

VIEWPOINT OF THE VOCAL COACH

Session singer and vocal coach **Kim Chandler** on what you need to be a top rock singer. Words: **Geoff Barton**

What exactly constitutes a great rock voice?

Strength. The pure strength of the vocal. The power aspect is the most important thing. That sense of being able to compete on a similar level of intensity as the guitar, bass and drums.

As a vocal coach, could you coax a big rock voice out of a weak voice?

No. You can strengthen a weak voice, but will it actually take on the proportions of a natural rock voice? Probably not. A great rock singer has to have a certain physicality to the voice. There's a natural-born thickness to the vocal cords. Top rock singers are like Olympic athletes.

Who, in your opinion, are the leading rock singers?

I love Glenn Hughes. I got most excited by Deep Purple when Glenn was singing lead, even though I love David Coverdale's stuff, too. I'm also a big fan of Uriah Heep's Bernie Shaw [Kim has recorded



Chandler: major Glenn Hughes fan.

high-intensity levels of voice use, the risk of vocal injury is high. Just as it is in athletes who push the boundaries. So some will be okay; some will crash and burn. That's the nature of pushing the envelope. You may not notice deterioration quite so much in a gentle pop voice or a light jazz voice. But because rock singers are at the edge,

it's going to be more obvious when they lose muscle tone and vocal condition.

Say Robert Plant approached you and said: "I'm bored with Alison Krauss, I want to sing in Led Zeppelin again." What would your advice be?

There's no reason why voices can't continue into their 60s. I'd say to Robert: "Let's put you on a full-blown, physical and vocal training programme to get you back into match fitness." I'm talking about going to the gym and becoming aerobically fit. Not to turn him into a bodybuilder but just to make sure he's at peak physical condition. If the muscles,

"When you are operating at the high-intensity levels of voice use, the risk of vocal injury is high."

and performed live with Heep]. I've stood in front of Bernie in rehearsals, fascinated by his lack of effort. It doesn't make sense that he can look so relaxed and emit those decibels at such a ridiculous level.

Do you rate any female singers?

Tina Turner, even though she would not be strictly seen as rock. I also loved Pat Benatar back in the day; she was one of my vocal idols in the 80s. Nikki Lambourne from Never The Bride. She's an amazing singer in the genre of Axl Rose – we're talking pure filth in the sound. Stevie Lange, Mutt Lange's first wife. Remember the Bodyform TV commercial? That's her singing. Plus Skin from Skunk Anansie.

A lot of the great rock voices from the 70s aren't what they used to be. What causes vocal deterioration?

There are a lot of variables. When you are operating at the

especially of the torso, are a bit lax then you won't be able to hit the big notes in particular. You can only try. Especially with someone like Robert, you'd have to go down fighting, wouldn't you?

What about the heavy metal growlers? Aren't they at risk of doing severe damage to their voices?

Believe it or not, there are vocal coaches around now who specialise in this technique. It is relatively new. It's hilarious when you hear it being taught: "Today, we are going to learn growl: RRRRAARRR!" "Next, we're going to learn distortion: WAURGH!" The fact that I haven't just gone into a coughing fit shows that these things can be done very sustainably. However, I don't think it'll ever be considered safe by the medical community.



Plant: is a date down the gym in the offing?

For more info go to: www.kimchandler.net

Is the art of lead singing dead? classicrockmagazine.com