
Resonance

By Nikki Blackmer

Resonance, in its plainest form, is the ability to amplify sound. When sound is created by the vocal folds, the result is a type of buzz. We then use the soft and hard tissues of our head, to change that buzz into the pretty vowels and consonants we are fond of. People think the nose is the primary resonator. While the nose plays a big part in resonating (there are lots of cavities for sound to enter) we also use our sinuses behind our eyes, our soft and hard palates, our teeth, jaw, tongue, lips and larynx to resonate sound.

What do I do with all of this information?

As singers, we can think of resonance as basically two different things that we want to balance in the end. First, there's what I call forward resonance. If we sang with only forward resonance, the sound would go solely into the nose – creating a pointed, ping-y, and nasal sound. Second is what I call space. If you sang with only space, the sound would be directed into the back of the throat, resulting in a woofy, covered, damp sound.

Excellent singers use both forward resonance and space. In essence, they sing with a lot of space in their throats, and a lifted soft palate, meanwhile directing sound into the cavities behind their nose.

Two tricks for finding balanced resonance:

1. Try talking the approximate pitches of the song like Julia Child. Notice how there is a lot of space in the sound, but the sound seems to travel vertically up behind the nose and out the forehead.
2. Snort. Go ahead – no one is around – snort really loud, and feel where the snort space is. Now, put your singing into the snort space. Notice how it is open and free in the back, but tall and projected in the front?

Tips for finding forward resonance:

1. Bend over at the waist and sing – and notice how the sound falls more forward into the nose.
2. Sing on an “N” or “NG” and notice how the sound goes more forward into your nose.

Tips for finding more space:

1. Lift the soft palate as high as possible with a yawn sign in, and direct the sound into the dome created.
2. Imagine filling the space around the back of your head with sound.

Resonance should not be used as a catch all word – and if someone asks you to sing with more resonance, ask them to clarify whether they are looking for more ping, ring, or point in your sound (meaning you need forward resonance), or whether they need a bigger, rounder, warmer sound (meaning you need a little more space).

Resonance is one of the hardest concepts in singing to fully understand...and while I know this article does not address everyone's struggles with this issue, I hope it serves to clarify some of what you have heard.

