

Abstract

Blind individuals have become renowned musicians since ancient times. Composers such as Francesco Landini and Johann Sebastian Bach are only two of the most well-known examples.

Today, most musically inclined youth aim at launching a career as singers. In particular, visually impaired students are naturally interested in the exploration of sound, and are acquainted with their voice since childhood. Therefore, many of them, as young adults, express the wish to become professional singers.

However, after enrolling in advanced voice-training programs, they come across a certain technical issue unique to vocalists with serious visual impairments. Specifically, in order to maintain a sense of stability and equilibrium, blind people usually adopt a characteristic way of standing and walking. The feet are far apart, the knees hyperextended and the hips, pelvic floor and lower abdominal muscles extremely stiff. Movement is initiated from the hips and each leg behaves as though it contained no joints.

As a totally blind professional singer and voice pedagog, I have worked with a number of visually impaired students across Europe. I have realized that the manner of walking I described above, precludes the displacement of the lower abdominal muscles and does not allow the diaphragm to descend adequately during inhalation. Consequently, the enthusiastic student attempts to produce a viable sound using very little air volume. In order to compensate, she raises the sub-glottic pressure and resorts to the production of pressed phonation.

This phenomenon caused by the manner of walking unique to blind individuals, has never been recorded in the literature. I believe that voice pedagogues who work with visually impaired vocalists, must be aware of the above mentioned particularity. Failing to notice or address the cause of this issue, may result in permanent injury to the student's vocal mechanism.