

An Introduction to the McClosky Technique

by Maria Argyros

I am a voice teacher and Certified McClosky Voice Technician. I work with the techniques developed by David Blair McClosky, a pioneer in the field of voice science and rehabilitation in the 1950's and 1960's, and author of *Your Voice At Its Best*. Mr. McClosky was a recognized authority in the treatment of voice disorders caused by misuse. He was founder of the voice clinic at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary in Boston, taught at several universities, and lectured throughout the world. Among his clients were many celebrities and politicians, including President John F. Kennedy. Before the study of voice science began in the 1970's, little was known about how the voice works, or how to care for it. The information provided by the technology available to us today has affirmed what David Blair McClosky believed and taught. His work is being carried on through the McClosky Institute of Voice. The Institute offers seminars and workshops nationwide for professional voice users, as well as a certification course.

The goal of the McClosky techniques is to free the voice of tension and eliminate compensatory behaviors for sound production. The techniques offer gentle and effective ways to relax the extrinsic muscles of the face, tongue, jaw, and throat. The intrinsic muscles within the larynx will function naturally as a result of freeing the extrinsic muscles, and this assures the proper approximation of the vocal folds by keeping them free enough to respond to and coordinate with the breath flow through the glottis. This easy onset on phonation initiated by the breath and without tension is vital to good vocal health, and is the paramount focus of the McClosky philosophy.

McClosky advocated a combination of abdominal and thoracic breathing while incorporating proper body alignment to achieve functional efficiency for breath management. In addition to the use of the abdominal muscles, the ribcage must remain suspended on exhalation. This maintenance of the suspension of the ribs keeps the lungs from being subject to elastic recoil and the effect of gravity which would cause them to lose the air almost immediately. McClosky insisted there be a constant "cushion of air" to

protect the vocal folds from coming together and oscillating too forcefully.

Also developed by McClosky is a specific description of six areas of relaxation which offers a hands-on approach to dealing with muscular tensions. Verbally saying "relax the tongue," for instance, may not be enough if the tongue muscle is in a contracted state at the root, and/or is habitually tense. Working with the tongue muscle will help to soften it enough to be able to "obey" the verbal or mental commands to relax. By using these relaxation exercises, the teacher has more tools available to help the singer actually change the condition of the problem muscle(s). The muscle habits and tensions can be dealt with specifically, and real change can take place. The six areas are the face, tongue, swallowing muscles (suprahyoid muscles), jaw, larynx, and neck. The exercises are briefly explained as follows:

1. Face:

With the pads of the fingers of both hands, slowly massage the facial muscles starting with the forehead and working down to the cheeks, masseter muscles, mouth, and chin. Use circular motions. Spend time on areas that feel tight. Let the jaw hang slack.

2. Tongue:

Let the tongue relax and allow it to come forward to rest on the lower lip. Now slide the tongue out of the mouth to stretch it toward the chin, feeling a pull under the chin. Hold the stretch. Then allow the tongue to retract slowly back into the mouth and remain soft. Repeat several times.

3. Swallowing muscles:

The muscles felt under the chin are the ones responsible for elevating the larynx, and they should never be tense during phonation. One can massage these muscles by using the pads of the thumbs of each hand, and pressing vertically up and in, alternating hands, until the swallowing muscles are softened and relaxed.

4. Jaw:

The jaw should drop and move without resistance from the chewing muscles. Take the chin in your hands with the thumbs under the chin and forefingers on top. With your hands slowly start to move the jaw up and down. Your hands should be in control, and the jaw should not resist movement at the command of the hands. Proceed until the up and down movement is fluid.

5. Larynx:

The strap muscles of the neck should not inhibit the larynx from being freely suspended in the throat. Hold the larynx on each side of the thyroid cartilage with the thumb and forefinger of one hand. Very gently move it from side to side, keeping the tongue and neck relaxed. It should move easily, and never be forced.

6. Neck:

Let your head completely let go and fall forward with the chin almost touching the chest. Keep your head down and gently turn your head from side to side while letting your head feel heavy. The neck muscles will feel stretched and lengthened. Then lift the head and balance freely on top of the spine.

It is helpful to begin these exercises with a calm and unhurried state of mind. All of these exercises are cumulative. Relaxation in one area should remain while going to the next. Over time musculature tensions in the entire throat and mouth area can change, and vocal freedom can not only be achieved, but maintained.

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