

**CASMEC 2019, Fresno, CA**  
**Full Body Singing and Vowel Unification to Improve your Ensemble Sound**  
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**Introduction**

Over the past couple of years my students and I have had the opportunity to work with Shauna Fallihee as our master voice teacher. You can find out about her at <https://www.embodiedsinger.com/>  
All of the material in this presentation referencing breath energy, body alignment, and domes are hers.

**Vocal Tone**

I don't use the word "blend" when talking about our ensemble sound. I feel that it implies that I wish the singers to somehow modify their voices to fit with others. We want the best of each individual's voice and can get them to "blend" by getting them to sing the same vowel shapes and colors. By approaching tone from this direction you get the best of each individual voice while not asking them to modify the way they sing. You may ask certain sections to darken or brighten their vowel depending on what register they're in. Lower voices usually need to brighten their tone in lower registers to offset the acoustic disadvantage they must deal with because of the frequency of lower pitches versus higher pitches.

**A special thank you to Heather Bishop and her wonderful treble ensemble for being our demonstration group this morning!**



## Physical Alignment

Your skull is floating easily atop your spine. Your ears are aligned over your shoulders.

Your cervical spine (neck) has a long inward curve.

Your shoulders are relaxed away from your ears. Your chest and upper back are broad and spacious.

Your thoracic spine (upper back) has a subtle outward curve. Your abdominal and back muscles are engaged to support your lengthened spinal position.

Your pelvis is neutral. There is a gentle inward curve at your lumbar spine (low back).

Your hip points and pubic bone are in the same vertical alignment. Your pelvic muscles are energetically lifted.

Your inner thighs are firm and lift up into your pelvic floor. Your knees are soft. Your leg muscles are engaged.

Your inner arches, inner ankles, and inner shins lift up the central line of your body.

Your toes are spread wide and all four corners of your feet are energetically grounded into the floor.

Alignment is the “optimal” positioning of your body parts in space.

Your habitual posture maybe different. Your body loves to learn and can adapt towards alignment with increased awareness.

## Breath Energy

Pranya breathing-Visualizing breath energy coming from the ground up. “Breath through your toes”, and when singing, visualizing the breath energy travelling the same direction (ground up and out). This will involuntarily keep the air moving.

## **The Domes of the Singing Body**

Our bodies have numerous domes. Some are structural, bearing weight like the arches of a bridge.

Some are convexities or sockets that contain other parts. Some are muscles stretched along their points of connection.

Most of our domes are wide at the bottom, narrow at the top:

- \* arches of each foot

- \* Thoracic cavity (rib structure)

- \* Pelvic Bowl

- \* Hip sockets

- \* Soft palate

- \* Respiratory diaphragm

**Identifying**

Arches of feet

Pelvic Bowl

Diaphragm

Soft Palate

**Activating your domes:**

Arches- grabbing the towel.

Pelvic bowl-breathing into it.

Diaphragm- panting like a dog.

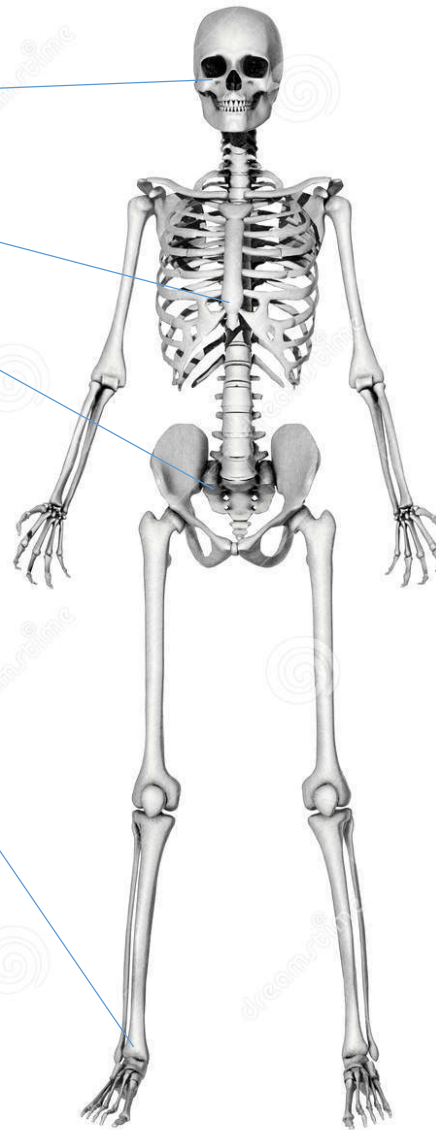
Soft pallet- sighing or yawning.

**Energizing and engaging the lower body:**

Ski jump position while singing.

Chair pose

Sitting against a wall. (halfway)



## **Vowels Unity and Color**

Front to back Vowels (Brightest to Darkest)

[ i, ε, a, o, u ]

Tongue position for vowels. Tongue is always anchored at the back of the bottom teeth

[i]- tongue is forward space is created in the pharynx.

[ε]-tongue is less forward, moving to a relaxed state. Imagine a chaise lounge!

[a]-tongue is relaxed at the bottom of the mouth. Imagine wall to wall carpeting.

[o]-tongue begins to rise slightly in the back, and lips round, mimicking the shape of the vowel.

[u]-tongue rises near back teeth, still anchored at back of bottom teeth and a channel is created between the soft palette and the top of the tongue. Lips “trumpet” out slightly.

### **Motions for each vowel:**

[i]- pulling an imaginary golden thread from the center of the forehead.

[ε]-bringing the back of the hands down the sides of the face.

[a]-place either hand, perpendicular to the chin, just below the mouth. You may also use the Curwen hand sign for “la”.

[o]-circle the face with your index finger in the shape of the vowel.

[u]-pull the longest piece of “musical spaghetti” from your lips, speeding up as you sustain the vowel.

### **Chiaroscuro**

We are all aware of natural brightness/darkness that each of the vowels possess, but we can explore the chiaroscuro of each vowel to expand our tonal palette to help with text painting, and certain diction considerations in some languages.

### **Experiment**

Place your hands, palms facing behind you, at the occipital ridge on either side of the face.

Sing through the series of vowels from bright to dark or vice versa, and be aware of where each vowel naturally “sits”.

Then sing each vowel from its brightest (hyper-nasal), to darkest (hot potato at back of mouth). You will notice in doing this that there are a wide variety of colors of each vowel. Are all of them useful? Probably not, but they do provide different hues of the intrinsic colors associated with each vowel. It also makes the singer aware of the natural placement of each vowel and gives them choices.