent. It is simply a matter of learning to speak clearly and using the whole range of your vocal apparatus.

You have already examined the importance of your breathing in this process. Now let us look at the way we actually form words, and do some exercises that develop effective pronunciation.

THE VOWELS

Vowel sounds are the heart of every word we speak. From the five basic vowels in the English language, A, E, I, O, U, we get over twenty different sounds in combination with other letters. For example, the letter A is pronounced AW in the word law but AH in the word lark.

All the vowel sounds are made with your jaw relaxed and your throat open so that the sound from the vocal cords passes freely into your mouth. The different vowel sounds are then shaped in your mouth by the use of your tongue, palate and lips.

Say this vowel sequence and feel the way your lips change shape:

AH (as in dark) AW (as in law) OO (as in lose).

Here is another sequence of lip vowels. Try them:

OH (as in go) OW (as in house) OI (as in boy).

Now put one finger in your mouth so that it is touching the back of your tongue and try saying these vowels:

AH (as in dark) ER (as in learn) EE (as in leave).

Feel the way your tongue is flat for AH but curves for ER and makes an arch for the EE sound.

INTERCULTURAL

South-East Asian languages contain a large number of vowels and consonants that require different pronunciations. When the languages are written, special marks are used to indicate the way the letters or words should be spoken.

The fourth vowel sequence also involves tongue vowels. As you practise them, be aware of the way your tongue curves inside your mouth to make the sounds:

AY (as in day) I (as in sky) AIR (as in hair) EER (as in ear).

When you speak, it is the vowels that are most important in creating the tone of your voice, so if your vowels are blurred or breathy, that is how your voice will sound. If your vowel sounds are strained or nasal, then you will sound harsh-voiced or as if you are speaking through your nose.

To make sure our vowel sounds are clear and strong, we need to develop the muscles that make them. First, we need to exercise the jaw muscles so that we speak with an open jaw which allows a free flow of sound into the mouth; then, the muscles of our tongue and lips, to help us form our vowel sounds precisely and accurately.

Lip vowels

AH (dark)	AW (law)	OO (lose)	OW (cow)
MAH	MAW	MOO	MOW
PAH	PAW	POO	POW
SAH	SAW	SOO	SOW
BAH	BAW	BOO	BOW

Tongue vowels

AH	EE (leave)
AH	AY (day)
AH	AY
LAH	LAY
TAH	TAY
DAH	DAY
	EE
	EE
	LEE
	TEE
	DEE
	I (sky)
	LI
	TI
	DI

The consonants

Consonants are formed when you use part of your mouth to completely or partly block the sound coming from your vocal cords. Consonants are important because they break up the vowel sounds into syllables. If the consonants are not clearly voiced, we lose the sense of a word. It is impossible to tell the difference between words like map, mat and mad unless the final consonant is properly sounded.

Plosives

One group of consonants are called plosives because they are formed when the sound from the vocal cords is stopped for a split second by the lips or tongue, and then allowed to explode out of the mouth. Try saying the consonant P, as in past, and feel the way your lips block the sound and then force it out suddenly.

Now put your hand up to your mouth so your fingers are almost touching your lips and say the following pairs of plosive consonants:

P B

T D

K G

CH DJ (the g sound in budge).

You should have felt the breath exploding from your lips for each consonant. Did you notice that there was more breath for the first column: P, T, K and CH? The sound for these consonants is made just by the breath exploding from our lips, whereas the consonants in the second column are actually sounded or ‘voiced’ as well.

Continuants

The second group of consonants are made when the sound from our vocal cords is only partly blocked. We can go on sounding these consonants for as long as our breath lasts and for this reason they are called continuant consonants.

The first three are M, N and NG (the *ing* sound at the end of words like running). These three are actually made by the sound of air escaping through the nose. Rest one finger against the side of your nose and place another just under your nostrils, then sound these three nasal consonants. You should be able to feel both the vibration in your nasal cavity and the air coming from your nostrils.

The next continuant consonant sounds are L and R, both made by the front of the tongue. The more you exercise your tongue, the more clearly you can sound these consonants.

Fricatives

The last six consonants are all made by the friction of the air passing through the mouth, so are called fricatives. They are excellent to use for practice because they demand a strong flow of breath and correct articulation in the mouth if they are to sound clear and precise.

The first two sounds, S and Z, are made with the tip of the tongue against the teeth; the sound escapes through the gap between the teeth. The next two, F and V, are made when the top teeth touch the lower lip and the sound escapes between them.

The last two sounds are very similar, the TH sound in thin and the TH sound in this. The differences are that we use extra breath for the sound in words like thin, and we voice the sound in words like this. They are both formed with the tip of the tongue between the teeth; the air is forced out around the tongue.

WORKSHOP: THE VOWELS

Exercise 1: Let your jaw drop down so that your mouth is wide open. Open and close your mouth slowly five times, making the jaw muscles work more each time. Now open your mouth wide and put two fingers, one on top of the other, into your mouth and close it until your teeth are just touching your fingers.

Exercise 2: Keep your fingers in place between your teeth. Make the AH sound, sustaining it for as long as you can.

Exercise 3: Remove your fingers, but keep your jaw in the same position. Take a deep breath and make the AH sound for as long as your breath lasts, keeping your mouth open the same width all the time.

Exercise 4: Practise the 'Lip vowels' and 'Tongue vowels' sequences on page 20, always beginning with the AH sound and making sure your mouth is open the width of two fingers each time you begin.

WORKSHOP: PLAYING WITH THE VOICE

Exercise 1: Begin by making the AH sound with your throat relaxed and your mouth open at least the width of two fingers.

Exercise 2: Say LAH, feeling the tip of your tongue curl up to touch the ridge behind your top teeth before uncurling to lie flat.

Exercise 3: Now practise the following exercise, making the curling movement of your tongue as precise as possible, even when you say *LALALA* very quickly.

<i>LAH</i> (pause)	<i>LAH</i> (pause)	<i>LAH</i> (pause)	<i>LAH</i>
<i>LA LA</i>	<i>LA LA</i>	<i>LA LA</i>	<i>LA LA</i>
<i>LALALA</i>	<i>LALALA</i>	<i>LALALA</i>	<i>LALALA</i>

WORKSHOP: PLAYING WITH THE VOICE

Exercise 4: Do the same sequence with each of the following consonants: *T, D, P, B, K, G, M, N*.

For example:

<i>TAH</i>	<i>TAH</i>	<i>TAH</i>	<i>TAH</i>
<i>TATA</i>	<i>TATA</i>	<i>TATA</i>	<i>TATA</i>
<i>TATATA</i>	<i>TATATA</i>	<i>TATATA</i>	<i>TATATA</i>

Make sure you say each consonant on its own first, noting how your tongue and lips move, and then when you say them in groups, try to get the same precise movements.

Exercise 5: Practise saying the following consonants in pairs:

S Z
F V
TH (thin) *TH* (this)

Concentrate on the movements of your tongue, lips and teeth, and emphasise the difference between the breathed sounds of *S, F* and *TH*(in), and the voiced sounds of *Z, V* and *TH*(is).

Exercise 6: Now combine the vowels and consonants together using all the elements of your voice to produce clear, strong sounds. Speak the vowel sequence:

AH I OW EE AY OH AW OO

Now place each of the consonants in turn in front of each sound and practise the sequences they make:

BAH BI BOW BEE BAY BOH BAW BOO
DAH DI DOW DEE DAY DOH DAW DOO

and so on for every consonant.

Using the same vowel sequence, place each consonant in turn after the vowel sound and practise them, beginning with:

AHB IB OWB EEB AYB OHB AWB OOB

2.5 USING THE INSTRUMENT

You have examined the way your voice works and practised some exercises to develop your speech. Let us finish by working on some techniques that help you to speak in more varied and interesting ways. In other words, to make full use of your voice as an instrument.

TONE

Because your body acts as a resonator for your voice, you can improve the quality or tone when you speak by using different parts of your body to resonate the sounds you are making.

This technique is extremely simple to learn. Just by focusing your concentration on the resonance in your body you become aware of it and can use it consciously whenever you wish.

PROJECTION

As well as improving your tone, you can also learn to make your voice carry further without having to shout. Again, the technique is simple. All you need to do is aim your voice where you want it to go. If you focus your attention on the person or place you want your voice to reach, and let the sound come out easily and naturally, then your vocal apparatus will automatically adjust the amount of breath and sound needed.

VARIETY

You can also make your voice more interesting and effective by introducing some variety into the way you speak. We can:

- change the pitch of your voice, using the higher and lower notes to express thoughts and feelings strongly
- use intonation, stressing or emphasising certain words that are important in what you are saying
- vary the pace at which you speak and use pauses for emphasis or to create tension
- change your volume, speaking more loudly or softly when it is appropriate.

Variety in speech should never be used artificially, just for the sake of it. The aim should always be to use the full range of your voice to express yourself more clearly and communicate more effectively.

 Speech is almost never used in isolation in the theatre, any more than body language is. They are both part of the integrated use of our voices and our bodies in performance.

WORKSHOP: TONE

Exercise 1: Put one hand behind your back, resting flat against your spine about halfway up. Place the palm of your other hand against your ribcage just under your heart. Say your poem or one of the main voice exercises aloud, feeling the sounds vibrate in your chest and back. As you speak, concentrate on building up that resonance without forcing your voice.

Exercise 2: Place one hand on either side of your throat and feel the resonance there when you speak. Keep your throat relaxed, and concentrate on building up the resonance by simply increasing the flow of air from your lungs.

Exercise 3: Move your hands to your cheeks, with your fingers touching the sides of your nose. Do some voice exercises involving the nasal consonant sounds *M*, *N* and *NG*, building up the vibrations in your mouth and nose resonators.

Exercise 4: Now speak or read anything you like, consciously making your body resonate with sound.

WORKSHOP: PROJECTION

Exercise 1: Say the long vowel sound *AH* three times, aiming it at three different places: one close to you, one in the middle distance and one a long way off. Do not force the sound to make it louder, but concentrate on shifting your attention from one place to the next and focusing your voice to reach each place.

Exercise 2: Now do the same with some words, reading or speaking to someone next to you, then someone further away, and finally to someone quite distant. In each case, focus your attention on the person and project your voice to just reach them comfortably.



Justin Sharrock and Peta Carolan in a CQ University production of *Snapshots from Home*

Snapshots from Home

by Margery Forde

First performed in 1997, this play is a series of short, cinematic scenes that give the audience a range of vivid impressions of life in Australia during the Second World War. The play focuses on the experiences of the women who remained behind when the men went off to fight in the war.

The following extract contains the final sequences of the play, showing the soldiers returning home in 1945 after the war has finished, and then jumping forward to today with the characters reflecting back on their experiences. As you can see, the characters are identified in the script only as voices, and this is a clear indication of the emphasis on the spoken dialogue. The extract relies particularly heavily on effective vocal work to convey the texture and meaning of the text.

Exercise: Make sure you warm up your voice sufficiently before you begin speaking the lines, and consciously apply the different vocal techniques you have learned to each extract you perform. At the same time, be aware of the non-verbal elements of the performance and ensure that your body language and use of empathy reinforce and enhance your spoken performance to create meaning for the audience and for yourself.

Snapshots from Home

SLIDE: HE STILL WON'T TALK ABOUT IT

VOICE 1 (Young woman)

The Aussie prisoners of war came down Queen Street in cars. They'd come through from Malaya and Burma and those places.

VOICE 2 (Young woman)

It was terrible to see them. These pathetic bundles of humanity. So terrible. I just stood there crying. That afternoon I went home on the tram.

[On the tram. The audience don't see the POW. The people on the tram are all staring at the unseen figure.]

VOICE 2

There was this man ... he'd been a prisoner of war. He was sitting right in the middle of the tram, on his own. He looked like a very old man ... but he couldn't have been. He couldn't have been very old at all. He was in a very bad way ... a shocking state. Everyone on the tram spoke to him ...

[Each passenger gently speaks to the POW in turn as they leave the tram.]

VOICE 3

Good luck matey. All over now, eh?

VOICE 4

She'll be right, mate. You're home now.

VOICE 3

You'll be alright, young fella. You keep your chin up ...

- VOICE 4** Yeah ... you're home now, mate. You're back home.
- VOICE 2** The man started to cry. I was still sitting across from him and I wanted to put my arms around him and hold him and comfort him and tell him how sorry I was. But I couldn't. I got off the tram and walked up the hill.
[The actors walk forward and talk directly to the audience. They are now speaking as the men and women they are today ... in their 70s and 80s.]
- SLIDE: I HOPED TOMORROW WOULD BE BETTER ...
- VOICE 2** Do you remember ... once the war was over we were expected to go back to the kitchen sink and populate or perish? But I'd changed.
- VOICE 1** I'd been in the army for four years. I was educated, I'd learned about friendships and I knew what went on in the big bad world.
- VOICE 2** My father had made every decision in our family. Mum did as she was told until the day she died. But I couldn't be like my mother ... subservient to a man.
- VOICE 1** I argued with my father for the first time in my life.
- VOICE 4** Fifty years on ... and I still feel bitter about what happened. The terrible anger has never left me and it never will.
- VOICE 3** I did hate ... with a youthful fervour. Not any more.
- VOICE 2** My husband had been through six years of private horror before I met him. He still won't talk about it. We've had forty years of living with the consequences.
- VOICE 4** When I see young Japanese I feel like walking up to them and shaking them and saying 'Do you realise your history books don't tell the truth?'
- VOICE 3** Neither do ours, mate. I don't feel bitter. I don't think your average Japanese was any happier about the war than we were.
- VOICE 4** You certainly hope war never happens to your children ... or your grandchildren. But then you see families who can't get on together ... and towns ... and political parties ... and races that can't get on together. Then you have wars ...
- VOICE 1** With so many men at the helm, there'll always be wars. That's because men don't have to go into the labour wards and push like hell to bring people into the world. Life just doesn't mean as much to them.
- VOICE 3** My only grandson was on stand-by during the Gulf War. I realised then that someone who belonged to me might be caught up in something terrible ... just as I was.
- SONG: TOMORROW IS A LOVELY DAY
(Words & music: Irving Berlin)
- VOICE 3** It's a lovely day tomorrow ...
 Tomorrow is a lovely day ...

- VOICE 1** World War I was supposed to be the war to end all wars. But it wasn't.
I marched in the streets to demonstrate against the war in Vietnam.
- VOICE 2** I became a member of the peace movement ... the People for Nuclear Disarmament.
- VOICE 3** Come and feast your weary eyes
On tomorrow's clear blue skies.
- VOICE 4** We all hoped that there'd be no more wars, but it hasn't happened and probably never will ... mankind being the way it is.
- VOICE 3** If today your heart is weary,
and every little thing looks grey.
- VOICE 2** Back then, in my 21 year old optimism, I certainly hoped that my children would grow up in a world without wars.
- VOICE 3** Just forget your troubles and learn to say ...
- VOICE 1** I believed tomorrow would be better. I still believe it can be.
- ALL** Tomorrow is a lovely day.
[Lights slowly down]
- FINIS

Snapshots from Home by Margery Forde, Playlab Press, Brisbane, 1997.

Other plays

The 7 Stages of Grieving by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman, Playlab Press, Brisbane, 1996.

Wolf by Tobsha Learner, Currency Press, Sydney, 1992.

Waltzing the Wilarra by David Milroy, Currency Press, Sydney, 2011.

Cosi by Louis Nowra, Currency Press, Sydney, 1992.

Under Milk Wood by Dylan Thomas, Everyman, 1975.