

CONSONANTS

The Good, The Bad and the Downright Ugly

Lea Baker. Region 25 Summer Music Camp, June 2024

Exploring sustained consonants.

M, N, NG, L, V, Z, ZH, TH, R, W, Y

Sound effects: S, F, TH, H, SH

Singable or voiced consonant contain pitch and duration. Some are very vowel like, W and Y for example, They sound very similar to OO and EE.

/zh/ – “genre” / “division”

EXPLORE MORE humming on THESE, Make up your own tunes.

Notice how each hum has its own unique quality

Do you notice a pleasant sensation?, Maybe vibrations in the bones of your face and head?

Humming feels great. It relaxes and revitalizes us.

Let's play the sound effect consonants. S, F, TH, H, SH – these are sustainable but contain no pitch.

Exploring percussive consonants

TAPPING – now start tapping a finger on the back of your hand. Tap tap tap tap.

Very lightly in a spring away fashion. Make the sound “tap”

Notice the feeling inside your mouth, using your tongue as the drumstick.

Now tap of a variety of percussive consonants. These contain rhythms. They are not sustainable.

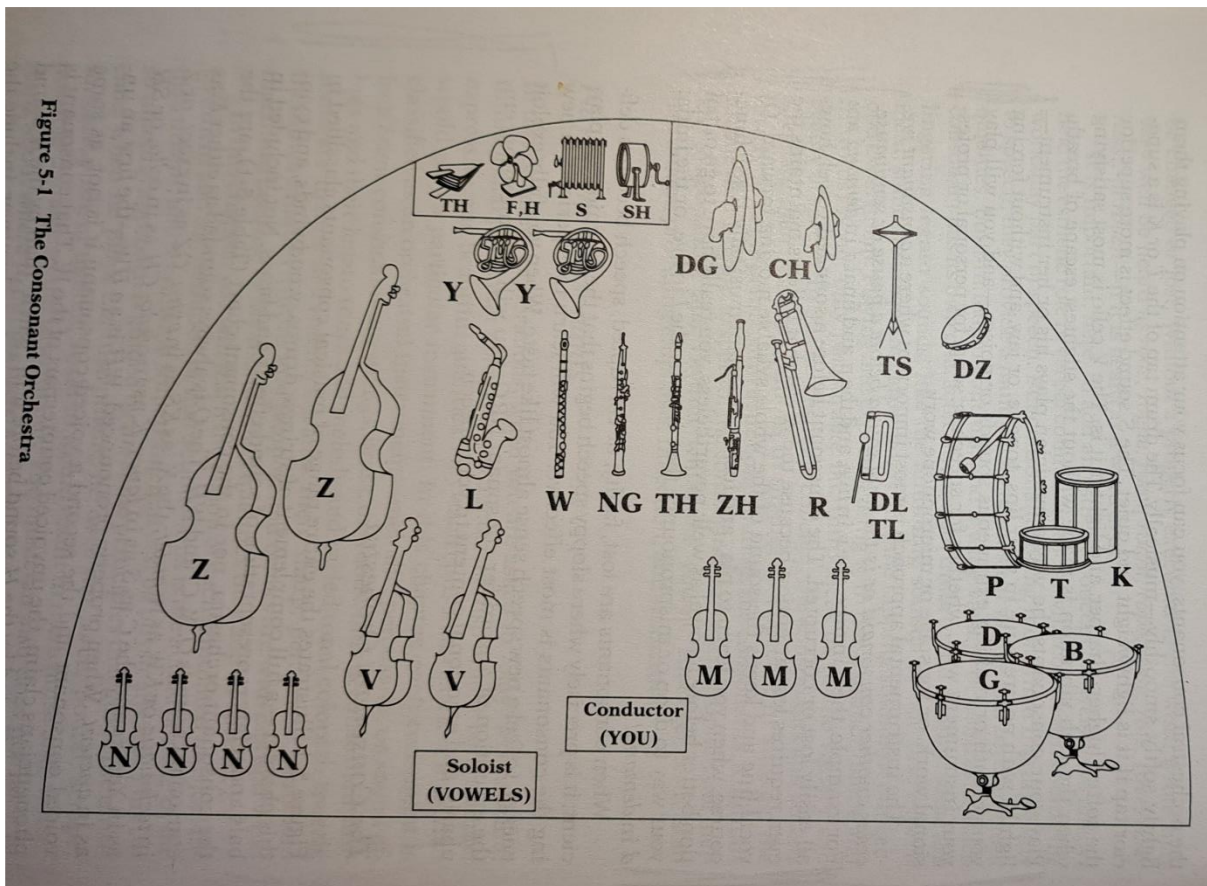
The spring away action makes them LIGHT, CRISP and ENJOYABLE.

Each tap is unique. Some have voice others do not, they contain different sensations in the mouth.

DG = Judge

Settle on a sound you recognise as a consonant. Tap tap tap tap

P, T, K, G, D, B, CH, DG, TS,



[The Use and Training Of The Human Voice. 3rd edition. Arthur Lessac]

Arthur Lessac groups consonants into an “Orchestra”.

Some are like stringed instruments, carry tone and pitch, others like drums and are percussive.

PLAY YOUR CONSONANTS LIKE A MUSICIAN!

- Lightly
- No pressure at the lips, tongue or jaw
- Without forcing the breath

Consonants:

- Have some form of friction
- Create words, syllables and sentences

Consonants sounds all made by partially or completely blocking the air flow through the vocal tract (except H).

Vowels on the other hand are completely unrestricted. AH EH AA OH etc

Consonants are important for creating words, syllables and they add MEANING to our speech.

In English, consonants often book end vowels to create words. Eg “Dog” “Cat” “Play” “Trick”

We (meaning everyone!) often ignore, omit or corrupt the consonant sound where it is the final sound before a pause, or where a consonant precedes another consonant. Words like “Take” “Live” often have the final consonant sound omitted. Oops!

The areas where we do tend to underplay them is when consonants are in the final position within a word or in the middle of the word, or when they precede another consonant.

Voiced vs Unvoiced consonants

VOICED

B as in 'babe'
 D as in 'dead'
 G as in 'agog'
 N as in 'noon'
 M as in 'mime'
 V as in 'verve'
 Z as in 'zones'
 TH as in 'breathe'
 ZH as in 'pleasure'
 NG as in 'sing'
 L as in 'lilt'
 Y as in 'beyond'
 R as in 'rewrite'
 DG as in 'judge'
 DZ as in 'intends'

These consonants are phonated with vocal fold vibration and cannot be whispered.

*Some have an unvoiced equivalent (cognate), where if you remove the vocal fold vibrations but keep the air going, you end up with another consonant.
 Eg B → P, D → T, V → F etc*

UNVOICED

P as in 'pope'
 T as in 'tight'
 K as in 'cook'
 F as in 'fifth'
 S as in 'safe'
 TH as in 'breath'
 SH as in 'wish'
 CH as in 'church'
 TS as in 'Bet's'
 H as in 'High'

These consonants are produced without vocal fold vibration and cannot be voiced.

You will notice that in this list there are several consonants that have counterparts, or 'cognates'. They are essentially produced in the same way, but one has voice and one does not.

For example....

Make the sound of a B - now take the voice away and whisper it. You end up with P

Make the sound of a D – now take the voice away and whisper it, You end up with T.

Even these whispered sounds should not be breathy. Hardly any air should escape through the mouth.

Q: Which consonants can we sustain tone on? M, N, NG, L, V, Z, R, W, Y, ZH, DZ

ZH = "Genre"

DZ = "Intends"

Q: Which consonants are percussive in nature? ie they sound like a drum beat or percussion instrument? B, P, T, CH, D, G, K,

As we know, play these consonants in a spring away fashion. The *release* part of producing them is important

Voiced Sustainables

M, N, NG, L, V, Z, R, W, Y, ZH, DZ

Percussive (non sustained)

B, D, G, K, T, P, Ch

Unvoiced Sustainables

S F SH H

Voiced sustainables – those we can carry pitch through.

W and Y are vowel like consonants. What vowel does a “W” sound like?

Sing “When” to find it.

What vowel does a Y sounds like?

Sing “Yes” to find it. It’s an “ee” sound right?

The last two may look unfamiliar but they are everywhere in our language. ZH as in “Genre” and DZ and in “Intends”

Percussive - are played but not have any sustaining sound in them.

Unvoiced sustainables. We know these ones very well.

Actors are often taught:

- VOWELS add emotion
- CONSONANTS add meaning and clarity

Wailing / crying / sobbing / delight / surprise – are open sounds, much like vowels.

- “AH HA!” (surprise, delight).
- Scared out of your wits – you get a fright
- Grief stricken wail

We may not understand what they are saying, just how they are feeling.

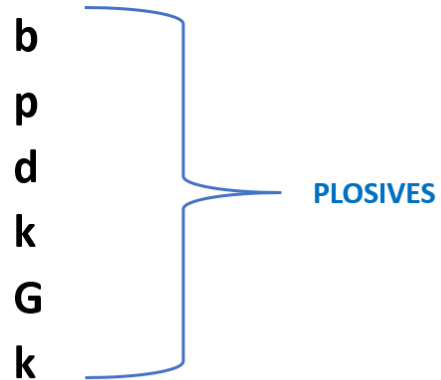
We need the consonants to gain meaning to that emotion.

Importantly VOWELS and VOICED sustainable consonants carry pitch. Sustainable, voiced consonants within words should be played even when separated by a silent ‘e’ as in “pinned”.

Consonants are a SOUND and should be part of the tone flow, not interrupt the flow!

Percussive consonants

- Sl**a**b
- Tra**p**
- Hand**m**ade
- Tip – Top
- Pinned
- Took
- Dig



Percussive consonants are played but not sustained. Play these lightly and cleanly in a spring away fashion.

PLOSIVE consonants completely stop the airflow momentarily: p,b,t,d,k,g

They can easily cause choppiness if we don't lighten them up & release them quickly.

Say these words and sentences:

Take

Take me home

Make

Make me live

Up

Up road the horseman "uhprohd"

This is where the light, spring away release of the played consonant is important.

If we don't release the 'k' and 'p' it has the potential to stop the flow and sound because we've caused a blockage.

This is where things can get UGLY. Some lyrics can easily lead us into vertical choppy singing.

In the lyrics below, use less lip pressure (a light touch) to B & D and think of them as part of the tone flow.

"I'll **b**uy you a **d**iamond ring my friend if it makes you feel alright"

Some day when I'm awfully low, when the
world is cold, I will feel a glow just thinking
of you, and the way you look, tonight

Sing out loud this well known melody making use of the sustained consonants to add flow.

The “F” is a lovely sound effect in “Feel”.

The percussive sounds can add expression and meaning to “Cold” and “Feel”.

Don't forget the ending “k” in “Look”, and the ending “t” on “tonight”.

Use a light touch on the plosive D of “day”.

sumdeheeoehnaheemawfleelohoo,
oehnthurworldizcohd,
aheewillfeeluhglohoojuhsthingkinguhveeo,
anthurooeheeyoolook, toonaheet

In singing as in speech there is no separation between words – everything is joined together or linked. It's unfortunate the words are written with gaps between them because we are actually singing a series of SOUNDS in a musical line.

Below is some song lyrics that can be problematic and easily choppy as there are different words on nearly note, a jumpy melody line and minimum sustainable consonants.

“How could you believe me when I said I love you when you know I've been a liar all my life?

I've had that reputation since I was a youth, you must have been insane to think I'd tell you the truth”

WOODBLOCK Click DL and TL

Found in words like “title” and “idle” “bridle”

Helps maintain crisp articulation and dexterity.

Stops turning two syllable words into three syllable words, eg:







PADDLING BOTTLING TODDLER CUDDLING

The pronunciation of these words changes between Britain and the US. British people tend to play the ‘T’ more than those in the US.

“Bottle” Vs “Boddle”.

Children as they learn to speak will often put a vowel in the word. “Paddaling”

Linking words together

Direct link	Play and link	Prepare and link
Add on 	Add me 	Add Don 
Far above "Farabove" 	Black tie Told him Love not 	Hip pocket Good news 

Here is how Arthur Lessac uses consonants to connect lines of text for actors.

It applies equally as well to singing!

DIRECT LINK

When the 1st word ends in a consonant and the 2nd word starts in a vowel, we just link it together and it flows beautifully.

PLAY and LINK

Back to back consonants that are formed in totally different parts of the mouth are played fully. Say these examples slowly and you'll notice how the D and M K and T are formed in different parts of the mouth.

PREPARE and LINK

Where back to back consonants are formed in the same place in the mouth or very close to the same place in the mouth, since the contact point is the same, we can't fully play both consonants without breaking the flow, instead we "prepare" the first one and play the 2nd one. The emphasis we put onto the preparation makes it clear what we are saying. For example, the way we would say "Add on" and "Add Don" is different – yes?

Linking word sounds together

Direct link

Add it
Grab it
Stand up
Give up
Wake up

Play & link

Add me
Grab Tom
Stand slowly
Give me
Wake me
Up road

Prepare & link

Add ~~Do~~n / Tom
Grab ~~B~~ob
Give ~~V~~ivian
Stand ~~d~~own
Get ~~t~~ogether
Even ~~n~~ow
Dog ~~c~~ollar

Consonants must also be 'played' when they are the final sound before a breath or a pause.

Play and link are often missed in our language and singing but are important to include because they help immensely with synchronization.

Also when phrases end in a playable consonant. That is the point of release of the phrase, keeping the momentum going and the ensemble together.

Let's look at our seminar song and see how it works looking at the linkages and sustainable consonants.

I don't see any plosives that could be problematic do you? G, T, K, P, B.

Come on and sing

1. Voiced sustainables?
2. Ending consonants before a breath or pause?
3. Linkages?

Come ~~o~~n and ~~a~~SING!

Let voicez ring! (Hear them m ring)

Let music fill our hearts with harmony

C'mon and ~~a~~ sing sing sing out ~~o~~ to the world unite ~~u~~ us all in song

C'mon and ~~a~~ sing along with me my friend ~~d~~ together we are strong

TIPS for SINGERS

- Vowel sounds are most important for carrying the tone and the emotion within songs and we spend most of our time on the open vowel sounds.
- We know that vowels make up the nucleus of syllables and the consonants form the borders. So when singing rhythmic songs, we want to land with the vowel with the beat.
- Work on releasing the jaw muscles through massage and jaw release exercises and letting there be space between your molars all the time.
- Consonants are important for clarity and expression – but we don't emphasize them.
- 'Stop' consonants can be particularly problematic in interrupting the vowel line, so use a very light approach to producing 'b' 'p' 'k' 'g' 't' 'd'. Think of 'brushing past' these consonants.
- Use consonant sounds lightly and fleetingly, so the vowels become the dominant part of our singing.
- Sometimes we'll ask for more emphasis on a particular consonant sound for expression, particularly in onomatopoeic words such as "Cool" "Crisp" etc.
- If you are using your speaking voice inefficiently, there will be a knock on effect in your singing voice. Use your speaking voice effectively and with lots of resonance, colour and inflections!

Lea Baker – Voice Teacher

<https://www.raiseyourvoice.net.au/>

<https://bettersinging.thinkific.com/>

Sources:

The Use and Training of The Human Voice – 3rd Edition. A bio dynamic Approach to Vocal Life. Arthur Lessac

Lessac Institute - <https://www.lessacinstitute.org>

Peggy Gram

Dr Jim Henry