

Benefits of Yoga Pranayama, Asana, and Meditation Techniques  
for Classically Trained Singers and Voice Educators

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine and explore Hatha Yoga and how it relates to a practice consisting of singer-friendly yoga postures, how these postures may benefit the singer's mental and physical health, and how these techniques relate to designated research. The study also investigates yogic breathing techniques and how these exercises relate to selected research. Lastly, the paper examines how the voice student and professional singer may alleviate anxiety by introducing a practice of daily yogic mediation of *mudra* and *mantra* techniques, and how voice teachers may better understand and assist their students with stage performance anxiety.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the spring of 2010, I was dealing with a shift in my personal life and nearly lost all the love for performing and teaching music. I stumbled upon numerous ways to contend with performance anxiety, but had found what I was seeking when I was introduced to yoga and mediation. I knew nothing of yoga and was not dealing with my diagnosis of hypertension and obesity. When I first began studying yoga, I went to classes five times a week for the first month and was pushing myself in ways I never thought were possible. I was overcoming physical issues and finding life to be more enjoyable through my mediation practice. My weight and hypertension were beginning to decrease and performing became more enjoyable. My anxieties were lessening and I was once again enjoying the study and performance of singing.

I was rejoicing so much in my yoga practice that it was suggested I take yoga teacher training. Initially, I thought being a teacher of voice studies was enough of a challenge, and I had no business teaching yoga. I began to think about the correlation between yoga techniques and singing, and how the practice of yoga may benefit singers and voice teachers. This led me to enroll in the 200-hour teacher training at Gilbert Yoga in Gilbert, AZ. It was there that I further evolved not only as a yogi, but also as a voice teacher and classical singer. The similarities between singing and yoga were enlightening. I was suggesting yoga postures to my voice students in the studio; some were beneficial to singing and performance, while some were not, but I was moved by my findings. I feel very indebted to my Yogini, Cassandra Wallick at Gilbert Yoga for her unconditional love, guidance and continued teaching. Thanks to all the amazing teachers at Gilbert Yoga!

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF EXAMPLES.....	v
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2 HISTORY OF HATHA YOGA.....	4
3 THE POWER OF PRANAYAMA TECHNIQUES .....	9
Ujjayi (Victorious Breath) .....	11
Nadi Sodana (Alternate Nose Breathing) .....	14
Kapalabhati Breath (Breath of Fire) .....	18
4 ASANA FOR HEALTHY BODY ALIGNMENT.....	26
Basic Asana.....	29
Spine-lengthening Asana .....	33
Heart-opening Asana.....	40
5 YOGA TECHNIQUES FOR PERFORMANCE ANXIETY .....	51
Yoga Mantra Techniques.....	56
Yoga Mudra Techniques.....	59
CONCLUSION.....	63
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	65
APPENDIX.....	67
A LETTER OF PERMISSION.....	68
B YOGA CERTIFICATION.....	69
C ASANA INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO.....	71

## LIST OF EXAMPLES

Example	Page
1. Appelman Pulsated Drill Exercise (Indiana University Press) .....	21
2. Appelman Five-Note Pulsation Exercise (IUP).....	22
3. The Wobble, W. Stephen Smith (Oxford University Press) .....	24
4. Tadasana, Mountain Pose (Hutton) .....	29
5. Utkatasana, Chair Pose, Steps 1-2 (Hutton) .....	31
6. Padmasana, Half Lotus Pose, Steps 1-3 (Hutton) .....	32
7. Balasana, Child's Pose, Steps 1-2 (Hutton) .....	34
8. Salabhasana, Locust Pose, Steps 1-2 (Hutton) .....	36
9. Salabhasana, Locust Pose, Gentle Variation (Hutton) .....	37
10. Dhanurasana, Bow Pose, Steps 1-3 (Hutton) .....	38
11. Supported Backbend, Julie Gudmestad (Hutton) .....	41
12. Matsyasana, Fish Pose, Steps 1-2 (Hutton) .....	42
13. Ustrasana, Camel Pose, Step 1 (Hutton) .....	43
14. Ustrasana, Camel Pose, Step 2 (Hutton) .....	44
15. Ustrasana, Camel Pose, Gentle Variation (Hutton) .....	45
16. Virabhadrasana I, Warrior I, Steps 1-2 (Hutton) .....	48
17. Virabhadrasana I, Warrior I, Gentle Variation (Hutton) .....	49
18. Namaste, Prayer Mudra (Hutton).....	60
19. Shankh Mudra (Hutton) .....	61

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Singers and singing teachers contend with numerous distracting difficulties. Professional opera singers face demanding travel, rehearsal and performance schedules all compounded by financial, health and social considerations. These common characteristics of the profession may prove detrimental to the singer and his or her vocal health. Similar to the professional singer, vocal performance majors attending college might have comparable conflicts and anxieties on a daily basis including: managing a curriculum of required classes, maintaining a grade point average, providing time for productive practice, attending rehearsals for performances and financial stress. Lastly, the voice teacher may encounter numerous complications relating to singers' demanding issues, everyday college stress and possible performance anxiety.

Yogi and Professor of Voice, Linda Lister (1969- ), suggests a consistent yoga practice might be one way to mitigate the stress of the performer's life. Voice instructors, opera singers, and recording artists suggest incorporating yoga *asanas* ['ɑ-sə-nə(z)]<sup>1</sup> and *pranayama* ['prɑ-nə-'jɑ-mə]<sup>2</sup> into the daily schedule in order to lessen performance anxieties.

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<sup>1</sup> *Asana(s)* ['ɑ-sə-nə(z)]: In Sanskrit translates as "sitting." In the Western culture the term relates to all sitting and standing postures.

<sup>2</sup> *Pranayama* ['prɑ-nə-'jɑ-mə]: breathing techniques that open the inner life force during meditation.

The late American baritone Robert Merrill, Grammy Award-winning singer Beyoncé Knowles, and Professor, Carol Webber at Eastman School of Music have all benefited from their yoga practice.<sup>3</sup>

This paper first identifies and explores Hatha Yoga and how it relates to a practice consisting of singer-friendly physical exercises encompassing basic *asanas*, spine-lengthening, and chest-opening *asanas*. The document considers how these *asanas* may aid the singer's physical, vocal and mental health, and examines how these exercises relate to research in vocal pedagogy. Secondly, the study investigates three breathing exercises: *Ujjayi* ['oo-jai]<sup>4</sup> *pranayama*, *Nadi Sodhana* ['na-di 'sho-da-nə],<sup>5</sup> and *Kapalabhati* [ka-pa-la-'ba-ti]<sup>6</sup> and how these breathing techniques relate to pedagogical research. In addition to the *asana* and *pranayama* exercises listed, the research examines the use of daily meditation in the form of yogic *mudra* ['mu-dra]<sup>7</sup> and *mantra* ['man-tra]<sup>8</sup> meditation. Such meditation might relieve persistent anxiety and be useful to the voice

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<sup>3</sup> Linda Lister, *Yoga for Singers: Freeing Your Voice and Spirit Through Yoga* (North Carolina: Lulu Press, 2011), 36, 53, 68.

<sup>4</sup> *Ujjayi* ['oo-jai]: translates as “victorious” in Sanskrit and used as a breathing technique during an *asana* practice or on its own.

<sup>5</sup> *Nadi Sodhana* ['na-di 'sho-da-nə]: In Indian medicine, refers to the purifying or cleansing of the channels where energies of the body flow.

<sup>6</sup> *Kapalabhati* [ka-pa-la-'ba-ti]: *Kapala* refers to the *skull* and *Bhati* translates as *light*. In Western culture it is referred to as Breath of Fire or Skull Shining Breath.

<sup>7</sup> *Mudra(s)* ['mu-dra(z)]: a symbolic gesture involving the hands and fingers used in conjunction with yogic breathing exercises to stimulate different parts of the body with breathing.

<sup>8</sup> *Mantras* ['man-tra(z)]: repetitive words and statements that may be spoken audibly or silently that might alter the patterns of the mind and brain chemistry.

student and the singing professional. An understanding of meditation techniques may expand voice teachers' abilities to assist their students with stage performance anxiety.

## CHAPTER TWO

### HISTORY HATHA YOGA

The term *yoga* is derived from the Sanskrit root *yuj* [yu-dʒ], meaning *to bind* or *yoke*. The exact dates of the inception of yoga are uncertain, but researchers believe the practice originated in India around 3000 B.C. Early archaeological evidence is found in stone seals that depict yoga poses dating to this time period. Scholars believe that the roots of yoga existed long before, and have traced its origins back to Stone Age Shamanism. Both of these ancient cultures advocated similar beliefs that were thought to better the lives of individuals and strengthen a sense of community.

Yoga is better understood when broken down into four historical periods. First, the Vedic Period during which *The Vedas*, the oldest scriptures of Hindu, were written. The time of this period is uncertain yet philological and linguistic documentation indicates that *The Vedas* were composed between 1700 and 1100 B.C. The end of the period occurred in 500 B.C. *The Vedas* are considered to be the oldest teachings of yoga, known as Vedic Yoga. People sought to live in total harmony with nature and their immediate families during the Vedic Period.

The second period is the Pre-Classical Period, introducing both *The Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. *The Upanishads*, written between 800 B.C. and 400 B.C., contained over 200 teachings composed by priests. They represent a deeper vision of reality that stems from devotion to *Brahman*.<sup>9</sup> Also from this period, *The Bhagavad Gita*, prepared around 500 B.C., relates to a conversation between God and man. The

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<sup>9</sup> *Brahman* ['bra-mən]: the universal Spirit, God, or The Divine.

scriptures assisted followers to alleviate difficulties in their lives, align their actions by means of yoga and meditation, and eliminate ego.

The writings of *The Yoga Sutras* introduced the third period known as the Classical Period. Patanjali,<sup>10</sup> estimated to have lived between 400 B.C. and 200 A.D., composed *The Sutras*<sup>11</sup> in 150 B.C. Its purpose was to assist people to better define and comprehend Classical Yoga. It contains 196 *sutras* and elaborates on another genre of yoga called, *Raja* ['ra-zhə] *Yoga*. *Raja Yoga* focused on the importance of Patanjali's Eight Limbs of Yoga which are: *Yama*,<sup>12</sup> *Niyama*,<sup>13</sup> *Asanas*, *Pranayama*, *Pratyahara*,<sup>14</sup> *Dharana*,<sup>15</sup> *Dhyana*<sup>16</sup> and *Samadhi*.<sup>17</sup>

The final period, referred to as the Post Classical Yoga, differs greatly from the first three. Post Classical Yoga taught people to live their lives in the present moment. Post Classical Yoga was eventually introduced to the West in the early 19th century. Many Indian Yogis contributed to educating the Western culture in the Eastern yoga

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<sup>10</sup> *Patanjali*: Patanjali compiled in a systematic way, the art and science of Yoga in the Yoga Sutras. The name Patanjali is a surname, and is the name of a lineage and school of teachers, students, and sages, rather than being only one person.

<sup>11</sup> *Sutra(s)* ['su-trəz]: rules in Sanskrit literature.

<sup>12</sup> *Yama* ['yΛ-mə]: commandments.

<sup>13</sup> *Niyama* [ni-'yə-mə]: self-control.

<sup>14</sup> *Pratyahara* [prə-tya-'hə-rə]: preparing the mind for meditation.

<sup>15</sup> *Dharana* [dɑ'rɑnɑ]: the concentration of the mind.

<sup>16</sup> *Dhyana* [di'a-nə]: positive thinking or meditation.

<sup>17</sup> *Samadhi* [sə-'mɑ-di]: the end result where one reaches super-consciousness.

philosophy. Swami Maharishi Mahesh (1918-2008) wrote the book, *Transcendental Meditation*, and Yogi Swami Sivananda (1887-1963) wrote the *Five Principles of Yoga*. The principles that are practiced presently in the West are: *Shavasana*,<sup>18</sup> *Asana*, *Pranayama*, proper diet, and *Dhyana*.

The emphasis of this study will focus on the yoga techniques of Bellur Krishnamachar Sundararaja Iyengar (1918- ). His genre of physical yoga may be defined as striving to keep balance and peacefulness throughout the mind and body. Similarly, classically trained singers must maintain the same calmness in their physical bodies while phonating and moving about the stage. A singer's heart rate may increase as faster movement on stage demands greater breathing and cardiovascular capacity. The pulse might become erratic as too much adrenaline is released, making it nearly impossible to phonate. Iyengar's form of *asana* and *pranayama* may benefit the singer in keeping the body under control and the mind at peace.

The term *Hatha* ['ha-ta] originates from the Sanskrit word *hatha*. When broken into two syllables, *ha* (sun) and *tha* (moon) refers to physical yoga. The *ha* refers to the hot energy of sun while the *tha* refers to the cooling energy of the moon.<sup>19</sup> *Hatha Yoga*, also known as *forceful yoga*, shares a similar concept with *Kundalini* ['kʊn-də-lɪ-ni]<sup>20</sup> and *Tantra* ['tan-trə]<sup>21</sup> *Yoga*. Desikachar suggests that *nadi* ['na-dē]<sup>22</sup> are located

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<sup>18</sup> *Shavasana* [ʃɑ-'vɑ-sə-nə]: Used as a resting pose after *asana*.

<sup>19</sup> T.K.V. Desikachar, *The Heart of Yoga, Developing a Personal Practice* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions International, 1995), 137.

<sup>20</sup> *Kundalini* ['kʊn-də-lɪ-ni] *Yoga*: the yoga of awareness.

<sup>21</sup> *Tantra* ['tan-trə] *Yoga*: the expanding of consciousness and unplugging of one's mind.



throughout the body. *Prana*, also referred to as infinite energy, flows within these *nadi* or channels. Desikachar suggests that three *nadi* spiral around the spinal column. The *ida* ['aɪ-də]<sup>23</sup> *nadi* moves through the left nostril and *pingala* ['piŋ-ga-la]<sup>24</sup> *nadi* enters the right nostril. Desikachar also states that the *nadi* meet at six points in the body referred to as *chakras* ['chə-krəz].<sup>25</sup> Running along the vertical line of the spine, one *chakra* is located at the center of the eyebrows. The second *chakra* is at the throat and the third is at the center of the chest and just above the heart. The fourth *chakra* is present at the navel and the fifth at the base of the trunk. The last *chakra* originates at the base of the spine. *Prana* flows between these channels and may only do so when not blocked. *Hatha Yoga* derives its name from the practice in which the yogi works to unblock these channels so the *prana* may flow between the *ha* and *tha*.<sup>26</sup>

Bellur Krishnamachar Sundararaja Iyengar was born in the Kolar District of India and, as a young child, fought numerous diseases such as malaria and typhoid fever. At the age of sixteen, he traveled to Mysore, India to study with his Guru, Sri T. Krishnamacharya. He later became Krishnamacharya's brother-in-law, mastered his

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<sup>22</sup> *Nadi* ['na-dē]: In Indian medicine, refers to the channels where energies of the body flow.

<sup>23</sup> *Ida* ['aɪ-də]: area associated with parasympathetic nervous system and controls involuntary actions. In yoga it triggers the relaxation response.

<sup>24</sup> *Pingala* ['piŋ-ga-la]: governs the sympathetic nervous system and the fight or flight response.

<sup>25</sup> *Chakras* ['chə-krə]: defined as a “wheel” in Sanskrit and corresponds to seven vital points of the physical body.

<sup>26</sup> Desikachar, *The Heart*, 137-139.

teachings on yoga and began to teach others. In 1937, after continued intense study with his guru, Iyengar was encouraged by his teacher to relocate to Pune, India to continue his yoga philosophy. In 1952, he was introduced to violinist Yehudi Menuhin who recommended that Iyengar take his teachings to London, Paris and other Western countries. Iyengar later took the advice and the Ramamani Iyengar Yoga Institute was opened in 1975 and dedicated to his wife. Iyengar is retired from active teaching but continues to write on yoga techniques. He has written fourteen books, one of which, *Light on Yoga*, is considered the most highly regarded work in yoga literature, and has been translated into seventeen languages.<sup>27</sup>

Voice instructors, professional and collegiate singers may benefit from the Iyengar method of yoga. Iyengar's technique focuses its attention on proper body alignment during the practice of all *asana*, which will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Four. Iyengar Yoga and the various postures and breathing techniques might help heal the body's misalignments and physical ailments. His system is derived from Sage Patanjali's 196 sutras. Iyengar states that he is able to find the meaning of the *sutras* through consistent practice and is capable of transforming the minds and habits of practitioners.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> B.K.S Iyengar "Iyengar Yoga", <http://www.bksiyengar.com/modules/Iyoga/iyoga.htm> (accessed January 7, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE POWER OF PRANAYAMA TECHNIQUES

Bellur Krishnamachar Sundararaja Iyengar is considered one of the world's most respected yoga instructors. He states that *pranayama*, the fourth limb in the Eight Limbs of Yoga, is best defined as the science of breath. When broken into two words, *prana* is defined as breath, vitality, wind, energy or respiration. *Ayama* [a-'ya-ma] relates to having expansion or length. *Pranayama* may then be translated as the extension of breath and its control. The three stages of such control are *puraka* [pʊ-'ra-ka],<sup>29</sup> *rechaka* [re-'cha-ka]<sup>30</sup> and retention.

Singers may find it arduous to sing particular phrases because of the great length of certain vocal lines. These expansive phrases might have to be sung while moving frantically on stage. The singer's heart rate may rise and cause the singer to have an insufficient amount of breath. For example, in Act Four of the opera *La Bohème*, the male characters might have choreography that involves running around the stage. The character of Lucia in the opera *Lucia di Lammermoor* may find her "Mad Scene" in Act Three physically and mentally fatiguing. In *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, the performer singing the title role might have difficulty balancing his breath with the physical effort exerted during the intense staging. All of these roles and many more require performing exhausting vocal lines during active staging while maintaining healthy respiration.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Puraka* [pʊ-'ra-ka]: the inhalation and inspiration.

<sup>30</sup> *Rechaka* [re-'cha-ka]: the exhalation and expiration.

<sup>31</sup> Lister, *Yoga*, 30.

*Pranayama* may assist the singer who must contend with excessively active stage movement and performance anxiety. Iyengar mentions that a slower, rhythmic pattern of breathing strengthens the respiratory system, eases the nervous system, and allows for better concentration.<sup>32</sup> He states:

Emotional excitement affects the rate of breathing; equally, deliberate regulation of breathing checks emotional excitement. As the very object of Yoga is to control and still the mind, the yogi first learns *pranayama* to master the breath.<sup>33</sup>

*Pranayama* may be practiced on a daily basis so the singer might witness physical and mental benefits. The act of breathing in performance may be involuntary rather than a conscious action and, technically helpful or not, possibly become a habitualized response for many singers as they vocally mature. Singers may know how to breathe for singing and still not breathe appropriately on stage. Through the study of *pranayama* and with conscious attention to their breathing, singers can benefit by becoming more aware of their breathing habits and improve their performance.

Singers may view breathing a physical action. Desikachar strongly suggests that students become familiar with *pranayama* before beginning an *asana* practice.<sup>34</sup> One such breath, referred to as *Ujjayi* can be practice on its own and while performing a pose in a yoga routine. *Pranayama* is best done seated with a block or stack of blankets inserted under the buttocks. The back is to be erect from the base of the spine to the neck. The head is to hang down from the nape of the neck and the chin situated between

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<sup>32</sup> Bellur Krishnamachar Sundararaja Iyengar, *Light on Yoga* (New York: Schocken Books, Inc., 1966), 44.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>34</sup> Desikachar, *The Heart*, 68.

the collarbones.<sup>35</sup> Iyengar suggests that the eyes remain closed so thoughts will not wander. The arms will rest on each leg with the palms of the hands facing up to receive positive energy. Iyengar also recommends lying down on the back after practicing *pranayama*. This prone pose, *Shavasana* [sha-'va-sa-na], or *Corpse Pose*, allows the mind and body to be restored after a series of postures and breathing techniques. He mentions that students should be relaxed while in this position but not asleep.<sup>36</sup>

## UJJAYI BREATH

*Ujjayi breath*, also known as Throat Breathing or Breath of Victory, is an integral part of every static or *asana* flow routine, and is the foundation of other *pranayama* techniques. In the practice of yoga, an *asana* flow is a series of exercises executed in a continuous, smooth manner, each exercise flowing into the next. Desikachar states that, during inhalation, the primary movement of breath into the body expands the area from the upper chest to the navel. Contraction of the abdomen is the focal point during exhalation.<sup>37</sup> There are two types of *Ujjayi*, *Anuloma* [anu-'lō-ma]<sup>38</sup> and *Viloma* [vi-'lō-ma]<sup>39</sup> *Ujjayi*, and for this study only *Viloma Ujjayi* will be considered. *Viloma Ujjayi*

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<sup>35</sup> Desikachar, *The Heart*, 63.

<sup>36</sup> Iyengar, *Light*, 441, 448.

<sup>37</sup> Desikachar, *The Heart*, 56.

<sup>38</sup> *Anuloma* [anu-'lō-ma]: In Sanskrit is defined as “to alternate” and is another type of *Ujjayi breath*. The inhalation begins from the throat and with one nostril completely closed; the exhalation passes through the opened nostril.

<sup>39</sup> *Viloma* [vi-'lō-ma]: when broken into two syllables, *Vi* means *against* and *Loma* means *hair*. The term refers to being *against the natural flow*.

breath begins by taking air in from the nose and breathing out from the throat and with a closed mouth. Desikachar explains that when practicing the technique the student should breathe through the nostrils and not the mouth. In contrast, singers may choose to breathe from the mouth and the nose when preparing to sing. Depending on the venue's environment, breathing in through the mouth might result in a dry throat. *Ujjayi* can be practiced either standing or seated.<sup>40</sup> Iyengar and Lister suggest singer-friendly instructions on how to enter the exercise.

1. Sit in a comfortable position on the floor (with a block under the buttocks to align the spine.)
2. Stretch the arms out straight and rest the back of the wrists on the knees.
3. Close the eyes.
4. Exhale completely.<sup>41</sup>
5. Inhale slowly and deeply through the nose.
6. Exhale slowly with a closed mouth. Engage the throat by approximating the vocal folds to form a narrow path for the air. The resulting sound will resemble a whisper [ha] sound.
7. As an alternate way to find the position: exhale with an open mouth and pretend to fog a mirror then attempt the same gesture with a closed mouth.<sup>42</sup>
8. Twelve rounds complete one cycle of *Viloma Ujjayi Pranayama*.<sup>43</sup>

Iyengar mentions that this genre of *pranayama* is helpful in bringing oxygen to the lungs, removes sinus congestion, improves endurance and is highly effective for people suffering from hypertension and heart issues.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 56, 60.

<sup>41</sup> Iyengar, *Light*, 441.

<sup>42</sup> Lister, *Yoga*, 47.

<sup>43</sup> Iyengar, *Light*, 442.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 443.

Singers may choose to breathe from the mouth and the nose when preparing to sing. Although, breathing through the mouth might provoke a cough or dry throat. Singers can benefit from *Viloma Ujjayi* because it focuses on lengthening the processes of inhalation and exhalation and draws attention to the abdomen.<sup>45</sup>

Richard Miller (1926-2009), voice teacher and vocal pedagogue, states that when singers are preparing to phonate, the diaphragm, the thoracic and abdominal muscles become more active. Singing numerous, long phrases, over the period required for the performance of most arias or songs, places great demands on the breath system. The breath cycle consists of inhalation onset, phrase duration and release and is repeated frequently as the composition proceeds.<sup>46</sup> Miller's description of a single breath cycle is similar to *Ujjayi breath* and is performed without phonation, preparing the glottis for phonation. Miller suggests one should:

Raise the arms above the head; return the arms to the sides while retaining the high posture of the sternum and rib cage. Breathe in and out, easily and silently, making certain the sternum does not fall and the rib cage does not collapse. The exercise should be accomplished by breathing through the nose. Following several inspiration-expiration cycles of nose breathing...it is essential that the structural support (posture) and the quiescent vocal tract remain unchanged...there should be complete silence during both inhalation and exhalation.<sup>47</sup>

Miller's exercise and *Ujjayi* are similar in that they both lack phonation. In *Ujjayi*, the sound that stems from the throat resembles the breathing sound of Darth Vader from the Twentieth Century-Fox movie, *Star Wars*, directed by George Lucas. Miller mentions

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<sup>45</sup> Desikachar, *The Heart*, 60.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing* (New York, New York: Schirmer Books, 1986), 26.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

that the lungs should not have a feeling of being crowded.<sup>48</sup> They are to be relaxed and the breath is not to be held. Benefits the singer may find helpful are the slowing down of an elevated pulse and the encouragement to be conscious of a quieter, more controlled inhalation. Iyengar suggests that this technique is ideal for those suffering from hypertension and anxiety.<sup>49</sup> One may conclude there are both similarities and differences between the two methods of approaching the breath cycle, which may be used successfully to strengthen the singer's breath and increase focus on his or her physical awareness.

## NADI SODHANA

*Nadi Sodhana*, defined as alternating nostril breathing, may prove advantageous for singers and teachers. Iyengar defines the term *nadi*<sup>50</sup> as a passageway similar to a vein or artery in the body. The term *Sodhana* ['sho-da-nə]<sup>51</sup> refers to the purifying of the *nadi*. The two words can be defined as the cleansing of the nerves. Iyengar suggests that nerve blockage is similar to an obstructed water pipe. Blocked nerves result in a lack of vital blood flow and *prana* ['pra-nə]<sup>52</sup> energy. The clotted *nadi* may eventually cause

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>49</sup> Iyengar, *Light*, 443.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 445. *Nadi* ['na-di]: refers to a channel or tubular organ similar to a vein or artery.

<sup>51</sup> *Sodhana* ['sho-da-nə]: means to purify or cleanse.

<sup>52</sup> *Prana* ['pra-nə]: In Sanskrit, defined as “life” or “the primary and all around motion of Life Energy.”



discomfort to an organ or the breathing apparatus or throat of a singer.<sup>53</sup> Desikachar suggests that this breathing technique should not be practiced if the individual has a cold or any type of nasal blockage.<sup>54</sup> The author states that the focus of this breathing technique, as with all *pranayama*, is the exhalation. He emphasizes that when the student is unable to breathe silently and slowly, he is not ready for any exercise of *pranayama*. Iyengar suggests that there may be a mental or physical block. The student is instructed to address all physical and mental issues before continuing with any *pranayama* techniques.<sup>55</sup> Lister suggests the following approach for singer-friendly *Nadi Sodhana*:

1. Close the right nostril with the right thumb and inhale through the left nostril.
2. Release the thumb.
3. Close the left nostril with the right ring and pinkie fingers and exhale through the right nostril.
4. Inhale through the right nostril and repeat the sequence, exhaling and then inhaling through the left nostril.<sup>56</sup>

Unlike *Ujjayi* breath, which may be practiced for any duration of time, *Nadi Sodhana* takes time to complete. The breath is to be steady and unforced. The first cycle ends when the last of the exhaled breath leaves the right nostril. After one round of alternate breathing from both nostrils, the second cycle can begin. Iyengar suggests that this technique consist of eight to ten repetitions of the complete breath cycle described above.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Iyengar, *Light*, 445.

<sup>54</sup> Desikachar, *The Heart*, 61.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>56</sup> Lister, *Yoga*, 50.

<sup>57</sup> Iyengar, *Light*, 447.

*Nadi Sodhana* has multiple benefits for the singer. The breathing technique prepares the body to receive larger amounts of oxygen in the blood stream, which may calm the *nadi*. The technique might also benefit the mind of the singer by creating a sense of balance between the brain hemispheres. Lister explains:

The alignment of brain hemispheres can be very advantageous to singers who need to utilize the right brain to realize an intuitive, inspired, and risk-taking performance while the linear, logical left brain helps them to remember their lyrics and/or staging. Singers should use this technique for balancing both the brain and the breath.<sup>58</sup>

*Nadi Sodhana* may prove beneficial for calming the mind and respiration. Singers and teachers contend with hectic schedules that tire the mind. Performance psychologist Alma Thomas works with singers on overcoming a host of mental distractions. In the book, *Power Performance for Singers*, she collaborates with voice teacher Shirlee Emmons (1923-2010), as they explore body-mind awareness of the singer. Professional singers and college voice students frequently fail to see the body-mind connection which, when out of balance, may impede musical preparation. The authors suggest being aware of the demands of the mind and what it is saying.<sup>59</sup> They recommend that singers learn how to identify physical tension. A rigid body makes it difficult for the mind to remain calm. Singers are considered singing athletes, and similar to sports athletes, must be sentient to any physical complications.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Lister, *Yoga*, 50-51.

<sup>59</sup> Shirlee Emmons and Alma Thomas, *Power Performance for Singers: Transcending the Barriers* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1998), 67.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

Emmons and Thomas state that vocal training is a physical and mental activity. The repetition of a vocal exercise or singing of an aria sends copious information from the nervous system to the brain. Once the brain processes the information, it sends neurological impulses to the muscles, refining the vocal tone and habitualizing the muscular synergies creating that tone. The subconscious body-mind can assume control and the singer may not have to be distracted by conscious pedagogical thought. The authors have adapted three exercises from John D. Syer and Christopher Connolly's, *Sporting Body, Sporting Mind*:

1. Become bodily aware when you sing your pieces.
2. Gain some insight into the mind-body relationship.
3. See what effect the body is having on your performance.<sup>61</sup>

The singer is first asked to identify, through self-awareness, any tension in the body, to then determine the thought patterns contributing to those tensions and, finally, to relate those tensions to possible problems in the performance.

Another similarity between concepts of Emmons and Thomas and *Nadi Sodhana* is the suggestion that the ability to relax may be enhanced by specific breathing methods. The authors recommend that singers concentrate on the breath any time it becomes erratic. The goal of the singer is to slow the breath cycle, regain control and avoid the distracting fight or flight response. The anxious singer might be able to regain control and avoid the break in concentration so often related to this response. The authors suggest breathing in through the nose and blocking all outside disturbances. Singers should be aware of their breathing patterns and seek out consistent cycles of breath.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

Similar to *Nadi Sodhana*, the cycle Emmons and Thomas advocate may bring a sense of freedom from tension. The authors' suggestions are similar to *Ujjayi* breath and can be accomplished without much effort or distraction, either backstage or in a dressing room.

When the breath, and thus the physical body, is under control, the mind needs to be reinforced. Thomas also suggests that during the point of inhalation before singing, to insert a positive statement into a subtext during a rest or interlude in the performance. She suggests the statements: "I feel relaxed" or "I am allowed to take my time."<sup>62</sup> A positive statement may be used as a survival technique during a performance.

*Nadi Sodhana* and Emmons and Thomas's technique are only two examples of exercises to combat mental and physical interference before and during performance. Singers contend with stress on a daily basis and it may be to their benefit to execute a mental plan to achieve the best performance possible. Thomas points out that finding control of one's self as a performer might ease the singer into the realization of a potential of which he is unaware.<sup>63</sup>

## KAPALABHATI

The third breathing technique singers may find helpful is *Kapalabhati* [ka-pa-la-'ba-ti]. When broken into two words, *Kapala* refers to *the skull* and *Bhati* translates as *light*. In Western culture it is known as Skull Shining Breath or Breath of Fire. Iyengar's book, *Light on Pranayama*, describes the technique of *Kapalabhati* as consisting of a

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 69

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 85.

slow inhalation and quick exhalation. The exercise consists of repeated exhilarating exhalations. Iyengar and Lister's suggestions for *Kapalabhati*:

1. Sit comfortably with a block under the buttocks, as in *Ujjayi*.<sup>64</sup>
2. Exhale all air out of the lungs and inhale through the nose.<sup>65</sup>
3. Contract the abdomen inwards four to eight times in rapid succession with a partial exhalation on each contraction, similar to doing a staccato exercise. The singer may exhale in a succession of hissing sounds. (The image of blowing out candles on a birthday cake.)<sup>66</sup>
4. Take a few deep and slow breaths, using *Ujjayi*. This allows the lungs and diaphragm to rest before repeating another round.<sup>67</sup> Keep the chest and shoulders still and bring focus to the abdominal muscles.<sup>68</sup>

Singers who experience high amounts of adrenalin levels before a performance may not want to practice this technique because it can create a feeling of exhilaration. In contrast, singers who are feeling sluggish could find this technique invigorating. Iyengar strongly suggests that students exercise care and remain aware of their bodies, and stop the exercise immediately if there is any stress on the lungs or diaphragm.<sup>69</sup>

*Kapalabhati* may prove advantageous for singers who perform repertoire that involves *fioratura* and intervallic coloratura from composers such as Bach, Handel, Donizetti and Rossini. *Kapalabhati* is similar to a phonated, staccato exercise. It is a controlled, carefully managed, repetitive exhalation using the lungs, abdomen and

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<sup>64</sup> B.K.S. Iyengar, *Light on Pranayama* (Great Britain: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), 178.

<sup>65</sup> Lister., *Yoga*, 51.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Iyengar, *Light*, 177-179.

<sup>68</sup> Lister, *Yoga*, 51.

<sup>69</sup> Iyengar, *Light*, 179.

diaphragm. Voice pedagogue and teacher, Dr. Ralph Appelman (1908-1993), suggests that breathing for normal, daily activity differs from breathing for singing, the former being far more passive. When singers breathe, the focus is on continuous exhalation with carefully modulated pressure and flow, which is then coordinated with phonation. The exhalation in “normal breathing” is more often than not an event caused by the elasticity of the body and the overpressure of the thorax. The process of phonation consists of twenty-five to thirty muscles. The set of muscles that are being isolated in breathing exercises is different from the group of muscles used in exhalation for singing.<sup>70</sup>

Appelman suggests:

Controlled expiration in song is basically conceptual. The singer grasps the idea of linkage of breath pressure and vocalized sound by experiencing the sensation of a particular physical effort; he will miss this experience if breathing is taught as an isolated act.<sup>71</sup>

Appelman’s concept in teaching breath support is similar to that of the *Kapalabhati*. Unlike *Ujjayi* and *Nadi Sodhana*, which are practiced with normal inhalation and exhalation, *Kapalabhati* is similar to the act of singing, excluding phonation. The singer may add a hissing sound with each exhalation. Appelman suggests a similar pulsated drill that includes phonation. The main objective of the drill refocuses the student’s attention on the sensations of respiration and phonation when

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<sup>70</sup> D. Ralph Appelman, *The Science of Vocal Pedagogy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), 16.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

singing. Another important objective for the student is to be observant to all kinesthesia in the abdomen and back.<sup>72</sup>

In Example 1, Appelman outlines the pulsated drill exercise as a series of sung pulsations. The exercise ranges from five to nine pulsations on one pitch. Each pitch should have an emphasis or stress similar to a tenuto. The teacher and student are to focus on abdominal breathing. The author suggests low breathing similar to the preparatory breath in *Kapalabhati*. The singing-yogi may consider doing a round of *Kapalabhati* before beginning the pulsation technique to warm up the musculature.



Example 1. Pulsated Drill (D. Ralph Appelman)

Once the pulsation exercise is accomplished, a five-note scale may be attempted. The exercise, illustrated in Example 2 (see p. 22), can be done ascending and descending and on any vowel. Appelman states that the key component in the singing of the five-note scale is to keep the breath pressure consistent so that the pulsation is timed perfectly with every change of pitch. The pattern may ascend five notes and elongate the value of the fifth note five times before descending back to tonic. The five-note scale is essentially the pulsation exercise inserted into the ascending and descending technique.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 20-21.



Example 2. Five-Note Scale (Appelman)

Appelman's vocalise may prove beneficial for the singer. His technique, similar to *Kapalabhati*, relies on coordination. The sensations for the student are those related to the control of abdominal muscles. It is possible the singer can experience healthier singing when phonation and expiration are working harmoniously. The author suggests that, with careful observation and persistent repetition, the singer might gain more awareness of physical sensations, hear an improved sound and be able to decide whether the exercise is proving productive. Appelman stresses that the reason young singers fail in the exercise is because they lack the strength for appropriate muscular coordination. He suggests that the voice responds subconsciously to the ideas, images and feelings that are required for good, expressive singing. The mind provides the needed control of breath pressure, the larynx, resonance, and the articulators. It positions the body to accomplish the musical, textual and expressive requirements of the repertoire.<sup>74</sup> The discovery of the body-voice relationship, through vocal exercise and instruction, may enable progress for those dedicated to learning and practice.<sup>75</sup>

Another example, similar to *Kapalabhati* and Appelman's research, is an exercise invented by W. Stephen Smith (1950- ), Professor of Voice and Opera at

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 22-23.



Northwestern University. He states that the key to gaining vocal flexibility is by practicing the exercise he calls “The Wobble.” Smith disagrees with the statement that many singers who possess larger voices cannot sing *fioratura*. He suggests that every voice should be capable of singing *fioratura* and such an ability centers on the instrument being free. Smith calls it “The Wobble,” anticipating that singers and teachers will think of voice control in a different light. He thought of the vocalise when working with a student who was incapable of controlling his voice and who was having breath management issues.<sup>76</sup> The singer may find the exercise helpful in achieving flexibility. He states:

When we give up control of the larynx, singing various intervals will feel like an out-of-control wobble, so using that term helps conceptualize the sensation of total loss of control, which is, in fact, true freedom.<sup>77</sup>

*Kapalabhati* and Smith’s exercise share similar characteristics that require a relaxed larynx and awareness of the lungs and diaphragm. He conveys that the emotional and vocal flexibility of the singer requires psychological vulnerability, and the exercise may be challenging if the singer is not open to being vocally susceptible. The action of letting go may allow the voice to become relaxed.<sup>78</sup>

In Example 3 (see pg. 24), the exercise alternates between pitches that are four tones apart. The singer is to commence slowly and then work up to a faster speed. Smith quotes:

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<sup>76</sup> W. Stephen Smith, *Naked Voice: A Wholistic Approach to Singing* (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 2007), 93.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

The neutral vowel of [a] is sung on a note ordered by the instructor, followed by singing the vowel [a] up a perfect fourth from the base note, and then alternating back and forth from the fourth to the base note for four quarter notes, followed by two beats of eight sixteenth notes on [a], ending with a quarter note.<sup>79</sup>



Example 3. © Oxford University Press (W. Stephen Smith).

Smith suggests the effectiveness of “The Wobble” stems from the sixteenth notes and the fast movement caused by these notes in the larynx. He explains that “The Wobble” is used to increase agility and coordinate it with airflow. The interval of a perfect fourth is recommended so there may be greater alternation of the degree of stretch applied to the vocal folds. The folds may be able to move more freely and distinctly through the slightly wider interval. He suggests that the exercise commence in the low part of the voice.<sup>80</sup>

*Kapalabhati* may not use phonation, but a student can use the rhythm of “The Wobble” to prepare for phonation. The singer might also choose to use a hissing sound throughout the rhythm of “The Wobble.” Smith explores how the vocal folds move from long and thin to short and thick in a rapid sequence. This may contribute to a wobbling sound and sensation, help the singer let go of psychological control and gain flexibility in order to sing *fioratura*.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 95-96.

The ultimate goal of all singing is to be free, without physical tension and mental doubt. A singer might search during an entire career for balance in the physical act of singing and relief from negative mind-chatter. These unproductive thoughts may cause singers to critique everything they attempt. Singers have a plethora of *pranayama* exercises to explore that often prove profitable to their physical health and mental well being. Iyengar suggests that *pranayama* without the use of *asana* may help the student focus only on breath. Direct attention to breath may aid in calming the mind, slowing the heart rate and creating a sense of ease and accomplishment. Singers should consider all *pranayama* as consistent, life-saving energy. Desikachar states:

The outbreath (exhalation)...releases what is superfluous and removes what would otherwise become blocks to the free flow of *prana* within.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Desikachar, *The Heart*, 57.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE POWER OF ASANA FOR HEALTHY BODY ALIGNMENT

T.K.V. Desikachar defines the term *asana* as *posture*. The third limb in the Eight Limbs of Yoga, the word *asana* derived from the Sanskrit root *as*, which means *to stay, to be, to sit* and *to be established in a particular position*.<sup>83</sup> In the commentary of the *Yoga Sutras*, Sri Swami Satchidananda (1914-2002), defines *asana* as a “steady and comfortable posture.”<sup>84</sup>

Iyengar suggests that the practice of *asana* focuses on every muscle, nerve and gland. He states that a stretched and elastic body protects the student from fatigue and comforts the nervous system. The Yogi also suggests that *asana* is a gateway for training and purifying the mind.<sup>85</sup> Singers and teachers may find benefits of *asana* to include: stronger body alignment, improved respiration, greater body awareness, relief of stress, and better focus. Iyengar states:

Many actors, acrobats, dancers and musicians possess superb physiques and have great control over the body, but they lack control over the mind, the intellect and the Self...they often put the body above all else. Though the yogi does not underrate the body, one does not think merely of its perfection but the senses, mind, intellect and soul.<sup>86</sup>

Desikachar acknowledges that before beginning an *asana* practice, students must accept themselves physically and mentally. When a student is executing the pose with

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>84</sup> Sri Swami Satchidananda, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Yogaville, Virginia: Integral Yoga Publications, 1978), 152.

<sup>85</sup> Iyengar, *Light*, 40-41.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

proper form, the mind should still be engaged and not wander. The practice of *asana* focuses on mind-body awareness. Desikachar believes that, once the student recognizes his starting point and accepts it, the practice may be more rewarding.<sup>87</sup>

The yoga scriptures state that there are over 8,400 *asanas*. There may be *asanas* that are not appropriate for singers to practice because of possible injury to the neck. Headstands, or poses involving the head, neck and larynx should be avoided. Singer-friendly *asanas* include rib and spine-opening poses and *asanas* that prevent neck tension and that keep the shoulders free.<sup>88</sup>

Similar to singing, yoga practice demands the individual set aside ego. A voice student in the first years of voice study might find it difficult to execute a particular vocal exercise. Frustration could create anxiety and self-doubt, making it impossible to complete the exercise correctly. When the ego and self-doubt is removed, the exercise may prove easier to sing. The same might be true when beginning a difficult *asana*.

Lister states:

When singing and doing yoga, worrying about “looking good” prevents you from doing your best. Worrying about how the class or the audience thinks you look distracts you from staying focused on your form... focus on the pose at hand and you will free your mind from distraction and grant your body greater freedom and better form.<sup>89</sup>

The student’s objective in *asana* is to become more familiar with each pose while sensing how far to move into a stretch. The limiting point is referred to as the “edge.”

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<sup>87</sup> Desikachar, *The Heart*, 18.

<sup>88</sup> Lister, *Yoga*, 145-146.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-152.

The student may not go far enough into the pose and the muscles will not be challenged. Conversely, the student might push the body too deeply into the stretch and cause pain or injury.<sup>90</sup> Singers new to yoga should attend a class at a studio or a college campus to be introduced to proper form, allowing the body to open up for other, more challenging *asanas*.

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<sup>90</sup> Erich Schiffman, “Playing the Edge”, [http://www.movingintostillness.com/book/asana\\_playing\\_the\\_Edge.html](http://www.movingintostillness.com/book/asana_playing_the_Edge.html) (accessed March 4, 2013)

## BASIC ASANAS



Example 4. Tadasana- Mountain Pose. (Christopher Hutton)

*Tadasana* [tɑ-'dɑ:sənə],<sup>91</sup> known as Mountain Pose in Western culture, and is a standing posture that singers may find favorable. The pose begins with the feet parallel to one another. The toes should imitate roots connecting into the floor. The yogi is instructed to draw an imaginary line from the center of the ankle through the second toe of each foot. These two lines are to be parallel to each other. The kneecaps should be slightly tightened, the hips contracted and the quadriceps flexed. The chest remains forward, the spine is erect, and the neck is straight. The weight of the body should be distributed evenly across the soles of the feet and not directed toward either the heels or the toes. The arms may be at the side of the body, the hands facing inward, and the eyes looking outward. Iyengar suggests remaining in the pose for several breaths, while frequently mentally scanning the body for centers of tension.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> *Tadasana* [tɑ-'dɑ:sənə]: a standing pose and known as Mountain Pose in Western culture. Derived from the Sanskrit *tada*, meaning mountain.

<sup>92</sup> Iyengar, *Light*, 61.

Singers might find it difficult to stand at the curve of the piano during a lengthy recital, or on the opera stage for a long duration of time. Iyengar suggests that when the body weight is distributed to the balls of the feet, the student may feel the hips become loose, the abdomen protrudes, the spine begins to ache, and the body begins to tire. Singers try to prevent fatigue by shifting weight to one leg and only cause further body misalignment and greater strain.<sup>93</sup>

The physical benefits the singer can find advantageous in *Tadasana* might include: aligning of the spine, greater expansion of the chest, toning the abdominal muscles and strengthening the arches, ankles, knees and thighs. The pose also promotes improved posture, mental focus and may reduce mild anxiety.<sup>94</sup>

Author and Biomedical Engineer, Martin Kirk, (1959- ) suggests the pose *Utkatasana* [ʊt-ka-'ta-sa-na],<sup>95</sup> or Chair Pose, commences in *Tadasana*. In Example 5 (see p. 31), the yogi is instructed to exhale and bend the knees as comfortably possible. The pose may be modified by placing the hands on the knees. On an inhalation, the arms stretch above the head with the palms facing each other. The fingers are outstretched. The thighs, knees and feet are to remain parallel. Kirk suggests holding this pose for fifteen to thirty seconds.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>94</sup> Brooke Boon, Daniel DiTuro and Martin Kirk *Hatha Yoga Illustrated* (Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics, 2006), 28.

<sup>95</sup> *Utkatasana* [ʊt-ka-'ta-sa-na]: meaning “wild” or “frightening” in Sanskrit, is a standing pose that may assist in balance and stability.





Example 5. Utkatasana-Chair Pose, Steps 1 and 2. (Christopher Hutton)

The focus when coming out of the pose is the inhalation. The legs are straightened and the arms are lowered to the sides of the body. The head is forward and the gaze is focused outward. A gentle variation may be executed by not bending the knees to a complete ninety-degree angle. The physical benefits of this *asana* may be lengthening of the spine, opening the chest and stimulating the digestive and circulatory systems.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Brooke Boon, Daniel DiTuro and Martin Kirk, *Hatha*, 46-47.



Example 6. Padmasana-Half Lotus Pose, Step 1. (Christopher Hutton)



Example 6 continued. Steps 2 and 3. (Christopher Hutton)

In Example 6, *Padmasana* [pad-'ma-sa-na],<sup>97</sup> or Lotus Pose, could benefit singers and may be used at the end of a yoga class, prior to the final pose of *Shavasana*. *Padmasana* is also used when meditating. Kirk states that getting into the pose consists of four steps. First, begin seated with legs extended outward. The student is to picture the spine and the tailbone lengthening up through the crown of the head. Second, bring one heel to the navel and place the top of the foot on top of the outstretched thigh at the crease of the hip. Proper technique requires that the shin is to rotate forward and away from the chest. The third step is similar to the second, with the opposite heel coming in and rotating onto the opposite thigh and crease of the hip. The final step is imagining breath energy moving from the lower abdomen, up the spine and through the top of the

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<sup>97</sup> *Padmasana* [pad-'ma-sa-na]: a seated, spin-lengthening posture derived from the Sanskrit word “Lotus.”

head. The sides of the body are lengthened, the shoulders are drawn back and the shoulder blades should slide down the back slightly. Breathing deeper might allow for a deeper stretch. The pose may be held for as long as the student feels comfortable. The visual focal point is out and forward. Alternately, the eyes may be closed. A variation of the pose is to put only one foot on top of the crease of the thigh. The benefits of *Padmasana* include: opening the hips, lubricating the knee joints and toning the abdominal region. The student may also feel more focused and less stressful.<sup>98</sup>

#### SPINE-LENGTHENING ASANA

Singers may be instructed prior to beginning voice studies that having healthy posture is essential for balanced singing. Lister suggests that a body out of alignment might affect the lungs and overall physical freedom of the voice.<sup>99</sup> Voice students and teachers can possibly benefit from practicing spine-lengthening *asana* in the voice studio. Voice teachers might find it helpful to infuse different teaching techniques that will benefit each student. Students differ emotionally and physically and it may take a series of spine-lengthening poses before one feels comfortable.

In Example 7 (see p. 34), a pose the student and teacher could find productive is a resting posture called *Balasana* [ba-'la-sənə],<sup>100</sup> or Child's Pose. The beginning of the word, *bala*, relates to *not being fully grown* or *developed*. The pose represents a child on

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 156-157.

<sup>99</sup> Lister, *Yoga*, 99.

<sup>100</sup> *Balasana* [ba-'la-sənə]: the word *Bala* refers to a child in Sanskrit. A posture that may help with relaxing the body and mind.

the ground begging for a toy. Yogi Therapist Leslie Kaminoff (1958- ) explains that the difficult task is to position the *ischial tuberosity*<sup>101</sup> to the heels and the forehead to the floor. Placing a blanket over the heels and under the sitting bones may help in keeping the back straight and avoid injury.



Example 7. Balasana- Child's Pose, Steps 1 and 2. (Christopher Hutton)

The student is instructed that when the sitting bones are on the heels, the shoulders should remain above the hips (step 1). The singer may find that gravity assists the beginning of this pose. The chest is placed softly on the thighs and the forehead rests on the floor or prop block. The body lengthens by extending the hips to the shoulders.<sup>102</sup> Kirk suggests that the arms can be positioned back and at the side of the body. Another less strenuous position is to reposition the arms out beyond the head. A gentler approach that might benefit singers is to place a foam bolster under the belly. Also, the knees may

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<sup>101</sup> *Ischial tuberosity*: Sit bones.

<sup>102</sup> Leslie Kaminoff, *Yoga Anatomy* (Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics, 2007), 123.

widen. A yoga block can be placed under the head for support if the forehead cannot reach the floor (step 2).<sup>103</sup>

Numerous muscles, including the spinal extensors, hamstrings and gluteus medius will elongate and work simultaneously. This action will allow the sitting bones and the head to safely reach the floor. Students are encouraged to widen the knees, which may allow for more expansion in the spine and make room for the belly. Kaminoff states that a student might feel tightness in the hip joints. Gravity might prove helpful in pulling the body down instead of the muscles.

*Balāsana* is used as a resting pose so the participant can focus on breathing. Kaminoff suggests the pose might constrict breathing and cause a feeling of suffocation in a student who is new to the posture. He suggests more movement in the rib cage and at the back of the waist to allow for a deeper intake of breath.<sup>104</sup>

Students may find the physical benefits of *Balāsana* to include: reduction in head, neck and chest pain. The singing-yogi might also feel an expansion in the hips and lower back. It is possible that *Balāsana* can also assist with expanding the shoulders, while calming the mind and reducing fatigue.<sup>105</sup>

In Example 8 (see p. 36) contains an additional spine-lengthening pose singers may find advantageous is *Salabhasana* [ʃa-la-'ba-sənə],<sup>106</sup> or Locust Pose. The term

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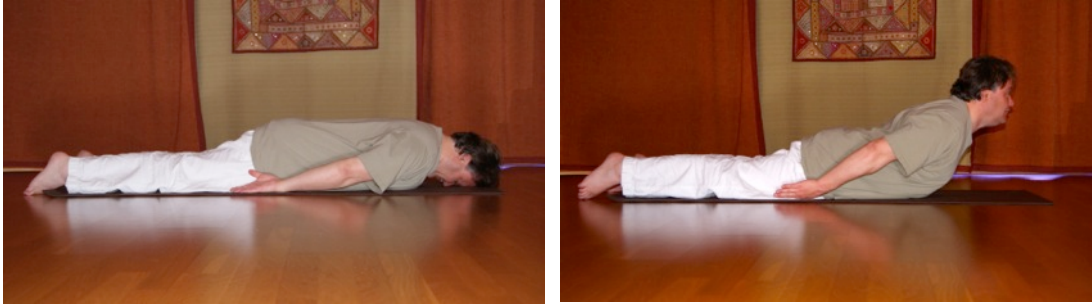
<sup>103</sup> Brooke Boon, Daniel DiTuro and Martin Kirk, *Hatha*, 195.

<sup>104</sup> Kaminoff, *Yoga*, 123.

<sup>105</sup> Brooke Boon, Daniel DiTuro and Martin Kirk, *Hatha*, 195.

<sup>106</sup> *Salabhasana* [ʃa-la-'ba-sənə]: a reclining yoga posture which refers to a grasshopper in Sanskrit.

*Salabha* refers to a grasshopper or locust. The student should enter *Salabhasana* by lying down on the stomach. The arms are stretched out at the sides and the forehead is resting gently on the floor.



Example 8. *Salabhasana*- Locust Pose, Steps 1 and 2. (Christopher Hutton)

On the inhalation, the head, arms, chest and legs lift simultaneously off the floor, with the eyes focusing forward. The pose is held for a few slow, steady and deep breaths. On the exhalation, the body returns to the beginning position. Kirk states that this pose may help to create expansion of the chest, lengthen the spine, tone the abdominals and improve overall posture. Mental benefits from *Salabhasana* might include: reduced stress, relief from mild depression and mental stimulation. Singers who suffer from spinal or neck injuries, untreated hypertension or are pregnant should avoid this pose.

In Example 9 (see p. 37), singers may find another version by lifting one arm and the opposite leg off the ground at the same time. Kaminoff suggests that the muscles being strengthened are the latissimus dorsi, rhomboids and abdominals. As with any static or flow *asana*, proper breath is essential, and possibly provides a deeper stretch and release.



Example 9. Salabhasana- Locust Pose, Variation. (Christopher Hutton)

He mentions that the weight of the body may impinge the working of the diaphragm and can create a rocking motion. The goal is to keep the body from rocking, which will result in a release in the middle-spine and the diaphragm. The absence of rocking should allow the floor to seem to push into the abdomen.<sup>107</sup>

In Example 10 (see p. 38), a more advanced spine-lengthening pose, *Dhanurasana* [da-nu-'ra- sənə],<sup>108</sup> or *Bow Pose*, may prove beneficial for singers. Kaminoff mentions that the posture is a basic to intermediate prone backbend that works the spinal extensors<sup>109</sup> and opens the chest and throat.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Kaminoff, *Yoga*, 170-171.

<sup>108</sup> *Dhanurasana* [da-nu-'ra- sənə]: the Sanskrit word *Dhanura*, is defined as, “to bow.” The posture is a spine-lengthening pose.

<sup>109</sup> *Spinal extensors*: the muscles of sacrum and extend to the lumbar, thoracic and cervical spine. Spinalis, Longissimus and Iliocostalis.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.





Example 10. Dhanurasana- Bow Pose, Steps 1 and 2 (Christopher Hutton)



Example 10 continued. Dhanurasana- Bow Pose, Step 3. (Christopher Hutton)

*Dhanurasana* commences with the body resting belly-down and the head gently facing to one side. The face gently lifts up and the chin rests on the floor. On the inhalation, the knees bend, and the arms reach back to hold the tops of the feet. Once in this position, extend from the pelvis and out through the top of the head, allowing the spine to lengthen. It is important to keep the thighs parallel and the shins drawn inward. The stomach remains on the floor.<sup>111</sup> Kaminoff suggests not rocking while practicing this pose. It is not forbidden to rock, but allowing the body to remain static may focus more attention on the breath. The breath should be directed to the chest. He states that caution

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<sup>111</sup> Brooke Boon, Daniel DiTuro and Martin Kirk, *Hatha*, 108.



should be used because the front of the shoulder joint is exposed and can be vulnerable in this pose. Singers might notice that after practicing *Dhanurasana* they may experience greater strength in the back, more expansion of the chest region and a reduction in stress.<sup>112</sup>

Richard Miller argues that the common and rather vague instruction to “relax and sing” may be counter-productive. Miller states that many talented voices may have been damaged due to this relaxed state of breathing because the larynx is forced to drive the sound by using too much glottal resistance to airflow.<sup>113</sup> Miller continues:

Axial alignment alone permits proper relationships among the muscles of the neck and torso that control breath management in singing. The singer should be “keyed up and relaxed,” as for any athletic event involving heightened emotion, and should not be de-energized under the assumption that the act of singing calls for “relaxed” posture.<sup>114</sup>

Spine-lengthening poses and Miller’s concept suggest that the body needs to remain energized, and not in a state of complete relaxation. He states that the vocal apparatus may only work to its physical optimum when all body parts are in perfect order. The foundation begins with the position and alignment of the head, neck and torso. Miller indicates that size and stature do not play a part in healthy structural alignment. In comparison, the singing-yogi may benefit from focusing on the musculature function of the head, neck and torso. Singers should focus attention on the

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<sup>112</sup> Kaminoff, *Yoga*, 170-171.

<sup>113</sup> Richard Miller, *On the Art of Singing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 78.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

position of the rib cage, the relationship of the muscles of the torso to the rib cage and sternum, and the balance of the body.<sup>115</sup>

## HEART-OPENING ASANA

Singers may explore a long list of beneficial heart-opening *asanas*. Heart-opening *asanas* refer to the opening of the heart emotionally and the opening of the heart space of the physical body (rib cage). In the article *Opening the Heart*, Yogi and Physical Therapist Julie Gudmestad explains that the physical heart dwells within the thoracic cavity and is surrounded by the rib cage. The soft tissue that supports the rib cage remains flexible so the area may be able to expand while the student breathes. The accretion prevents the rib cage from becoming an inflexible receptacle for the heart and lungs. Restriction of the lungs might be detrimental to the yogi and singer.

Before beginning any chest/rib-opening *asanas*, it is suggested to work consciously on *pranayama* to improve the flexibility of the rib cage, which may allow more blood to flow to the heart. Focusing on breath at the beginning and during the *asana* practice can possibly lengthen the thoracic tissues and prepare for expansion in the chest. The author suggests that when the student feels pain or fear resulting from being challenged, there may be the need to protect the body by either breathing shallowly or holding the breath completely. The resistance and holding of the upper abdomen proves counterproductive for all chest-opening *asana* and *pranayama*. The objective is to keep the diaphragm working in its normal rhythmic pattern and without tension. Voice teachers may guide the student in remaining engaged with slow, deep breathing.

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 236-237.

Gudmestad mentions that this slow and expansive breath might prove advantageous by releasing an inflexible rib cage.<sup>116</sup>

In Example 11, a supported backbend is a technique used in a yoga practice and may be helpful when practiced in the voice studio. The student is instructed to lie down on the floor with a rolled blanket or towel placed under the thoracic spine.



Example 11. Supported backbend, Julie Gudmestad (Christopher Hutton)

The arms should reside at the sides of the body, and the rib cage may broaden with every inhalation. Gudmestad also suggests a safer approach by keeping the knees bent and placing a thin towel under the head to prevent back tension. The student is suggested to remain in this position for a few minutes, as the body and mind become more relaxed. The student may experience a more conscious breath pattern, which may allow for more expansion in the thoracic area.<sup>117</sup>

A chest-opening *asana* that the singer may find rewarding is *Matsyasana* [mə'tʃyɑ- sənə],<sup>118</sup> or Fish Pose. In Example 12 (see p. 42), the student is instructed to lean back and allow both elbows to rest on the floor. The arms should come slowly

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<sup>116</sup> Julie Gudmestad, "Opening the Heart," [http://www.yogajournal.com/for\\_teachers/2349](http://www.yogajournal.com/for_teachers/2349) (accessed February 1, 2013).

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> *Matsyasana* [mə'tʃyɑ- sənə]: The term, *Matsya*, refers to a fish in Sanskrit.

down, one at a time, as the back is lowered to the floor. The arms are positioned at the side of the body. The student is suggested to lengthen from the pelvis and through the knees. The chest should lift upward while the head rests gently on the floor. On the inhalation, the elbows are pressed down and the chest lifts. The neck is gently curled from the back, and the top of the head rests gently on the floor. The hands may rest on the floor for support.



Example 12. Matsyasana- Fish Pose, Steps 1 and 2. (Christopher Hutton)

Another variation of the pose is to rest the head gently on the floor. The arms are stretched out above the head. A bolster may be added under the lower back for support. Since *Matsyasana* is a static pose, the breath should become deeper and fuller. The pose is held for a few minutes, or can be used as a substitute for *Savasana*.

The physical benefits a singer might experience include greater expansion in the rib cage, throat, hips and abdominal cavity. *Matsyasana* may also aid in digestion and asthma. The muscles of the upper back, neck and shoulders might become stronger with consistent practice. Singers should be aware of the neck while practicing this pose to avoid unwanted pain or injury. The singer who may contend with knee or hip injuries

should be advised to use the modified version of the pose. The singing-yogi may also benefit from a reduction in stress and anxiety.<sup>119</sup>

In Example 13, the second chest-opening pose singers may find helpful is *Ustrasana* [u-'stra-sənə],<sup>120</sup> or Camel Pose. The term *Ustra* refers to the *camel* and *asana* means *seat* or *posture*. *Ustrasana* may be considered a singer-friendly *asana* because it can possibly expand the chest while opening the throat, shoulders and torso. The pose is a deep backbend and caution for the integrity of the knees is paramount. A towel can be placed on the yoga mat to alleviate any knee discomfort. The singer should be aware of the heart rate, which may increase as the pose is practiced.



Example 13. Ustrasana- Camel Pose, Step 1. (Christopher Hutton)

*Ustrasana* requires the breath to remain deep and slow. The pose begins with the singer kneeling on the floor with the thighs parallel, and the palms resting on the hips or at the side of the body. The feet are positioned back, and the toes press gently into the floor. On the inhalation (see p. 44), the thighs move backwards, followed by the

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<sup>119</sup> Boon, DiTuro and Kirk, *Hatha*, 114-115.

<sup>120</sup> *Ustrasana* [u-'stra-sənə]: known as Camel Pose and a chest-opening pose.

exhalation and scooping of the tailbone to allow a stretch in the back. The student should inhale and extend from the pelvis through the head. Kirk instructs to exhale and reach back with the right hand and place it on the right heel or block. The left hand will imitate the same process as the right hand.



Example 14. Ustrasana- Camel Pose, Step 2. (Christopher Hutton)

The shins will press into the floor, and while rooting the tailbone down, the pelvis moves slightly forward. The chest lifts upwards and the shoulders are curled back. The neck should be extended to its maximum length, while the head is gently curled backwards. The student may carefully slide the hands down to the soles of the feet or blocks.

*Ustrasana* is held for only a few breaths while focusing on deep, slow breaths.

The student may exit the pose by exhaling and pressing the shins into the floor. Kirk suggests leading with the chest and keeping the head back as the student rises. The pose is completed after resting back on the heels or blocks. The yogi may remain in the position for a few deep breaths as the heart rate returns to normal.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Boon, DiTuro and Kirk, *Hatha*, 104-105.

In Example 15, a gentler version of *Ustrasana* is to place the hands on the buttocks, which should allow for proper form and avoid injury. Kaminoff suggests that focusing on the breath is the goal of *Ustrasana*. He states:

The thoracic structures are maintained in an “inhaled” position, and the abdominal wall is stretched. This results in a decreased ability of the body to breath normally. The trick is to find support from the deeper musculature so the more superficial efforts can quiet down... to notice an interesting relationship between the deepest layer of the scalenes and the breath movement in the apex of the lungs.<sup>122</sup>



Example 15. *Ustrasana*- Camel Pose, Gentle Variation. (Christopher Hutton)

Kaminoff states that the muscles involved are the deltoids, pectoralis major, apex of the lung and pectoralis minor. The author recommends focusing on the *sternomastoid muscles*, which help stabilize the weight of the head.<sup>123</sup> *Ustrasana*, when practiced

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<sup>122</sup> Kaminoff, *Yoga*, 125.

<sup>123</sup> *Sternomastoid muscles*: two thick muscles running from the sternum and clavicle to the mastoid and occipital bone. Muscles that help flex the neck and extend the head.

frequently, could benefit the singer with increased spinal flexibility, release of the hip-flexors and an intense stretch for the esophagus.<sup>124</sup>

Voice instructors and singers may find a multitude of benefits while practicing *Ustrasana* and *Matsyasana*. Other chest-opening *asana* that singers can research include Extended Side Angle Pose (*Utthita Parsvakonasana*) and Extended Triangle Pose (*Utthita Trikonasana*). These poses are standing postures and help lengthen the serratus anterior,<sup>125</sup> abdominal muscles, pectoralis major and minor, external obliques and the latissimus dorsi.

Singers comprehend vocal instruction differently, and the author suggests teachers explore various ways to communicate with the student. He suggests statements that include: “establishing an abdominal muscular effort coordinated with the vocalized sound” and “singing on the breath.”<sup>126</sup> Appelman has encountered young singers in their vocal studies failing to make a connection during difficult intervallic passages. The student may be having issues with vowels that are consistently changing in the vocal line. The author suggests that one reason singers contend with these issues is because they lack the “point of suspension.” He defines the “point of suspension” as the body’s way of physically feeling the sensation brought on by the pressure of the thoracic muscles. The objective of the student is to familiarize himself with the sensations of the thoracic muscles of inspiration, and how they differ from the abdominal muscles upon exhalation.

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<sup>124</sup> Kaminoff, *Yoga*, 125.

<sup>125</sup> *Serratus anterior muscle*: muscle that originates at the surface of the second to ninth ribs at the sides of the chest.

<sup>126</sup> Appelman, *The Science*, 11.



Appelman describes that in singing, the driving energy of the abdominal muscles frequently transcends the opposing energies of the thoracic muscles. Breath control suffers because of these opposing forces. He states:

The entire scale should be sung on the point of suspension where the thoracic and abdominal pressures are balanced. Such a condition assures complete control of intensities as well as changes of interval.<sup>127</sup>

The yoga exercises of *Ustrasana* and *Matsyasana* would work well to familiarize the student with two kinds of breathing, abdominal/diaphragmatic and costal or chest breathing. Once the student has settled into the pose, he may observe the same expansion in the rib cage. Both techniques focus on the external intercostal muscles and the other muscles that raise the ribs.<sup>128</sup>

In Example 16 (see p. 48), the standing pose, *Virabhadrasana* [vi:ra-ba-'dra-sana] I,<sup>129</sup> or Warrior I, could be helpful to singers. The posture commences by standing in *Tadasana* as the right leg moves forward, and proceeds into a gentle stride. The heel of the left foot is turned in slightly so the foot is at a minimal angle. Kirk suggests keeping the legs engaged, and with an exhalation, bending the knee ninety degrees. The hands should be on the hips for balance and to square the hips. He states that the student should be aware of his stance, as the feet may need to move in so the posture can become

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>128</sup> *Rib raisers*: the pelvic and abdominal diaphragm, pectoralis major/minor, latissimus dorsi and levatores costarum muscles (twelve, tendinous and fleshy bundles that are located at the ends of the transverse processes of the seventh cervical and upper eleven thoracic vertebrae).

<sup>129</sup> *Virabhadrasana* [vi:ra-ba-'dra-sana]: known as Warrior One in Western culture and derived from Hindu mythology.

smaller. The student is instructed to keep the right knee directly over the ankle. This should allow proper form and prevent injury to the right knee. On an inhalation, the arms are raised over the head, and the eyes look outward.



Example 16. Virabhadrasana I- Warrior I. Steps 1 and 2. (Christopher Hutton)

The tailbone is rooted down and extended down through the pelvis. The pose may be held for a few breaths, which may expand the chest. In Example 17 (see p. 49), a gentler approach would be to keep the arms positioned up at the sides of the body, or placed on the hips.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Boon, DiTuro and Kirk, *Hatha*, 40.



Example 17. Virabhadrasana I, Warrior I, Gentle Variation. (Christopher Hutton)

The singing-yogi may enhance vocal production by practicing *Virabhadrasana I* and feel an increase in muscular endurance, strengthening of the hips and the shoulders, and relieve tension in the sciatica. When the pose is executed, the yogi might feel a sense of tranquility, as the mind slows and breath becomes deeper.<sup>131</sup>

Many chest-opening *asanas* focus on a high rib cage, while remaining static in the pose. Similar to *Virabhadrasana I*, Appelman states that the student's primary focus for body support is the feeling of pressure from the abdominal region. The pressure in this area exerts more energy than the opposing muscles that make up the rib-raiser group. He suggests that singers should feel the muscle group working above the waistline. The lower muscles, including the pelvic diaphragm, are firing automatically.<sup>132</sup> The same type of support may be felt when holding the pose of *Virabhadrasana I*. The posture is

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Appelman, *The Science*, 13.

held for a few breaths and in a small amount of time energy is derived from the abdominal area. The singing-yogi may feel a slight pulling in from the abdominal region, which can allow the pectoralis major and minor to expand. The expansion is felt when the arms are brought up and out to the side body. *Virabhadrasana I* is much more physical in appearance when compared to the singing posture. Appelman recommends the chest be held high so the lateral expansion may take place in the lower ribs. This will also allow a new breath to take place with very little movement of the lower rib cage.<sup>133</sup>

Singers and teachers have many poses that may prove valuable for healthy posture and singing. The emphasis when practicing all chest-opening poses is on proper form. Lister suggests that singers focus on the expansion of the intercostals, which may increase the rib cage. Many chest-opening poses rely on an elevated rib cage, and expansion of the ribs, so the lungs do not become obstructed. She suggests that young singers might find it difficult to sing through long phrases. The practice of chest-opening *asana* could possibly prevent the singer from suffering a collapsed chest and assist him in singing long phrases.<sup>134</sup> Singers may find a quote by Desikachar helpful when beginning any static or flow *asana* practice:

More important than outer manifestations is the way we *feel* the postures...*asana* is to incorporate steadiness and alertness...and the ability to remain comfortable in any posture. Without these qualities there is no *asana*. If we want to make the principle of *asana* practice a reality, we have to accept ourselves just as we are. It is only possible to find the qualities that are essential to *asana* if we recognize our own starting point and learn to accept it.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>134</sup> Lister, *Yoga*, 135-136.

<sup>135</sup> Desikachar, *The Heart*, 17-18.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### YOGA TECHNIQUES FOR PREVENTING PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

Singers often face multiple difficulties during their education and career. Performance anxiety is an example of one impediment that might prevent singers from reaching their full potentials. The mental and physical symptoms may include: difficulty remembering the text and staging, and a rapid heart rate that might negatively affect breath support. Lister, Thomas and Emmons suggest that different yoga and meditation techniques often provide mental and physical freedom for singers so that they can perform at their best.<sup>136</sup>

Emmons and Thomas suggest the singer be aware of emotional responses so they may be better understood. Singers might experience doubt, which can possibly present issues during a performance. The physical response to doubt may cause the singer to become anxious and result in a lack of confidence. The authors suggest that how a performer perceives these messages can determine how he might react. The singer's objective should be to consider how to change the way he views himself. The authors suggest that a small alteration in thinking might alleviate unwanted anxiety.<sup>137</sup>

Emmons and Thomas state that singers may sometimes think of anxiety as being externally caused. The authors suggest that singers should come to understand that apprehension and nervousness are often internal. They explain that the negative thoughts are not necessarily forced upon the singer by outside sources. Teachers, directors, and

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<sup>136</sup> Lister, *Yoga*, 210, 206.

<sup>137</sup> Emmons and Thomas, *Power*, 147-148.

colleagues often contribute to the agitation, but the singer should realize that anxiety is self-generated and can always be controlled. The authors state:

Anxiety results from the singer's perception of an imbalance between what is demanded of the singer and the singer's feelings regarding his own capability to achieve what is being demanded.<sup>138</sup>

They also suggest that singers may benefit from a limited amount of anxiety to achieve their goals, but having too much can produce an unpleasant experience. Singers might find that a positive performance may result from a balance of positive and negative anxiety. A small amount of nervousness is beneficial and allows the singer to not become overly confident. The authors explain that singers often benefit from controlling and managing performance anxiety, allowing for consistent and enjoyable performances.<sup>139</sup>

How does the singer identify performance anxiety? Emmons and Thomas point out that there are two kinds of anxiety. The first, cognitive anxiety, refers to mental anxiety, which relates to the nervousness created by a situation, which may result in a depletion of self-assurance. The authors suggest this genre of anxiety may commence days and weeks before the performance. The second type of anxiety the authors examined is somatic anxiety. This type of anxiety focuses on the physical body. Symptoms the singer may feel are stomach discomfort, sweating of the palms and the

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 149.

sensation of having to relieve the body of fluids. The authors state that this type of anxiety occurs closer to the performance and may lessen once the performance begins.<sup>140</sup>

How does one control anxiety? Emmons and Thomas suggest the singer learn to manage anxiety by recognizing the symptoms. They agree that physical and mental anxieties should be addressed differently and require their own skills. The three skills singers are suggested to employ to remain quiet-minded include: self-awareness, coping with mental anxiety, and minimalizing physical anxiety. These three skills may be practiced to assist singers days or weeks prior to a performance.<sup>141</sup>

The skill of self-awareness may reveal what type of anxiety the singer is battling. The authors state that the singer cannot move forward with treating the physical or mental symptom until it is identified. One example Emmons and Thomas suggest is to write down how anxious the singer might be. Questions to be answered include: Does the singer often worry or only occasionally? Is the performer calm, too calm, or is there a balance between the two? The authors instruct the singer to use a journal and explore the symptoms he may be feeling. Another method of increasing self-awareness is to refer to a list of cognitive and somatic symptoms. Such examples of mental symptoms may include: worry, fear, irritability, forgetfulness and the sensation of being overwhelmed. Physical symptoms may include: increased heart rate, nausea, insomnia and increased

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 151.

muscle tension. When the singer is aware of the symptom, he may move forward with an action plan to combat the anxiety.<sup>142</sup>

Singers often define the feeling associated with mental anxiety as being worried about the demands they put on themselves and their colleagues. Singers want to do well in an audition, but the presence of the artist's management and auditioning administration in the room may cause discomfort and paranoia. Another example might be related to their own ability. Singers may critique their singing and compare it to the competition in an audition. The artist may also worry about how vocally insecure they feel during a performance, audition, or vocal competition. The worry may be so intense that the singer might feel he or she will never perform well and be hired.<sup>143</sup>

Emmons and Thomas suggest that singers who feel trapped by negative thoughts should consider using self-statements that relate to the anxiety being felt. The authors state that the aim of this technique is to train the singer's mind to react to the difficulty of the performance and not the anxiety. This may allow the singer to become excited and not live in fear while performing.

Examples of statements that singers may find beneficial include: "The singer before me may have sung well, but I will not allow that to affect my audition." "I know my music. I have worked hard and will allow my audience to enjoy the performance."

Another technique that may minimize mental anxiety is to introduce mental images that might allow the singer to feel relaxed and focused. The authors suggest an

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 152-153.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 154.



image of a family member, a supportive voice teacher, or the image of a beautiful sunset. The singer may also benefit from a series of breathing techniques. One example of a breathing technique is referred to as “even breathing.” Similar to *Ujjayi*, “even breathing” may allow the singer to focus on the mind and scan the physical body for unwanted tension. The authors instruct the singer to inhale only through the nose, allowing for four to five deep breaths. He is to repeat the process through the mouth. All of these techniques are intended to benefit the singer in managing stress and enjoy performing.<sup>144</sup>

Emmons and Thomas state that physical anxiety is likely to occur the day of the performance rather than weeks before, but also suggest singers may feel the triggers of physical apprehension for days leading up to the performance. The authors recommend that singers explore different relaxation tactics days before they perform. Singers may find different yoga, massage and meditation methods helpful in minimizing physical anxieties.<sup>145</sup>

Lister suggests that the practice of yogic meditation, combined with *mantras* and *mudras* is beneficial to the singer who struggles with symptoms of stage fright. Similar to the Emmons and Thomas exercises, Lister explains that these yogic techniques may provide psychological and physical relief.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>146</sup> Lister, *Yoga*, 206.

## YOGA MANTRA TECHNIQUES

A yoga technique that can be advantageous to the singer is a practice of *mantras*. Harbhajan Singh Puri (1929-2004), known as Yogi Bhajan, suggests that *mantras* are statements that may help an individual gain control of the mind and regain focus. The Yogi suggests that *mantras* are powerful and are considered the mind's relationship with the Cosmos or Universal Consciousness. Bhajan states that the action of the mouth, tongue and lips results in words, which may stimulate meridians in the head and assist the endocrine system.<sup>147</sup> On a physical level, and with correct repetition, *mantras* may assist in regulating breath and allow the mind to focus on the present.<sup>148</sup> Lister suggests numerous *mantras* that singers and teachers may find conducive to their self-assurance:

“I will sing my best.” “I am in control.” “I can do this.” “I center myself in stillness and trust.” “My talent will shine.” “I greet this day with confidence and faith.”<sup>149</sup>

These mantras can be practiced silently as a mental warm-up before the performance. Lister recommends the singer approach the *mantra* with assurance and distinguish between what is positive and negative. She states that the objective of the *mantra* should be to find meaning from the habit and the repetition, and more importantly, to believe in the power it may reveal.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> *Endocrine system*: glands that help control the body's metabolic activity and include the pituitary, thyroid, parathyroids, adrenals, ovaries and testes.

<sup>148</sup> Harbhajan Singh Khalsa (Yogi Bhajan), “Why Use Mantras.” [http://kartapurkhhalsa.typepad.com/kundalini\\_yoga\\_yogi/2005/09/index.html](http://kartapurkhhalsa.typepad.com/kundalini_yoga_yogi/2005/09/index.html) (accessed March 9, 2013).

<sup>149</sup> Lister, *Yoga*, 222.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 223-224.

Yogi Bhajan states that three negative statements singers and yogis may find debilitating before a performance or yoga practice are the *mantras*: “I don’t know, I’m not ready, and I can’t do it.” He reminds the student that *mantras* are formulas and that negative statements tend to create negative patterns in the mind. The affirmation, when spoken out loudly, or silently, may direct the mind to the present and replace feelings of worry, regret and intense fear.<sup>151</sup>

An example of a *mantra* that singers may find favorable is by Guru Amar Das (1479-1574), *Ek Ong Kar Sat Nam Siri Wahe Guru*.<sup>152</sup> The translation of the Sanskrit is: “One Creator, Truth is its identity, Great Experience of Ecstasy.” The effect and vibration of the *mantra* may be similar to playing certain notes on a piano.

Bhajan states:

the sound of the vibration is all the student has to master, because vibration holds all universes and every dimension.<sup>153</sup>

Shakti Parwha Kaur Khalsa (1929- ), Yogi Bhajan’s first student, gives

instructions on how the *mantra* should commence:

1. Sit comfortably in a chair or on the floor with a blanket under the sitting bones to support the back, the feet are flat on the floor and the spine is erect.
2. Place the hands in the lap with the palms facing up or down.

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<sup>151</sup> Khalsa (Yogi Bhajan).

<sup>152</sup> *Ek Ong Kar Sat Nam Siri Wahe Guru* [ek-ong-kar-sat-nam-si-rē-wahē-gorū]: a *mantra* that has eight vibrations and describes the Glory of the Lord. Should be spoken or sung two and a half hours before sunrise.

<sup>153</sup> Yogi Bhajan, “Lecture on Mantra,” <http://fateh.sikhnet.com/sikhnet/articles.nsf/fed9a32db02c040887256671004e06c3/038d2f1fc3c581aa872576fd007c5093!OpenDocument> (accessed March 9, 2013).

3. Stretch the back of the neck gently by pulling the chin down and toward the back of the neck. Relax the muscles of the face, neck and throat.<sup>154</sup>

The singer is instructed to inhale and speak or chant the words on one tone, *Ek Ong Kar*. On another inhalation the singer is to speak or chant, *Sat Nam*, until the breath has depleted. The third inhalation prepares for the words, *Wahe Guru*. Singers and teachers may better comprehend and practice the eight syllable *mantra* with assistance from the International Phonetic Alphabet:

[Inhale → *ek-ong-kar* → Inhale → *sat-nam-sire* → Quick Inhale → *wa- hegəru*]  
                  1 2 3                                   4 5 6                                   7    8(liaison)

Once the cycle has completed, the singer is instructed to inhale and hold the breath for a few seconds before exhaling and relaxing. The student is instructed to keep the tone consistent when practicing the *mantra*. The student is also reminded to be aware of the head so it does not tilt backwards.<sup>155</sup>

Similar to Lister, Emmons and Thomas’s methods, yoga *mantra* meditation techniques can be of benefit to singers. Yogi Donna Quesada suggests that *mantra* meditation may reduce anxiety and depression, and transcends the senses. She states that

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<sup>154</sup> Shakti Parwha Kaur Khalsa, “My Favorite Mantra: Ek Ong Kar Sat Nam Siri Wahe Guru,” <http://www.3ho.org/kundalini-yoga/meditation/featured-meditations/my-favorite-mantra-ek-ong-kar-sat-nam-siri-wahe-guru> (accessed March 13, 2013).

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

a daily *mantra* practice may also release neuroses and remove subconscious, unhealthy patterns.<sup>156</sup> A singer-friendly quote by Bhajan that may provide relief:

We meditate so that our minds can be sharp and alert. We chant *mantras* so that our souls may be ignited like candles. In the light of this beauty we will walk.<sup>157</sup>

## YOGA MUDRA TECHNIQUES

A second yoga technique that singers are likely to find gratifying is the practice of *mudras*. Yogi and psychology professor at Stanford University, Kelly McGonigal, states that *mudras* are hand gestures that develop a particular state of mind. There are hundreds of *mudras*, and when practiced in conjunction with *pranayama*, may stimulate different areas of the body and mind. The birthplace of *mudras* is unknown but many *mudras* represent the yogic warrior, Bodhisattva. The author states the yogi warrior fought courageously to end human suffering. She explains that *mudras* may be compared to sign language that may allow for an open mind and an aroused heart.

The hand gestures may be practiced during *asana*, *pranayama*, and meditation. McGonigal suggests that *mudras* may provide better focus to a practice. First, they may allow the singer to sense the beauty of their talent and not be constantly critical of their singing. Second, *mudras* may be a pathway between a singer's spiritual experience and

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<sup>156</sup> Donna Quesada, "10 Reasons to Chant: On the Benefits of Mantra Meditation" <http://www.spiritvoyage.com/blog/index.php/10-reasons-to-chant-on-the-benefits-of-mantra-meditation/> (accessed March 13, 2013).

<sup>157</sup> Yogi Bhajan, "Why Use Mantras," [http://kartapurkhhalsa.typepad.com/kundalini\\_yoga\\_yogi/2005/09/index.html](http://kartapurkhhalsa.typepad.com/kundalini_yoga_yogi/2005/09/index.html) (accessed March 9, 2013).

the way he or she interacts with the world. The author suggests that *mudras* are similar to prayers that are practiced kinesthetically.<sup>158</sup>

In Example 18, Lister suggests a beginning *mudra*, *Namaste* ['nɑ:məs-deɪ]<sup>159</sup> or *Prayer Mudra*, which may allow the singer to remain centered before and after a meditation practice. The *mudra* may be done seated during a meditation or *pranayama* routine. She instructs:

Hold each hand with the fingers together. Place the palms together and bring the hands closer to the body and rest gently on the chest.<sup>160</sup>



Example 18. Namaste-Prayer Mudra. (Christopher Hutton)

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<sup>158</sup> Kelly McGonigal, “From Hand to Heart” <http://www.yogajournal.com/practice/2668> (accessed March 14, 2013).

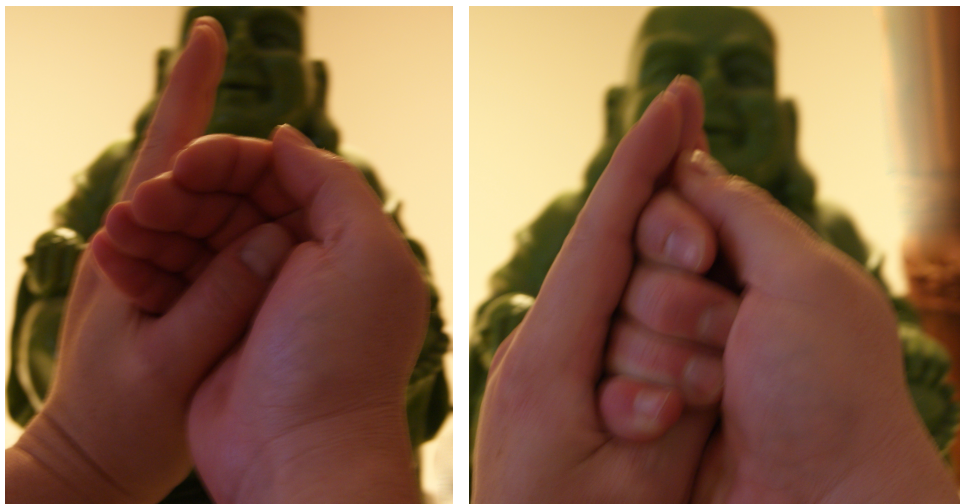
<sup>159</sup> *Namaste* ['nɑ:məs-deɪ]: literally defined as “I bow to [your] form,” and “I honor the Spirit in you which is also in me.”

<sup>160</sup> Lister, *Yoga*, 229-230.

Yogi Shiva Rea suggests that the physical benefits of *Namaste mudra* may include: neutralizing the positive and negative sides of the body while balancing the *nadis*, and promoting flexibility in the hands, wrists, fingers and arms. The hand gesture may prove mentally beneficial by relieving stress and anxiety before a performance or audition.<sup>161</sup>

In Example 19, a second *mudra* singers may find beneficial is *Shankh* ['shank] *mudra*. Yogi and ENT, Dr. K.O. Paulose, states that *Shankh*, or Conch Shell, is frequently used in Hindu temples for worship. When air is blown into the shell it creates a pure sound vibration. Paulose students on how to practice *Shankh mudra*:

The student should place the hands in front of the chest. In step 1, take the fingers of the right hand to grasp the left thumb. In step 2, the student is then TO bring the remaining fingers of the left hand into place so that they all are centered on the right thumb. The hands may resemble a conch shell. The singer may keep the hands at chest level or position the hands at the throat. The singer may chant a favorite *mantra* while holding this position for several minutes.



Example 19. Shankh Mudra, Steps 1-2. (Christopher Hutton)

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<sup>161</sup> Shiva Rea, “For Beginners: Anjali Mudra” <http://www.yogajournal.com/basics/145> (accessed March 14, 2013).

The author states that this mudra is beneficial to the practitioner in problem solving and issues related to the Throat Chakra, the energy center in the larynx. The singer may also benefit by clearing phlegm from the throat, and allow for greater quality of speech by restoring the resonance and pitch. Paulose also suggests that the *mudra* may also balance the *thyroxine*<sup>162</sup> secretion from the Thyroid gland.

Students, professional singers, and teachers are encouraged to explore all of these performance anxiety theories and techniques, which are helpful in restoring mental and physical balance. Similar to yoga techniques that are methodically instructed by yogis, Emmons and Thomas suggest that singers write out and practice a mental plan so they may reduce stage anxiety and achieve performance excellence.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> *Thyroxine*: one of two major hormones secreted by the thyroid gland. The principal function is to stimulate the consumption of oxygen and the metabolism of all cells and tissues in the body.

<sup>163</sup> Emmons and Thomas, *Power*, 285.



## CONCLUSION

Voice students, professional singers, and teachers face numerous obstacles in their studies and teachings. The research that has been chosen for this document derives from professional voice pedagogues, sport psychologists, yoga teachers, and from my own experience having passed a 200-hour, Hatha Yoga Teacher Training Program. The research suggests that a daily practice of Hatha Yoga can be beneficial to the singer's body and voice, and minimize performance anxiety. Hatha Yoga may also benefit voice teachers by incorporating these techniques during voice instruction.

Singers should always check with their health care physician before beginning any yoga practice. In my personal experience, a routine doctor visit for sinusitis resulted with me having been diagnosed with hypertension. I was prescribed extremely powerful medications that can cause damage to the kidneys and the liver. I knew I needed to be responsible and bring my blood pressure down, but the thought of taking numerous medications was unacceptable. Although my blood pressure has decreased, I continue to focus on my body, and visit my doctor in combating this chronic medical condition. My yoga practice has played an integral part in keeping my hypertension from worsening. The practice of *pranayama*, *mantra*, and *mudra* has also assisted me in overcoming my performance anxieties. Since being introduced to Emmons and Thomas's research for this document, I have begun to feel more confident with the memorization of text. I have battled with memory issues for years. Their suggestions have allowed me to feel more comfortable on stage and reduced my stage fright.

Presently, yoga is flourishing throughout the country. Yoga classes are offered at many college campuses, at their sports recreation facilities, yoga studios, and the YMCA.

Yogis and Yoginis strongly suggest taking a beginning class with a certified instructor in order to introduce proper physical form. There are even yoga studios offering class packages on the website “Groupon.”

The art of singing and the practice of yoga will never be perfect. Lister explains that the old saying “practice makes perfect” does not apply to the art of singing or yoga. In yoga, just as in singing, there is no “perfect.” As much as singers try for perfection, it seldom, if ever is accomplished. Just as the daily practice of singing may allow singers to see advancement in the use of their instrument, yoga has the potential of providing a passageway to physical and mental focus. Yoga techniques may not completely remedy all stress and anxiety, but with time, patience and practice, they might allow singers to develop better coping techniques where singers can enjoy their advancement and exploration of singing.<sup>164</sup> The following is a quote from the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali that all singers and teachers may find enlightening:

It is only when the correct practice is followed for a long time, without interruptions and with a quality of positive attitude and eagerness that it can succeed.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Lister, *Yoga*, 282, 284.

<sup>165</sup> Patanjali, *Yoga Sutras*, 20.

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APPENDIX A  
LETTER OF PERMISSION

**KENNEDY, Ben** <[ben.kennedy@oup.com](mailto:ben.kennedy@oup.com)>

March 12, 2013 7:59 AM

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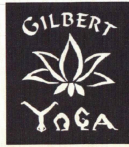
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APPENDIX B  
YOGA CERTIFICATION



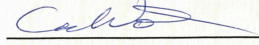
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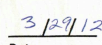
**Christopher Hutton**

has successfully completed the  
**Hatha Yoga Teacher Training 200hr Program**  
at Gilbert Yoga  
Gilbert Arizona

Gilbert Yoga is conditionally licensed by the Arizona State Board for Private  
Postsecondary Education and is a  
Registered Yoga School (RYS) with Yoga Alliance.



Director



Date



## APPENDIX C

### ASANA AND PRANAYAMA INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO

THE INSTRUCITONAL VIDEO WAS RECORDED USING MAC OS X (10.9.1) AND  
IMOVIE (10.0.2).