

Principle 3: The Nasty Triangle

THE PRINCIPLE:

In order to implement this principle effectively, the singer must have a familiarity and comfort level with the physical feeling of their own resonance as outlined in Principles 1 and 2.

The Nasty Triangle raises the singer's awareness such that they are able to experience the changes in feeling that accompany changes in pitch. As pitches ascend, the tissues of the vocal folds stretch thinner, the oscillation pattern speeds up, and the singer typically experiences the resonance that accompanies those things as a sense of thinning or narrowing. Hence, the triangle.

The Nasty Triangle is liberating. It is also a bit tricky. You are helping the singer both *create* the conditions for experiencing this feeling – focused intention on physical feelings of resonance, the engaged abdominal wall that accompanies that, a relaxed larynx, and intention for pitch – and *allowing* the feeling to occur. If the singer tries to *make* the feeling, or *push* their resonance, they will meet with limitations.

Both you and the singer should have a sense that the breath is “doing the heavy lifting.” The larynx should remain in that “nothing” state from the previous two principles, and the abdominal muscles should be naturally engaged.

This principle can be introduced with just Principle 1, *Find the Hunn*, without opening to the vowel as in Principle 2, *Hunn-ee*. (Not to say that it should be, just that it’s up to you based on the individual student.)

OBJECTIVES OF THIS PRINCIPLE:

The objectives of this exercise are any or all of the following:

- Introduce the singer to the concept of using feeling to guide register coordination.
- Help them realize that what they feel is providing information about how their voice is functioning.
- Begin the process of teaching the singer to *expect* a certain *feeling* outcome, so that they can make the real-time adjustments needed to create the sounds they want.

TEACHER NOTES:

The following exercises *introduce* this principle. You can push the ranges, modify vowels, and incorporate it into song coaching as the singer becomes adept. There are exercises and patterns for this in my book, and you can make up your own.

This is the exercise for which you will get the most push-back. I have not yet found a way around the clients' feelings of resistance that accompany the lack of familiarity combined with the unattractive sound. I've had success with:

- Explaining that both the singer and I are working together to trick the singer's brain. We don't want the brain to know that it's singing.
- Agreeing that the sound is horrible. Making them aware that this horrible sound is a *component* of the sound of *all* the singers they love.
- If the singer's doubt is expressed *after* they have successfully executed the exercise, you can agree that it sounds horrible, and then point out the things about the sound that might indicate that it could lead to vocal freedom:
 - The singer felt no laryngeal strain.
 - The singer felt abdominal engagement.

- o The singer was making a very loud sound with (again) no laryngeal strain.
- o The pitches the singer hit were surprisingly high (as appropriate).

Keep the range comfortable at the beginning, pushing the range as the singer becomes more familiar with it. This could happen in one lesson, or it could take months. It depends on the singer.

SCRIPT I: Just the “nn”

YOU: Now that we’ve been able to find that feeling on the “hunn” – that easy feeling that goes with the buzz of the “nn” sound – we’re going to move it around a bit.

We’re going to find that feeling, and then slide it into the next higher pitch, and then back down again. Like this:

You “hunn” on a do-re-do pattern. Very slidey, not “hitting pitches.”

Would you try that please?

THEM: *They copy what you just did, more or less.*

YOU: Great. Now please be aware that as soon as your brain hears you connecting two pitches together, it will probably think you’re

singing, and it might open the “sing” file. Knowing that, we’re going to try to head it off.

Once again, will you please tell me what you’re calling the tool that’s been allowing you to *not* sing when you looked for the feeling on the “hunn” exercise?

THEM: [They say their tool, e.g.] Having a complaining attitude.

Or whatever. Whatever thought, emotion, or intention for physical feeling was allowing them to access the resonance in the first exercise.

YOU: Got it. [Complaining attitude.] You’re going to keep that in mind while you do that sliding from pitch to pitch. Now, we’re not singing a song, we’re looking for a feeling, so if you don’t “hit the pitch” it doesn’t matter.

So, once again...

You demonstrate.

THEM: *They do it.*

This will be easy and successful more often than not. If the student cannot keep themselves from singing, go back to the single pitch until they are no longer resistant and/or can consistently shift their focus from the sound to the feeling.

When it is clear to you that they are phonating between pitches without singing, bring their awareness to the Triangle.

YOU: This sounds like it's really comfortable to you. Like, you're able to feel the consistent buzz, and you're not working hard at all.

THEM: Yes. It's easy.

YOU: OK. Then I want to bring your awareness to something you're already doing as we do this exercise. It's going to be a tool we'll be able to use a lot more as we move through the process.

I'm going to ask you to do just three or four more of these patterns and I'd like you to bring your awareness to the feeling and see if you can notice something.

When you're sliding from this pitch (*do*) to this pitch (*re*) you may notice a slight narrowing, or thinning, of the feeling you're making. Will you give that a try?

Teacher note: When I say "narrowing or thinning" I make my hands move into a triangle shape. I don't want them to look for a specific feeling. I want them to experience it in whatever way makes sense to them or feels right.

THEM: *They do it again.*

YOU: Can you feel it?

THEM: Yes.

YOU: Great. What does it feel like to you?

THEM: [Their concept, e.g.] Like a bird's beak.

YOU: OK! Let's do a few more just to let you get the feel for it.

*Do a few more. Watch out for trying to bridge breaks too soon.
Stay in "safe" ranges while the person is learning.*

SCRIPT II: On a vowel

This script follows the same process. The only difference is that you'll create a repeating pattern: *do-re-do-re-do* and do the "hunn" on the first *do-re* and the "ee" on the second "*do-re.*" (The final *do* is optional.)

YOU: We're going to do the same exercise we did before:

Demonstrate "hunn" on do-re-do pattern

...and we're going to add a little to it. Remember when you did "hunn-eee" and you kept the feeling in the same place? We're doing the same thing here with this pattern.

I want you to notice that feeling of thinning or narrowing that we found on the "hnn" and then look for that same feeling when you open to the "ee."

That's it. This exercise typically goes very well if you stay in a comfortable range the first time or two. Sometimes people will surprise you and sail through breaks the very first time they try this. Use your ears to guide the process.

There are other patterns for this in my book.

As this becomes more familiar, you can help them stretch the boundaries. As it becomes harder, they feel their abdominal wall working and hear their sound becoming more thin and whiney.

If they keep reaching for that balance between *creating* the conditions for that feeling, and *allowing* for that feeling to occur, your job will be easy.

All you have to do is reassure them based on what you hear.

- Keep pointing out the lack of laryngeal strain or tension, the abdominal engagement, and the volume.
- Play them songs or videos of great singers and challenge them to hear this Nasty Triangle component in the sound.