

Tension after Tonsillectomy

Question: I have a singer who had a tonsillectomy last year. She has experienced an increase in tongue and pharyngeal tension since the procedure. Wondering if anyone else has experience with this.

Response: I've had a few colleagues and one student who had tonsillectomies. The most consistent report was a big change in resonance. Generally it was beneficial but took some getting used to. Trying to recapture the familiar resonance could perhaps lead to some tension. I imagine there could be some scarring impeding movement, which most people might not notice but a singer would. Her doctor would have to check on that, of course.

Trombonist's weight distribution

Question: I'm giving the WEM course to different instrumentalists at the Amsterdam Conservatoire at the moment and a trombonist asked me what to do about his left arm getting tired from holding the trombone after playing for a long time. My first reaction is that it's normal to get tired after holding it for a long period of time so he should take a rest, but perhaps there is a mapping issue aside from balance that I am missing and could address? Does anyone of you have experience with this?

Responses:

1. I would look at how they are standing or sitting. Using weight shifting to deliver instrument up can balance the effort of support. Keeping in mind that support starts at the ground and travels through the structure will be important in my experience

2. I would add one more thing that wasn't in the handout from the trombone webinar. Because the weight of the trombone is primarily on the left side, it helps for the player to be aware that the balance can adjust to the right if the player allows it.

If you want to experiment with them, they can try finding good balance with the trombone slide resting on the floor. Then, as they bring the trombone to playing position, they can notice that the balance can shift subtly to the right. This helps connect the player to the possibility of whole body support for the trombone. I think it might be easier to perceive the shift in balance while seated.

3. Something else I have noticed with low brass players is a concept of counterweight. I saw this with horn players, that they would make some adjustments with the concept of having to counter the weight of the horn, and usually those adjustments are not balanced. It's a question that is worth asking.

Hearing Health and How to Ear Plug

Question: Just wondering what your latest resources are on hearing health. And any advice you give on "how to ear plug"

I know what I do as an orchestra musician vs when I play in pits vs pops concerts, practicing, etc.

I know how I pick and choose when I want to ear plug, what filters I use on custom plugs etc.

Singers, do you ear plug for singing in choir? I just don't know!

Help! I look forward to 'hearing' from people.

Responses:

1. I'm no expert on this, but one of my adult students who has been playing in jazz ensembles his whole life went to an audiologist and had a tailor-made set of inserts to combat the loud sounds around him. I would think that meeting with an audiologist who can determine what you want reduced would be a good start. They have the equipment to assess vibration ranges. As per Lois Svard's research, most musicians suffer from hearing loss due to practicing their own instrument more than being in ensembles! No doubt that happens when we practice in small rooms that aren't acoustically designed. Or just the sheer number of hours we practice our own instruments.
2. I have a decibel meter running on my apple watch face all the time. I use that as a guide.

In a pit, I plug as a rule, because it's a lot of instruments in a small space and many of them have amps, plus amplification through a monitor of some kind. Occasionally if it's just me accompanying on a keyboard, if the amp is too close to me and turned up, I'll plug that side. Usually I request an adjustment to the placement and that works better.

I've never heard of choristers plugging, mostly because you need to be so tuned into the sound of the ensemble, but I admit I've never tried it. In an orchestral situation, the chorus is usually behind the orchestra, so I would think that would be a factor. Also, choirs usually sing in open spaces.

It's too bad that school aren't teaching better hearing care. So many young musicians I play with, when I casually mention the need, just shrug and say, "yay, I know I should..."

3. In my experience, most classical singers do not use ear plugs. The room sound is so different from the inside-your-head sound, and ear plugs cause you to hear waaaaay more of the latter. It can throw off intonation and color and more. Tomatis (who was a hearing and voice expert) said that your voice can only produce the tones you can hear. He was mostly referring to hearing loss in factory workers and opera

singers, and the resultant darkening and lowering of the voice, but I extrapolate that (with only personal experience to go on here, no evidence) to mean that if you aren't hearing upper partials because of your ear plugs, you'll stop producing them. For my students, I emphasize the need to continually change dynamic and timbre in order to keep your voice and ears from becoming fatigued, as well as the ears of your audience.