



How to Teach High Rock “Belt”

August 7 or 17, 2023

NOTES:

Questions & discussion:

- In the chat
- In the post-workshop discussion
- Post to Meredith’s fb page: [MeredithColby.NeuroVocal](https://www.facebook.com/MeredithColby.NeuroVocal)
- Email Meredith: MeredithColby@icloud.com

In the email you’ll receive after the workshop:

- pdf with the outline ([this](#))
- Link to the video of this workshop ([available to view on replay for 2 weeks after today](#))
- Colorful and attractive crib sheets for the two concepts we’re going over today
- You’ll be on my mailing list, so you’ll get all the BIG discounts I offer for classes and workshops. This fall I’m doing a

workshop on teaching popular styles to teens, so...the songs, the goals, some tricks, and some suggestions for keeping everybody happy. People on my mailing list get 50% discounts to my workshops, so you'll get that too. I'll also keep you posted on all the Neuro-Vocal opportunities for next year.

Two tools for helping your singers achieve a high rock belt, and one word you may innocently be using that could be holding your singers back.

Brains: *Cuz it's all about brains!*

Neurology underlies everything we do, including singing. Our brains tell our bodies to behave when we have the intention to sing.

Sensory feedback loop

Whenever you make sound (or do anything) in an intentional way, your body is involved in a sensory feedback loop. Your body (brain) is predicting what you will hear and feel, and is adjusting to your intention as you go. When you're singing your brain is using

sensory feedback from your ears and your body: what do I sound like, and what does this feel like?

Voice teachers and coaches use versions of

- feeling
- hearing.

Feeling:

Interoception: your brain's monitoring of your internal state.

The brain constantly receives interoceptive messages that help you manage how your body is using resources (like oxygen and glucose) and when it needs something (like food or rest).

Singing also provides the potential for an interoceptive experience. Because singing is both internal and very active, many people are able to have an *interoceptive* experience of their singing.

Hearing:

Concepts: A creation of the human mind that structures our society, our perceptions, and our biology.

Concepts are based on a diverse set of instances (around each concept) that are unique to each individual. When we listen to

ourselves sing, we filter the sound through our individual conceptual frameworks.

Today we'll explore each of the two tools from both the **feeling, or interoceptive**, experience AND the **hearing, or conceptual**, experience of the singer.

Tool 1: The Honey Exercise

The exercise depends on the idea of “placement.” For the sake of this workshop, I’m going to define “placement” as “**the sensory or conceptual experience a singer has of the location in their body of the resonance of their voice.**”

Placement in microphone-based styles:

- the magic wand of getting to a high, loud mixed tone
- the key to a vocally sustainable sound in (often) punishing conditions.
- is authentic sounding to these genres
- **is very “forward”**, and some voice coaches consider the sound too nasal
- Is not (or is seldom) aesthetically pleasing or beautiful
- Is the foundation of pop/rock singing sounds

The “Honey” exercise

- Hum on an N as in Nutmeg.
- This makes it impossible for the air of the phonation to exit via the mouth
- The velum (or soft palate) drops and the air is forced out the nose
- (this can be an exercise all by itself)
- “trick” velopharyngeal port into staying open as we phonate on an “eee” vowel
- Both sound and feeling are buzzy & “whiney”
- Can be done based on feeling (interoception) or sound (concepts)
 - Please do not give them *your* concepts
- Do this on comfortable, speech like pitches
- Not too loud
- You should not hear any strain or gripping in the larynx; if you do it’s because the singer is trying to be too loud or they are resisting how terrible it sounds and trying to “sing”
- Move in half steps
- Aim for consistency between one pitch and the next semitone, either in *feeling* or in *concept*
- Allow the singer to
 - Feel strange about this
 - Get the hang of it over time

- When the singer is used to the feeling/sound, try to move this higher and “bridge the breaks.”
- Remember that the microphone does the heavy lifting in amplified music

See the workshop recording, and reference the crib sheet.

Tool 2: The Nasty Triangle

The Nasty Triangle

The Nasty Triangle concept helps the singer achieve the coordination wherein they allow the vocal folds to continue to thin into higher pitches without a discernible shift into a different register.

(For this short workshop...) Two powerful reasons this exercise works.

1. The singer isn't trying to make a sound that they perceive as “good.” They are intentional about creating an exaggerated, non-singing sound.
2. Rather than trying to **create** a high mixed tone, they are **allowing** for the changes to occur. In a sense, they are using an exaggerated sound with a very forward placement to *teach the larynx* this new behavior.

The “Nasty Triangle” exercise

- Review the steps to the “honey” exercise
- Phonate on a comfortable pitch with the feeling/sound you got on “nee”
- Walk that “nee” phonation up and down a P4 or P5
- On a low-ish and comfortable pitch, slide the “nee” up and down a whole step. The intention will be to keep the feeling/sound as consistent as possible.
- Move in semitones through a comfortable range.
- Repeat this process, beginning in the low-ish part of the head register
- Allow the singer to get the hang of this
 - Some people will do it in one lesson, some may take two months
- If all goes well, try doing it through their break (ascending, descending, both)

Though this sound seems very exaggerated it really is the sound of pop singing. When your singer (or you) become familiar with this experience of sound, you will begin to hear it in *every single singer* of popular styles that you hear!

Bonus: How you may be holding your students back

“Belt” is a concept

Our brains form concepts based on diverse sets of instances of a thing, and those instances are unique to our experience. For many singers, this concept carries with it connotations that may be unhealthy or even just impossible. That word seems to urge them to bring weight and richness to their higher notes that **physiology will not allow**.

Use a word for which your students do not have an existing concept. (“blend” or “mix” or “coordination...”)