

Shower Power: From Shower-Singing to Confident Public Speaking

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Have you ever been puzzled by the great mystery of life: "Why am I able to sing in the shower and sound so great, and then trip over my own shoelaces in a simple conversation?" There are probably a great many of us who are Shower Virtuosos. We sing our pop, or country, or classical hits in the shower at a great volume, and we clearly enjoy the sound we produce. And yet, when we are asked to sing before others, even if it is just "Happy Birthday," we find we cannot even raise our voices above a whisper. Perhaps public speaking creates the same kind of panic within us.

There are reasons for our successes in the shower. The factors that engender good singing in a shower environment can be easily identified. Once we know why we sing so well in the shower, we can correct whatever is missing in our ordinary lives to provide this same level of comfort or seeming proficiency.

Perhaps the best way to look at the question of shower singing is to ask ourselves what we do differently when we are in the shower than we do when we are in front of a piano, or a microphone. What is different about our environment, our attitude, that affects us in a way that engenders better singing?

The most obvious factor is, of course, privacy. When we are in our showers, we are cut off from the rest of the world. All the unpleasantnesses of our home lives, our work lives, our stresses and our tensions, are cut off by a foggy

glass door or a hanging nylon curtain. And in this private environment comes a feeling of freedom, a feeling that we can do as we please, for we are not being observed, or judged, or timed. In such an environment, there is little to stand in the way between the desire to sing and the act of singing.

I want to make an important observation here. In point of fact, we have increased our privacy only a little. Our families or our housemates can still hear us singing through the curtain. We are still subject to the ringing of a phone. We are still dwelling in that house that needs fixing. And we can only stay in the warm, private place for a limited time. What keeps these realities at bay?

The answer is that we make a *deliberate decision* to disregard these realities. We complete the feeling of a private environment by using our own imaginations. Once we have labeled that shower stall a private place, we have created an environment where we can freely express ourselves without fear of censure.

If we can do this with a shower stall, why not do it with a stage? Why not declare the stage a sacred place, a private place, in fact, where we are above reproach? Professional performers do this all the time, whether consciously or unconsciously. But we are in our showers nearly every day, and we have been since we were little; we know generally what will happen to us in this small place. How can we make the stage, or the piano, or the podium, as private, or at least as comfortable a place as a shower stall?

The experienced actor or performer or speaker has spent enough time upon a stage or behind a microphone that they have a pretty good idea what to expect there. For the occasional speaker, it might be a good idea to visit the site of the anticipated recital. Spend a few minutes there every day for a week. Sing there, speak there, find out what you sound like in that space. If this is not possible, then perhaps there are similar environments that you can visit in lieu of the real

one. Perhaps the hotel at which you are staying has an empty conference room. Perhaps there are smaller recital halls not being used that you might visit and practice in.

Of course, the addition of the audience will change that environment quite significantly. And only time and experience in that filled space can adequately prepare you for making an unabashed appearance every time. But if you have a feeling of safety in that space, if you consider it a comfortable place, then the audience can be disregarded, much as the family members are disregarded when you are singing at the top of your voice. Or, conversely, the audience can be allowed into your personal space. You may grant them permission to hear you speak. But you maintain ownership of the place in which you are speaking. You have created a new environment in which you can feel comfortable.

Another element of our shower experience is our own reaction to a place which has acoustical qualities unlike any other. In other words, we hear things in a shower that we do not hear anywhere else.

Most bathrooms are wonderful places to sing! The flat surfaces, usually tiled, provide a marvelous echo for our voices. There is a reason our voices sound so much more powerful in the shower. When we sing or speak, our voices instantly bounce back to us from the floor of the shower, and from the very close walls and ceiling of the bathroom or the stall. Our voice comes back to us immediately, from all sides. We sound powerful. Our voices come back to us rich and full.

One way in which this helps us sing is by boosting our confidence level in our own voice. We have been transported to a magical realm in which our voice is as reliable as Luciano Pavarotti's. It is loud, clear, and rich. Unfortunately, outside of a bathroom and a very few concert halls, there are few places where

we can get such positive auditory feedback.

But what happens when we hear our own voice, and enjoy the sound of it? Quite naturally, we make more noise. Little children love the sound of their own voice. When they are learning to talk, they howl and scream and make up silly songs, just for the sake of hearing themselves. We have a tendency to lose that sense of auditory awareness, that ability to truly listen to ourselves. Too often we have a preconceived idea of what we should sound like, and when we do not hear that ideal sound, we imagine that what we do hear is inferior.

Generally, our own natural speaking and singing voices, as individual as they are, are quite interesting to other people. People with a real gift for speaking or singing do not try to impersonate another sound. Rather, they will emphasize the positive qualities of their own voices; they have learned to do this because they are familiar with their voices, and they enjoy them. Has it ever struck you that singers such as Billie Holiday or Neal Diamond have very unique qualities to their singing voices, qualities which we enjoy regardless of their idiosyncracies?

Take increased note of your voice when you are in the shower. Get to know it in this comfortable place. Then, when you are in a different place, listen to it in the same way that you listen to it when you are in the shower. Realize that the voice you enjoy in the shower is the same voice you are using now, only quieter. Can you speak or sing louder or more clearly so that you can hear those qualities in a living room? How about a concert hall? In every place you sing or speak, you will be able to hear, and perhaps enjoy, the sound of your own voice. In this way, you can overcome one of the greatest obstacles to good singing or speaking, and you will be able to do the vocal task you have set for yourself.

The last element of shower singing, and the one that is perhaps most

easily overlooked, is the increased awareness of our bodies, whether conscious or unconscious. The shower environment is one of warm, cascading water, of pleasant, soapy smells, and of rough, massaging brushes or washcloths. These trappings of our shower life bring contact to our bodies in ways that we perhaps only experience in the shower. How often do you make contact with every point on your back? How often do you pay attention to your feet?

The increased awareness of our bodies that we receive, if only briefly, during our showers, is one of the greatest fringe benefits of the shower environment. It is, in fact, one of the reasons that we feel comfortable enough to sing there.

We tend to lose the heightened awareness of our bodies when the water stops. And yet, if we desire, we can maintain that awareness in any environment; at a podium, in a grocery store check-out line, or sitting in an airplane chair. This awareness allows us to make ourselves physically more comfortable, no matter where we are. We can stand more comfortably, relax tense muscles, and feel safer in our environment simply by being more aware of how we are standing or sitting in that environment.

Perhaps a useful exercise might be to imagine, while you are standing at a grocery store check-out line, that you are in a shower. Remember what movements you go through as you make yourself clean. Can you feel those forgotten corners of your back that you can only reach with a washcloth? Can you sense the backs of your knees? Does bringing attention to these places make you feel more comfortable?

When you are more aware of your body and how the parts interact, you will find that you are able to move more easily. This freedom of movement, even in the realm of standing, will make it easier for you to speak and sing. Voice teachers are constantly working with their students to keep them from stiffening

up on stage. Teachers want their students to relax and breathe so that they can take advantage of their vocal and expressive abilities. Ideally, they would like their students to be able to move in any way they desire. We feel this freedom naturally in the shower, and having a heightened, pleasurable sense of our bodies is one of the reasons. We can experience this heightened sense anywhere, at any time, and we can use it to help us speak and sing freely in more public settings.

There are many lessons to be learned from the unexpected facility we experience with our voices when we are in the shower. I would assert that whenever we find a place in which we perform in a superior way, we can examine the qualities of that environment to discover ways to transfer that performance to other areas of interest. If we find we are excellent writers, then perhaps there are elements of our writing process that we can borrow for use in other areas like cooking or joke telling. Why should one's personal strengths be limited to that place in which we feel most at ease? In fact, needing only a recognition of those qualities which provide our facility, we can achieve any number of things we may have assumed were out of our reach.

-The End-

Adam Cole publishes a free monthly newsletter about *Feldenkrais* on www.feldenkraisinfo.com. During his training, Adam wrote a novel entitled *The Myth of Magic*, about a school of magicians who are fighting for their survival in a world that does not understand them. Visit www.mythofmagic.com to read an excerpt from this Feldenkrais-influenced book. To learn more about Adam, hear his CD, read his poetry, and much more, visit

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