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No Spandex Required: Yoga Stretches for Singers
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The following yogic stretches were selected specifically for singers to improve posture, breath support, and stage presence. Please remind your students they should feel a stretch, but not pain. If pain, simply back off from the pose. We should not hear "ow" (common with kids the first time they do new stretches not because it is painful, but because it is different). Tell them each day our bodies feel different, based upon sleep, amount of activity or amount of sitting at a desk, and many factors. Be okay with that reality. Accept where you are TODAY.

- 1. Focus:** Find comfortable seat, hip points rooted into the seat. Quiet your mind, focus on your breath, be in this moment. Set a goal or intention. Can use inspirational quotes of your choice. "I want to be that teacher that when my students look back on their music education, they feel love in their hearts, have a smile on their face, and can truly say that they knew I cared." Slowly blink eyes back into the room.
- 2. Half Neck Circles:** drop chin to chest, leading with nose inhale chin toward right shoulder, exhale back down, repeat on other side. Can do full circles if you prefer, moving slowly and with the breath.
- 3. Side stretch:** with hands clasped behind head, shoulders melted down, soften base of neck and slowly lead with right elbow toward ground. Be careful not to lean forward just to get farther toward the floor. Repeat on opposite side.
- 4. Hip Circles:** Placing hands at base of knees, relax shoulders down, then lead with heart (not rounding shoulders) toward your knee, circling around front, toward other knee, then rounding back drawing navel in toward spine. Complete a few in one direction, then circle the opposite direction.
- 5. Shoulder Circles:** place hands on shoulders, then do slow circles forward to the full range extension. After 3 slow circles, go in the opposite direction.
- 6. Side Stretch Wrist Pull:** Inhale arms overhead. Grasp and lengthen right wrist with left hand. With your exhale, lean toward side with lengthened wrist. Inhale back up. Exhale arms down. Repeat on other side.
- 7. Seated Twist:** Inhale your arms overhead, then drop your left hand to your right knee, dropping your raised right arm behind you, possibly grasping the chair behind you. Glance over your right shoulder. Repeat on other side.
- 8. Seated Cat/Cow:** Interlace hands and on your exhale press palms away from you, rounding your spine. In this position your hands are pushing away from you while your spine is rounding back behind you. Next, we inhale the clasped hands upward the ceiling, dropping the shoulders and relaxing the base of the neck.
- 9. Thread the Needle:** Kneeling in front of the chair, rest your forearms flat on the bench. Inhale your right arm up, following with your gaze. Exhale the arm back down, "threading it" behind the left elbow. Rest your right shoulder on the chair, lowering your head to rest as well. Stretch left hand away from you. Option to take a bind.

10. Down Dog at the Chair: Stand away from the chair, placing your flattened palms on the bench. Step feet away, until your body forms an upside down V “down dog” shape. Feel the stretch in the hamstrings. If it feels like too much, step in closer to the bench and back off from the pose. Can add variations with leg lifts, hip openers, etc.

11. Sun Salutations: Starting standing with your arms at your sides, inhale your arms away from your body and to the sky. Arms align with ears. Can press palms together to engage biceps and triceps more. Lower hands to heart center (prayer hands). Inhale, repeating that pattern, but lower hands through the heart center into a forward fold, stopping with hands on thighs, calves, ankles, or the floor. Inhale half way up, lengthening the spine, and exhale back down. Inhale from floor, feeling the expansive breath filling the torso, returning hands to your heart center.

12. Utkatasana/Chair Pose: From standing pose, lower knees to sit in a pretend chair behind you that doesn’t exist. Pause. Can add variations, such as shifting weight to one side and crossing opposite ankle over knee. Other variation is the side prayer twist.

13. Pencil Pose: From standing pose, shift weight into left foot, go onto tiptoe of right foot, bending right knee and raising foot to meet your right hand. Stay here, or place left hand on waist, or inhale left hand to sky. Be sure that your knee is facing straight forward, and not twisting to either side.

14. Dancer Pose: Pencil Pose, then tilt forward with arm at diagonal.

15. Eagle Pose: Raise elbows with flat palms faced toward each other. Inhale the right hand under left elbow, hooking right arm under left and drawing the right palm to rest flat closer to left palm (slightly under). Relax the shoulders down, and lift the elbows. Breathe into places of tension in the shoulders.

16. Leg/Ankle Stretches: From seated with feet flat on floor, grasp sides of chair with both hands, rooting into seat bones. Slowly inhale, lengthening one leg. Flex foot, roll ankle in each direction, return to ground. Point and flex each foot. Instead, singers can cross one ankle over other thigh and do the same process.

17. Warrior 2: Face sideways in front of your chair. Take a big step front foot forward toward the front of the room, with toes facing the front of the room. Put a deep bend in the front knee, keeping the knee directly over the ankle. Take arms out to a T (parallel to the ground).

18. Triangle: From Warrior 2 pose, lengthen/straighten the front leg, and single forward at the hips, keeping arms level (parallel to the floor). Slowly lower the front arm down to the center of the calf and extend the top arm up toward the ceiling. The back should be as if it is leaning up against a wall. Do not reach to get closer to the floor by misaligning the back.

19. General Relaxation: Legs up the wall. Slows heart rate, reduces swelling in feet and legs, can use sand bag on feet, block under sacrum, or add blanket under head. Get into staff pose on left side up against the wall. Swing legs up while turning body to the left. Lower back to the floor.

20. Mountain Pose: Stand in “singer posture”, with long spine, crown of head toward ceiling, relaxed shoulders, soften the base of the neck, feet as far apart as your shoulders. Mountain pose is similar to standing singer’s posture, except palms face the conductor.

The light in me honors the light in each of you. Thank you for allowing me to share with you today. Namaste! melissajoykeylock@gmail.com