

Expression

Expression needs to be as honest as it can be so think about a memory/ person/time in their life that relates to the song and use it as an "Emotional Anchor". Expression will come through naturally and you can build on it however you wish. If you can't relate the song to something in your own life then imagine yourself experiencing whatever it is that the song is about, becoming a character and acting through the music.

You can break down expression as much as you'd like, but I like to think of it as 3 main sections, vocal expression & effects, facial expression and physical expression.

Vocal Expression & Effects

Consider their tone, dynamics, diction, rhythm and phrasing, onsets and offsets.

Tone:

Use an array on vocal tones when performing, round/thick, aspirate/breathy, nasally/thin etc. Moving the vocal tone can change the whole demeanour of a song.

Dynamics:

Keep the song moving by using quiet dynamics, loud dynamics, sudden dynamic changes and gradual changes to keep audiences engaged.

Diction:

Soft, medium and tight diction can instantly change the mood of a piece. For example, soft diction can be used to represent sadness whilst tight diction can represent anger

Onsets and Offsets:

This is the way you start and end a note. There are 3 types of onsets & offsets to work with:

Aspirate/Breathy - use a 'h' sound to add breath to the start/end of a note

Glottal/Hard - sudden start or end to the sound

Balanced/Smooth - gradual/connected sound, use a 'y' sound to help you

You can also add a vocal fry to your onset to change it up.

Vibrato:

Along with Falsetto, vibrato can be seen as one of those elusive techniques, you can either do it or you can't, but that's not true! Vibrato is the effect created when a singer tilts their Thyroid Cartilage and if you have good vocal technique and practice these exercises regularly, really focusing on the feeling and sensations then you will gain a natural vibrato. You can practice all of the following exercises or focus on the one that your student relates to the best.

Cry Technique

This is a Vocal Estill Training method. Imagine being a child, your sibling has sweets but you don't, it's totally unfair so you're really going to moan and whine about it. That tone is known as "Cry Technique", it allows the voice to wobble and oscillate freely between notes.

You can also pretend to be a spooky ghost, wobbling your voice as you slide up and down on "ooOOooOOooh".

Shakey Hands

Clasp your hands in front of your chest, sustain a note then wobble your hands, feeling your throat and larynx wobble with it. Of course this isn't how we want to create vibrato moving forward but it allows your student to feel the sensations of their larynx wobbling, an intense version of vibrato.

Fist Pump

Similar to the previous exercise, this is to feel the sensation of the larynx wobbling. Make a fist with one hand, place it on your diaphragm, place your other hand over your fist, sustain a note and press your fist into your diaphragm in a pulsing action. This sends pumps of air through the vocal chords and although it's not how vibrato is actually created, again it is a great way of simulating the sensation of vibrato.

Oscillation of Pitch

Choose a note that is comfortable mid-range for your student and oscillate on a semitone (half note) or tone (whole note). Starting slow and speeding up as you go.

Rhythm and Phrasing:

Legato, staccato and accents being the first aspects of rhythm that you want to look at with students. Accenting the most poignant word in a phrase can add a lot of dramatic effect, using legato phrases leans more towards sadness, staccato more towards anger etc.

The melodic phrasing your student uses will alter the feel of the piece. Longer phrasing often used for more relaxed music and shorter phrasing for more upbeat.

Facial Expression

Relaxed/engaged muscles:

This can be one of the quickest ways to create either a soft/sad expression or intense/stern without considering anything specifically

Eyebrows:

Simply moving your eyebrows can adjust your whole facial expression

Eye shape/intensity:

Widening/narrowing your eyes, you can even pull in the outer corner of your eye if you really think about it. Consider the shape of your eye lids and the intensity of your stare.

Lift/drop cheekbones:

Obviously you can't move your cheekbones but it's a quick trick to brighten/lift or relax/sadden the face

Mouth movement:

Mouth shape is important for good technique and tonal control so take that in to consideration when doing this but some songs may lean more towards a smaller mouth shape/larger mouth shape, be it to fit the mood of the song or the characterisation of a musical theatre piece.

Physical Expression

Posture:

Rolling your shoulders back, lifting your head and standing tall is a huge contrast to dropping your hips, hunching your shoulders and looking under your eyes. Consider your posture immediately because it will change the whole demeanour of the piece and you'll find your vocals will follow suit

Head Movement:

A slight tilt, raise or drop of the head can add so much expression to a particular moment in a song.

Hand Gestures:

I usually split this into 2. Your hands are representing what the lyrics are saying e.g. say you're singing about something big your gesture would

be big or if you're singing about something far away, an outreached hand would represent that. The other is that your hand gestures follow the music e.g. following the beat/rhythm and/or the melody so your hand moves up as you sing higher, and comes down as you sing lower.

Everyone has their own performance style, mess around and see what comes naturally to your student.

If they don't feel comfortable with hand gestures don't push it straight away but if it's been a while then ask them to keep their hands up, elbows bent 90 degrees and keep them there through the song, do it with them. Simply pick out the beat when they can, bouncing their hands, clicking, clapping, whatever they are comfortable with just so it gets them moving their hands. Follow them or they follow you, whatever suits your student best, use simple gestures and praise every small milestone. Once you've broken the ice it's just a matter of reminding them on the regular.

Spacing:

Singers can get stuck in one position on stage so encourage your student to use the space during the lesson. You could ask them to start the song in one spot and be in another spot for the chorus etc. If you don't do it in lesson, they won't do it on stage!

All that being said, expression is the most personal aspect of singing so be sensitive, be patient but also be passionate and encouraging!