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The *FlemIngo* Stance on Marking

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WE OFFER HERE THE FIRST of what we hope will be a series of joint essays dealing with combined views on singing technique by one person who lives on stage, one who lives in the studio, and one who lives in the laboratory. Each of us overlaps a bit with the other two, however; we all sing, we all teach, and we all explore. We begin with the technique of “marking” because relatively little has been written about it and opinions vary significantly. Marking can be defined as “singing with reduced effort to preserve the voice for an upcoming performance.” The key words here are “reduced effort” and “preserving,” which leads to two primary questions: How is effort reduced in singing?; Why and how is the voice preserved with this reduced effort?

The techniques of marking can broadly be cast into several categories:

- 1) singing with reduced loudness;
- 2) singing within a reduced pitch range (taking octaves up or down on extreme pitches);
- 3) singing in a lighter registration;
- 4) singing only portions of the piece, keeping silent on less important parts;
- 5) speaking or whispering some or all of the piece;
- 6) mouthing and gesturing (acting) without any vocalization.

Discussion of these techniques cannot be centered on only one individual singer, but must generally include the partners on stage. This includes the conductor, stage director, chorus, other soloists, pianist or orchestra, technical personnel for audio enhancement, and those who come to preview the show at a rehearsal. The general rule would be that one must give the partners what they need for a meaningful and productive rehearsal; otherwise, your gain might be their loss. If they need your vocal entry or release, your pitch, your dramatic expression, or any other cues, you must communicate them effectively within your marking strategy.

Renée explains how she utilizes marking: “I sing in head voice—as lightly as possible without weight or pressure—usually avoiding chest voice altogether. Marking helped me to develop *pianissimo* in the *passaggio* and above. I used to mark entirely on pitch, but in the last ten years or so, I sometimes take higher things down an octave. I also mark the physicality of what I’m doing, particularly when rehearsing a dramatic performance, for my muscle memory of staging and for those I am rehearsing with. I enact the basic physical aspects of voice production without the intensity of actual performance. It can look exaggerated, but doesn’t have the muscle or intense emotion behind it. My

thinking is to project with the least amount of effort.” Similarly, Susan Graham states the following on her use of marking: “When I mark, it’s primarily to take the pressure off my vocal cords. I use a very light, gentle version of head voice, usually staying in the proper octave, occasionally going down the octave if it gets too high. But sometimes I have to be careful dropping the octave, because I can start to put too much pressure on the vocal folds, almost ‘belting’, which defeats the purpose of marking, which is to preserve and not tire the vocal apparatus.” Vocalists whose roles call for belting and heavier vocal production will also sing in a lighter head-dominant vocal production during rehearsal and may also rehearse down an octave on higher passages in order to reduce vocal fatigue.

The above strategies embrace the earlier identified techniques 1, 2, and 3, which may be ideal for lyric sopranos and tenors who are very comfortable in mixed registration. Often the female speaking voice is already in mixed registration (head-dominant mixed voice), creating a safe zone with reduced effort. There are singers in lower voice categories, however, for whom mixed registration is a never ending struggle, beginning with their speaking voices. From a muscular point of view, effort may not be reduced in lower ranges, even though the vocal folds collide fewer times and the vibrating tissue experiences less trauma. Reduced muscular effort and tissue preservation do not always correlate directly.

Reducing pitch range, by singing very high pitches an octave lower and perhaps very low pitches an octave higher, may invite a bit of a risk with a relatively new performance piece. Two different motor patterns may be created for transitioning to the two alternative pitches, which may not prepare the singer for guaranteed automaticity in the final performance. If you mark too often, in a panic the motor system may override your attempt at normal production and take the easy route to the alternate note. One way to avoid inadvertent switch to the alternate pitch is to mentally prepare the transition into the written high or low note exactly as it would be sung in performance, even when marking. Some teachers label this as developing the muscle memory required to consistently perform a specific piece, or “getting the piece into your voice.”

Vocal fatigue can be a serious problem for choral singers. Most college music students studying voice

are required to participate in vocal ensembles for their degree programs. Choral rehearsals for vocalists can range from four to six hours leading up to performances. Vocalists are asked to sing as they would in performance throughout rehearsals to create an ideal blend and balance of vocal parts. Many choral concerts take place during the year-end holiday season. For music students, long choral rehearsals are on top of a full day that likely includes a good deal of voice use in lessons, preparing for semester-end performance juries, and recitals. For working professionals, rehearsals are in addition to the demands on their voices throughout the day at work. When participating in student-run theater productions, students are asked to sing for long periods of time and often in full voice. Students report being told they are forbidden from marking because they don’t do it correctly. For most voice users, including college music students and semiprofessional voice users, vocal rest for several days is often not an option.

Few singing teachers and choral conductors have heard of systematic methods of teaching marking. It seems to be something singers are expected to do automatically. Even college graduate students studying voice claim they do not know how to mark, or how to mark effectively. The critical question to be answered is: What is correct marking technique for young voices or voices in training? If general vocal technique is not fully developed, perhaps frequent vocal recovery periods must be built into rehearsals. It is hard to understand why sectional partitioning is not utilized widely. Every section in a choir can be partitioned into group 1, group 2, group 3, etc. Rather than having the entire chorus sing full voice or *sotto voce* through the entire piece, repeatedly, why not alternate groups? That brings in techniques 4–6 listed above, which limit duration of vocalization. Many choral singers have not mastered registers well enough so that everything can be sung in mixed registration. Tenors and baritones often flip between their modal and falsetto registers, especially when fatigue has set in, or when rehearsing in early morning hours. Mezzo sopranos have similar problems. Building in a 5–10 minute rest period followed by 5 minutes of straw phonation or lip trills can offer a meaningful recovery and voice reset time. It also offers a chance for active listening and note taking for the singers, which could lead to better absorption of the piece while minimizing vocal fatigue.

For advanced singers, marking is something that can be practiced in the voice studio, particularly when an accompanist is present. This partner can help the performer decide when it is appropriate to mark based on the individual requirements of the piece. Marking a passage should never be a spur of the moment decision on stage. One should plan and rehearse in advance which notes, entrances, cadenzas, and/or fermatas will be altered or cut while marking, for one's own benefit and the benefit of others. If you curtail belting, let your directors and managers know that you will be marking in rehearsal and that you are not delivering your final sound. Keep in mind, you may have to give them a samples of the real performance sound so decisions regarding amplification, staging, and other important details can be made. Utilizing proper posture and support is always advised. Muscles recover quickly, in a matter of minutes to hours; vocal fold tissue traumatized from excessive vibration can take several days to recover.

Is whispering or speaking instead of singing helpful in the context of marking? Whispering is not an efficient way of producing sound levels required on stage. It requires preventing the vocal folds from vibrating, especially in a loud whisper. The vocal folds have to be abducted and stiffened, and lung pressure needs to be relatively high. This extra muscular effort expended for vocal fold posturing and respiration is likely to be an inadequate compensation for the benefit received from reduced vocal fold collision. Regarding the use of speech as a substitute for singing, it should be understood that most speech is low-level vocalization (acoustically), unless it is stage speech. Speaking a song in the proper musical tempo, rhythm, and meter is an art in and of itself. It is likely that the cognitive and motor demands for performing such new prosody and overall loudness could bring about a new fatigue. Nevertheless, for cueing and synchronizing ensemble productions, it may have utility.

A possible solution to help improve vocalists' ability to preserve their voices through marking is the inclusion of multiple methods of marking in college level voice pedagogy courses for voice performance, music education, music theater, and voice pedagogy majors. Marking methods could include different voice types and different levels of skill and vocal development. The key variables for vocal vibration dose, and thereby fatigue, are sound level (loudness), fundamental frequency (pitch),

and duration (time of voicing). Adjusting loudness and pitch have been discussed here. Time of voicing requires creativity by conductors and directors, allowing alternate sub-groups of individuals in ensembles the required vocal rest and recovery periods. This resetting may involve little or no speaking, combined with semi-occluded vocal tract exercises, until the full ensemble sound is needed.

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Dr. Rachele Fleming specializes in the training and vocal health of the contemporary vocal artist. Dr. Fleming holds a doctorate in Vocal Pedagogy and Performance from the University of Miami, a research Masters in Music Education from Eastman School of Music, a Bachelors of Music in Voice Performance. She has completed a voice science course under Dr. Ingo Titze at the Summer Vocology Institute, and pedagogic coursework in two of the leading commercial vocal music training programs. Currently, Dr. Fleming is a full-time member of the music theater faculty of The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, and continues to teach privately. Her students include those who perform on Broadway, in National Tours, at Madison Square Garden, Signature Theater, The Metropolitan Opera, and regionally. Dr. Fleming has previously taught at The Actors Studio MFA program at The New School in NYC, The Eastman School of Music Community Division in Rochester, NY, and at the University of Miami, Frost School of Music. She is in demand for master classes and as a visiting teaching artist. A versatile performer, Rachele has performed in plays, musicals, solo concerts, orchestral pops concerts, televised performances, and recordings.

Dr. Fleming acted as Production Adviser for American Voices, a three-day festival on American singing hosted by Renée Fleming at The Kennedy Center, and as a panelist for the symposium session "Voice Training Today." An edited taping of this event later aired on PBS as a part of their *Great Performances* series. Dr. Fleming is a charter member of the Pan American Vocology Association (PAVA), and a member of the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS). Research she has coauthored has recently been presented at conferences held by PAVA, NATS, and the Voice Foundation. Her work in teaching and research is also supported by professional experience in personal artist administration, stage direction, performance, television, and recording.

Renée Fleming is one of the most acclaimed singers of our time. In 2013, President Obama awarded her America's highest honor for an artist, the National Medal of Arts. She brought her voice to a vast new audience in 2014, as the first classical artist ever to sing the national anthem at

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the Super Bowl. Winner of the 2013 Grammy Award (her fourth) for Best Classical Vocal Solo, Renée has sung for momentous occasions from the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony to the Diamond Jubilee Concert for Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace. She has hosted a wide variety of television and radio broadcasts, including the Metropolitan Opera's *Live in HD* series, and *Live from Lincoln Center*.

Renée's 2016–17 tour schedule includes concerts in San Francisco, Toronto, Boston, Budapest, Paris, Madrid, and Tokyo. The season also includes performances as the Marschallin in a new production of Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, and the Metropolitan Opera.

In 2016, Renée was appointed Artistic Advisor-at-Large for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Since 2010, she has been the Creative Consultant at Lyric Opera of Chicago. Among her awards are the Fulbright Lifetime Achievement Medal, Germany's Cross of the Order of Merit, and France's Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur. She is currently a member of the Board of Trustees of the Carnegie Hall Corporation, the Artistic Advisory Board of the Polyphony Foundation, and the Board of Sing for Hope. www.reneefleming.com


Ingo R. Titze is Distinguished Professor of Speech Science and Voice at the University of Iowa and Executive Director of the National Center for Voice and Speech at the University of Utah. His formal education

is in physics and electrical engineering, but he has devoted much of his studies to vocal music and speech. Dr. Titze has published more than 400 articles in scientific and educational journals, coedited two books titled *Vocal Fold Physiology*, and now has four books in print: *Principles of Voice Production*, *The Myoelastic Aerodynamic Theory of Phonation*, *Fascinations with the Human Voice*, and *Vocology: The Science and Practice of Voice Habilitation*. He has lectured throughout the world and has appeared on such educational television series as *Innovation*, *Quantum*, and *Beyond 2000*. He is a recipient of the William and Harriott Gould Award for laryngeal physiology, the Jacob Javits Neuroscience Investigation Award, the Claude Pepper Award, the Quintana Award, and the American Laryngological Association Award. He is a Fellow and a Silver Medalist of the Acoustical Society of America, and a Fellow and Honoree of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. Dr. Titze has served on a number of national advisory boards and scientific review groups, including the Scientific Advisory Board of the Voice Foundation and the Division of Research Grants of the National Institutes of Health. He is currently serving as President of the Pan American Vocology Association (PAVA). In addition to his scientific endeavors, Dr. Titze continues to be active as a singer. He is married to Kathy Titze and has four children and nine grandchildren. Mail should be addressed to Ingo R. Titze, National Center for Voice and Speech, 136 South Main Street, Suite 320 Salt Lake City, UT 84101-1623. Telephone (801) 596-2012; Fax (801) 596-2013

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