

## “Pop Repertoire and Vocal Health”

As a professional pop singer myself and in my extensive work as a pop vocal coach the issue of how to care for the pop voice is vital knowledge for maintaining a performer’s longevity of career. The performance of pop repertoire, fun as it is, can be quite arduous at times and has the potential to take its toll on the health of the voice. So what are some of the main ‘danger’ areas? Allow me to describe what I affectionately call the “*Vocal War Zone*”.

If a committee of experts were to design one of the most hazardous environments for the voice to function efficiently in it would have the following features:

- Extremely high volumes: which are not only damaging to hearing but make singing over very loud instruments a feat of vocal endurance and stamina.
- Air conditioning: to dry out the vocal cords every time you breathe in.
- Smoke: even more effective than the above in quickly drying out the vocal cords in addition to clogging up the lungs and creating excess phlegm.
- Easy access to alcohol: all too tempting to partake when one is surrounded by it. Another heavy factor in the dehydration process.
- Late at night: many people are not at their best at this time.

You may recognise by now that this “war zone” is where most pop singers make their living as live performers on any given night of the week. It’s the local pub, jazz club or any function venue in the country. So what can be done to survive these environments with the voice still intact?

- **Develop a strong vocal technique.** It should be robust enough to withstand the demands placed upon it when performing. Taking regular private lessons and/or undertaking a reputable singing course can greatly help to develop this area.
- **Get physically fit.** Pop singers need stamina and endurance both physically and vocally to give out the amount of energy required for a performance.
- Always **warm-up** before singing to prepare the voice for a workout.
- It’s advisable to also **warm-down** at the end of a long practice session or performance to get the voice to settle back down into normal condition again.
- **Protect the ears.** The ears are just as vital to a singer’s performance as the voice, so when rehearsing or performing in a particularly loud environment the wearing of ear plugs is highly recommended.
- **Check the monitoring.** The ability to hear your own voice clearly through the monitoring system is crucial. When you can’t there is a strong tendency to try to compensate by driving the voice too hard which can easily lead to vocal strain.
- **Stay adequately hydrated.** In order to counteract the dehydrating effects of smoke and air-conditioning in the performing environment,

one must drink the recommended amount of water of around 2 litres per day. Make sure it's not too cold though.

- **Avoid dehydrating drinks.** Drinking alcohol dehydrates the body as do a whole range of other drinks such as coffee, tea, sugary soft drinks etc that are best avoided whilst performing. Watch the temperature of the drinks too; staying away from drinks that are too hot or cold.
- **Don't smoke.** The passive smoking environment that pop singers often have to perform in is bad enough but it seems foolish to make the negative impact on the voice even worse by smoking oneself.
- **Get enough sleep.** The voice doesn't tend to function well when one is tired so try to get enough rest before an important performance.

These pieces of advice have proved invaluable in my own performing life and in those of my students. Pop music in all its variety is great repertoire to sing and with the application of common sense to how the voice is treated one may enjoy performing for many years to come!

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