

Money Notes



HOW TO SING HIGH, LOUD,

HEALTHY, AND FOREVER

Meredith Colby

INTRODUCING NEURO-VOCAL, THE NEW METHOD BASED ON BRAIN SCIENCE

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Preface

I WROTE THIS BOOK WITH YOU IN MIND.

You're reading this because you want to improve your singing. You're a singer. Singing is not something you do as much as it is something you are. Because of this truth about you, your ability to express yourself accurately and authentically through singing is vitally important to you.

Maybe you've tried to improve your singing in the past. Maybe you've had voice lessons or coaching sessions that helped you a lot...or didn't. Leave that behind for now. In any voice work you've done before your focus was on training your voice. That's not what you're going to do here. This book is going to show you how to train your brain how to operate your voice efficiently so that you can sing with both freedom and intention. If your voice is working efficiently, it will give you all you need to sing: range, stamina, volume, and control.

You'll find even more support, ideas, and inspiration at my website, www.MeredithColby.com. You can also follow me on Twitter at @MeredithColby or on Instagram at MeredithColby.

"A bird does not sing because it has an answer. It sings because it has a song."

—Chinese Proverb

"Sweetest the strain when in the song
The singer has been lost."

—Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward
*Prolific author and courageous voice of reform
for women and animals*

ARE YOU READY TO CHANGE YOUR SINGING?

That may sound like a silly question to ask someone who's reading a vocal method book. But after more than twenty-five years of teaching voice, I know that

wanting to improve your singing is not the same as wanting to change your singing. And while any accomplished singer or voice teacher will tell you that the two go hand in hand, you may not be ready to actually change in order to improve.

I came to this conclusion because I've had a few students over the years whose singing hasn't changed a whit over several months of lessons. I admit this because I know I'm in good company; I've talked to other voice teachers whom I know to be excellent instructors and they've told me the same thing. Some people just don't seem to want to change. I used to turn myself into a pretzel trying to figure out how to help these students progress. After all, they were taking the time and making the effort to come to my studio, paying me for private lessons, and yet they weren't getting much better.

I now know there are some singers who want to get better without actually having to do anything differently; mostly because doing things differently can be scary and uncomfortable.

So take a moment (no, really, take a moment) and figure out if this describes you, because if it does, you're not ready. You'll waste your time and then blame it on the method. It's easier just to be honest with yourself and know it's okay. If you're not ready, you're not ready. You'll know when you are.

"I soon realized that no journey carries one far unless, as it extends into the world around us, it goes an equal distance into the world within."

—Lillian Smith
*Musician, author, teacher, and
valorous social activist*

OLD HABITS ARE HARD TO SHAKE.

You've probably been singing since you could talk. You know how to sing. But here's the thing: changing something you already know how to do is harder than learning something new. So even though this method will help you get control of your voice quickly and organically, you'll still have to work at it. You'll run up against your old habits and have moments of frustration. You'll hear yourself making unfamiliar sounds and may feel

resistance to that. You'll be unaccustomed to some new feelings and wonder if you're on the right track.

You just need to know that going into this process. Know that change can be a bumpy road, and don't freak out about it. Just stay on the road and do your best to keep moving forward. I promise you it will pay off—in learning Neuro-Vocal Method or anything else you take on!

I really want you to make good use of the information in this book. I want you to get from it all that you hope. I've thought of you a thousand times as I've written it. I love you because you're a singer and your singing is a gift to you and to the world. Do not doubt for a second the good you can do and the joy you can bring with your

singing.

Whether you think your singing is just a hair from where you want it to be, or that control of your voice just seems to escape you altogether (or anything in between), keep at it. Use the tools and teachers that you can; some will work for you and some won't, but you won't know until you try. Keep trying. Your voice—both literal and metaphorical—deserves your attention and energy. I will be honored if I can help you along your path.

Meredith Colby

2016

“There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost.”

—Martha Graham
dancer and groundbreaking choreographer



Part 1



CHAPTER 1

No Magic Bullets

Cards on the table: I'm lazy. Lazy and impatient. I like to say I'm ambitiously lazy, because I'm willing to do things that are a little difficult or uncomfortable in the short run if they'll make my life easier in the long run. Like, learning to drive a car, for instance. Learning to drive made me feel awkward and was a little scary at times. I had to learn some new skills that were specific to driving. It took time, money, courage, intention and focus. But now I know how to drive, and that skill makes my life easier.

In helping people learn to sing, my character flaws came together with my own personal need to help my students get what they want, which is, in nearly every case, money notes. High, loud notes. Notes that people in musical theater call "belting" and people in other genres call "frickin' awesome." Or words to that effect.

Money notes can't sound creepy or hurt singers' voices, though. The world of popular performance can be tough, especially if you sing in a band, where singing time can be measured in hours, in situations where singers can hardly hear themselves, and then might have to sing for hours the next day, too. If you're going to last as a singer, your singing has to be healthy and efficient. My method had to support that. It also had to get results quickly, make intellectual sense, and not mess with a person's singing while they learned it.

I'm not trying to imply that I set out to create a vocal training method. I didn't. I read brain books for fun, watch laryngoscope videos on YouTube, and read medical papers on Google scholar. (I'm a nerd and have the Doctor Who t-shirt to prove it.) Once I had the notion that the focus of voice training could be purposefully neurological I had willing subjects, myself included, to experiment on. After twenty-or-so years of working with my theories it occurred to me, in the middle of a Qi gong class, that I did the same things for all my students and got predictable results. I realized I had a method.

Studying with Mr. Miyagi



Remember Mr. Miyagi from *The Karate Kid*? In case you don't, *The Karate Kid* is an underdog-to-champion movie made in 1984 (and remade in 2010, but I'm going old-school) in which Daniel, the Kid, asks Mr. Miyagi, the unlikely sage, to teach him karate. Miyagi agrees. Training begins with Miyagi having his new student wax his car and paint his fence—tasks that clearly have nothing to do with karate. Miyagi insists that Daniel perform the tasks in very particular ways. Daniel works for hours at a time and over several months. He doesn't understand why he's doing these chores, or why Miyagi is so picky about their execution. He feels angry, frustrated, and confused. He doubts his teacher's sanity.

Then comes the scene in which Daniel has to defend himself against a Bad Guy, and what do you know? His defensive tactics use precisely the same movements he had been integrating into his muscle memory by waxing cars and painting fences for Miyagi-san. He knew what to do without thinking about it. His body had integrated the effective and efficient karate movements he learned when he was doing mundane and seemingly unrelated tasks: *when he didn't think he was learning karate.*

Because he didn't think he was learning karate, he was able to learn the most effective skills very quickly.

You are the Karate Kid. Neuro-Vocal Method is Mr. Miyagi. Wax on, wax off.

What Neuro-Vocal Method won't do is change the “you” in your singing. You'll still be yourself. You'll just be a better version of yourself. You'll be you with a bigger range, more control, more volume, and more endurance. Also, if you want to get those high, loud notes that the winners of the TV singing contests always seem to have, then you've come to the right place.

Neuro-Vocal Method is not for those pursuing classical technique.

It is specifically for those singing popular genres.

It's also not for those seeking a magic bullet.

There are no magic bullets.

GOOD SINGING IS GOOD SINGING

Most voice teachers say that the method they teach is applicable to any type or style of singing. That can be true if you're a beginning singer. It's also true in that all good technique has a couple of things in common: breath support and placement. (Placement describes where in the chest, head, and face a singer senses the resonance of tone while singing—more on that later). But the thing is, the closer you are to knowing what your singing is about (for you) and how you want your music to show up in the world, the more important learning the right stuff becomes.

There are differences between genres, including the sound and the role of the singer, the situation in which the singing happens, and the culture of the musical style. If a voice teacher has never sung in a band, for instance, it's hard for that teacher to understand what the singer in the band needs to learn and know.

Singers should get instruction appropriate to the style they sing. If your voice teacher tells you that the appropriate, accepted style of singing for the kind of music you love is “wrong,” it can mess with your self-confidence. You’ve put yourself in the hands of an expert, and that expert may not be willing or able to teach you what you want to learn. If you want to sing popular styles but you’re studying classical technique it can reduce the level of skill you already have in your chosen genre. In extreme cases it can result in vocal damage. The most common problem, though, is authenticity. Authentic singing comes from being comfortable with your ability. If your voice feels out of control it can make you feel self-conscious and insecure. That’s not authentic. That’s not the real you.

BEING REAL

When we open our mouths to sing, what comes out should be the right thing—an accurate reflection of how we want to express ourselves musically in the world. It’s got to be real. When what comes out of our mouths feels or sounds wrong to us, it’s...well, it’s not good. It’s frustrating and embarrassing. It keeps us from enjoying our singing and from fully expressing ourselves musically. It forces us to focus on ourselves and our voices instead of on the audience or the music.

When what flows from our lips sounds effortless and feels good, then all is right with our world. If we’ve really got it going on, we’re barely even aware of ourselves; we’re one with the music. It seems to emanate from us of its own accord.

I’ve often told my students, “If I could give you a pill that would make you feel, just for five minutes, the way your singing will feel when you master this method, you’d do anything I told you.” I don’t have that pill, unfortunately, but I know that if they’ll work with me, their singing will feel better than they’ve ever imagined. It’s impossible to describe what singers experience when their singing is easy, open, efficient, controlled, and real. There’s nothing yummier or more uplifting. There’s just nothing better. Including chocolate.

What’s most fun about Neuro-Vocal Method is that it seems to work by magic. You do these weird exercises. You sound bad on purpose. You change your focus from what you’re hearing to what you’re feeling as you sing. And then, after a few weeks, things start to happen all by themselves. You’re louder. That high note doesn’t feel so high. You’re not tired at the end of the gig. Your voice seems to be making these changes all on its own, and it’s really fun.

Later, after you’re more familiar with how your “new” voice feels and you’re sensing more (or a different sort of) mastery of your instrument, other people will start to notice too. That’s the bomb.

The bottom line is that if you’re willing to go through the weirdness and trust the

process, you'll be really glad you did. If you shortcut the process, try to second-guess the instructions, or temper the instructions with your own experience, you won't get the results I'm promising. Sorry. If you want what this method promises, you'll have to go with the program.

WHY CHANGE YOUR SINGING?

Most people who work on improving their singing are already natural singers. If you're one of them, singing has felt good, made you happy, and gotten you attention. There are things about your own singing that you really like—things you know sound good and earn you compliments. But again, if you're a singer, you're probably more discerning than the average person on the subject of singing. So there are probably things about your singing that you don't like.

Some common frustrations are:

- Feeling that you can't sing loudly enough
- Wanting more range—reaching higher or lower notes
- Feeling that your high notes are quiet or weak
- Feeling that your voice is unreliable, that it won't predictably do what you want it to or sound the way you think it should
- Suffering vocal fatigue—your voice gets tired quickly
- Suffering vocal fall-out—your voice hurts or is raspy after you sing
- Feeling hindered by your “break,” the notes at which your voice radically alters in volume and timbre (tone color)
- Fearing singing out of tune

For most non-singing people, these issues wouldn't matter—if they were aware of them at all. But to a singer they matter a lot. To a singer, having any of these issues is troubling in a way that non-singers just can't understand. When we open our mouths to sing and what comes out is something other than what we intended, it can rattle us to our core. Most of us have ways to cover up or compensate for the stuff we don't like about our singing, but that feels bad too. It can rob us of our confidence, our sense of who we are, our desire to share our singing, even the joy we get from music. For a singer, a voice that ain't representin' is no small thing. And it doesn't seem to matter if a singer is having these experiences in front of large audiences or in the living room singing karaoke. It's never good.

Some singers just work out ways to live with it, but they never stop being bothered by it. Most singers will try to fix it. They'll try on their own or with books, online programs, DVD courses, or voice teachers. A lot of the time they'll be able

to make the changes they wanted and go forward in life, joyously singing for themselves and others.

VOICE LESSONS

A lot of people are perfectly happy with the way they sing. There are also people who are mostly happy with the way they sing and feel that's good enough. And then, of course, there are people who'll dabble, trying to change their singing but not taking the plunge into private lessons. For those people the process isn't worth the time, money, commitment, risk, or any combination thereof. Some people take private voice lessons with a Trained Professional, either in person or through a program. Some of those find the process worth the investment: their singing improves. The rest will quit.

Some of the reasons people quit voice lessons are:

- The time commitment is too great
- The money commitment is too great
- The teacher or method doesn't meet their expectations
- The genre the teacher teaches isn't the genre they want to sing
- They realize that the teacher doesn't have a magic bullet
- The personalities of the teacher and the student don't mesh
- Things come up in their lives

Because I'm a singer and teacher of popular styles, and because I'm a Recovering Classical Singer, I've always been very aware of the fears people have around the issue of voice lessons. When I started voice lessons I didn't even know what classical singing was, but I ended up taking eight years of classical lessons. Then I had to learn how to sing normally again. I get it. Lessons can be scary. But they can also be so worth it.

THE PROMISES OF NEURO-VOCAL METHOD

These are the claims I can make confidently about Neuro-Vocal Method. I'm confident that they're true because I've watched this method work (as I've been refining it) for a couple of decades now. And, as the saying goes, a man with experience is never at the mercy of a man with a theory.

WHAT DOES NEURO-VOCAL METHOD DO?

- Neuro-Vocal Method alters your neural pathways. The exercises fool your brain into accepting new behaviors associated with an established intention. In other

words, the command “sing” brings a different, better result. It seems like magic.

- Neuro-Vocal Method doesn’t change your style. You still sound like you, but your voice is a more authentic representation of you and your music.
- Neuro-Vocal Method is healthy for your voice. You’ll be able to sing for hours and not get tired. You’ll be able to sing as long as you live. Your singing will feel really good.
- Neuro-Vocal Method is about efficiency. It teaches the larynx to behave in as efficient a manner as possible while teaching the physical supporting structures to allow for that efficiency.
- Neuro-Vocal Method gives you:
 - Increased vocal strength and stamina
 - Increased vocal range
 - Increased vocal control
 - Increased volume
 - Increased control over vocal breaks

I can guarantee these results. That’s a provisional guarantee, though. Neuro-Vocal Method will work for you if a) you’re ready to change, and b) you follow the program. It will not work for you if you try to interpret the method based on what your experience tells you is right, if you can’t stand to hear unattractive sounds come out of your mouth, or if you can’t make the time to do the exercises a few times a week. You’ll get the results if you invest some time and trust. If you don’t, you won’t.

If you want this to work, it will. I have YouTube videos to help you. I have audio support on my website. You can follow me on Twitter or Instagram. (If all that is old news by the time you’re reading this book, then look at whatever everyone’s using!) I know how important your singing is to you. You can do this!