

The 7 Biggest Mistakes Made By Singers...



By Daniel Tompkins

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Introduction

Hello, thanks for downloading the e-book. If you're reading this, you've either signed up to my mailing list or subscribed to the 'Daniel Tompkins Vocal Coaching' website. Either way I'm really pleased you're here and I look forward to helping you learn and develop into a consistent and competent singer.

For those of you that don't know me, I've been in the music business since 2006 and have been involved with many live bands and studio-based projects. In that time I've worked with various underground and mainstream record labels, released a varied back catalogue of records AND have been lucky enough to have won and been nominated for a host of awards.

One thing that sets me apart from the majority of other vocal coaches available on the Internet and anywhere else for that matter is that I am an active singer and regularly tour worldwide. I am no stranger to the touring lifestyle and the difficulties that come with it. I have a wealth of knowledge and experience that I can't wait to pass onto you.

This short e-book on the '7 Biggest Mistakes Made By Singers' is based upon my personal experience working with students over the past 8 years but also heavily influenced by the mistakes that I've personally made on my own developmental journey as a singer. One thing I like to say is that 'I've made all the mistakes so that you don't have to!'

I hope you find it an interesting read at the least. I did have a lot of fun writing it. As you make your way through it try and keep an open mind. Some things might seem like common sense while others might be more insightful!

1. Ignorance is bliss? So how does the voice work?

If the truth were told, for years I failed to genuinely understand and appreciate my voice. Who does? In the beginning more or less everyone hates the sound of his or her own voice, it simply takes time to develop and discover and when that time comes everything will make sense.

There are days when my mind boggles at how incredible THE voice really is! It wasn't until I took a closer look at my own that I became truly mesmerized by its complex and beautiful nature, however you look at it! And that's exactly what I did... I looked at it!

Consistently for over 6 months I remember waking up in the morning with a sore / dry throat, bad breath and this sensation of feeling a lump each time I swallowed. A doctor / friend of mine explained to me that it sounded like 'Globus', which is the feeling of having a lump in your throat when there is in fact none there at all! After a lengthy chat to my doctor she eventually referred me to a voice specialist at the local hospital, who offered me a Laryngoscopy. Seeing your voice internally for the first time is a surreal experience and as a singer / vocal coach, priceless.

The human voice functions as a result of complex muscular movement and co-ordination. The air you exhale provides energy for the vocal cords to produce vibrations up to 1000 times per second as they draw together by the myriad of muscles contracting around them. The vibrations produced here are then sent resonating into the various open cavities (chambers) in our upper body creating our unique human sound; it's a wonderful thing.

Every single voice in the world is completely different to the next much in the same way that fingerprints are also unique. Our voices help us to identify those we know and love; to communicate with one another; to help us recognise emotions and to create wonderful sounds through singing. The human voice is an extraordinarily powerful gift that all singers should treat with the respect it commands and deserves.

Adopt this attitude of understanding from day 1 and I promise what is to follow will make much more sense and your growth as a singer will happen much faster.



Tip 1...

Commit to understanding

2. Preparation and Maintenance is KEY!

People often ask 'How do you manage to sing so consistently on tour?' The reply I give is usually along the lines of, 'Are you serious? That was such a bad show' but that's what happens when you have high standards right? It's ok to criticise your own performances. I always watch back and study live footage from shows and if I see or hear a mistake I try my hardest to correct it on the next. Consistency for me is so important. If people can fly from other countries or drive a few hundred miles to the nearest show then I'm going to deliver the very best I can.

However, touring for a singer can be tough, especially for those of us that are working hard to deliver consistent, solid performances on tour, most of which, these days are scheduled with back-to-back dates and no respite. Getting into a daily routine that can prepare and help your voice throughout the day is important. It's a lifestyle change. Cleanliness, eating healthy, staying fit, vocal routine and resting well are just a few simple things to get you started. It's very easy to neglect these things and ignore the needs of your voice. Everyday it will respond differently and let you know how it feels, listen to it. You need to learn to recognise the warning signs of neglect and vocal fatigue and know how take action to prevent it developing.

A lot of inexperienced singers fail to exercise their voice sufficiently before and after performances and the majority of those that do, do it the wrong way. I often hear people bellowing out songs at the top of their voice or singing the same scale in the same voice type for 5 minutes and then they're done! It's simply not enough. In essence, the longer you spend systematically warming up the more longevity you will have on stage. I easily spend around 30 - 45 minutes gently building my voice into good connection and importantly, relaxing before I enter the stage. De-compressing the voice is crucial to keep you balanced and controlled.

On stage, there are also a number of techniques I use to stay relaxed even during the high-energy performances I'm typically a part of. De-compression (use of the vocal fry register and other gentle exercises) will save your voice and do it's part to prevent fatigue setting in.

Equally at the end of your set, it's important to warm down, adopt vocal silence and rest. Your voice has worked so hard during that 45 minute set that it needs rest and if day in and day out you keep cracking the whip it will break! Don't make the mistake of speaking above the PA system to be heard after the show, use your phone to type talk or speak quietly into someone's ear. Don't smoke, drink and party hard if you want to survive the shows and more importantly do your fans a favour and show some respect by performing the very best you can. You will be rewarded for it.



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Tip 2...

Preparation and maintenance is KEY!

3. Straining so hard it hurts!

I would be lying if I said I wasn't guilty of this. In fact I've made ALL the mistakes enough times now and I want you to learn from them! Straining hindered my progress for a long time until I understood how to access my 'Mix Voice' which is something that I can show you down the line. Although back then, the hindrance was not just down to my own lack of understanding but also the music and singers that I used to listen to. I admired them, they sounded so amazing as I drove down the motorway with the music full volume. I loved the passion, the perfect execution of those golden high notes sending shivers down my spine. I wanted to do that so badly. I wanted to feel that passion and be a part of it but something was missing and I was always frustrated when I couldn't hit those sweet sounds.

Your voice, as we know, is unique. This means that you are you and you alone! Get to know your voice. I would estimate that 9/10 new students I take on have no idea what their range is. Once you know 'physically' what notes you can hit then you can narrow this down to your 'Tessitura', which is the most musically acceptable and comfortable range for a singer and a part of the voice where we experience the best texture or timbre.

Most singers like myself, at some point have written top lines WAY too high to sing properly live or even to sing well! I'm talking about those notes you try to hit that are so high they just sound wrong! The one's you know way in advance are coming. As you prepare to hit the note, the chin lifts, neck stretches out, eyes disappear to wrinkles, veins in your temple and neck bulge and your face explodes! Well maybe not that far but you've seen it haven't you? Guests at a wedding reception wailing away to that last chorus of 'Livin On A Prayer' No-one needs to hear that!

Not only is singing outside your Tessitura unrealistic it's going to hurt and damage your voice over time by abusing the vocal cords as you strain.

You'll only need to hit these notes a few times before you experience that annoying sore throat, feel defeated and want to give up! I've been there before trust me.

Of course I'm not saying you can't be adventurous and experiment at your limit but you have to do this in the right way. You need to be patient...take time to discover and develop your voice sensibly and systematically. This is the correct way to increase your range and avoid causing any unnecessary damage.



Tip 3...

Find your range

4. Identity Crisis. WHO AM I?

I ask myself this question everyday (I'm laughing right now) Sometimes I look back and cringe because for a long time I was very confused at the start, when performing on stage was new to me. Sure it's a great feeling when you perform to an audience, it can be a rush and a very liberating experience but something deep down wasn't gelling. I remember feeling very uncomfortable with my image, I was insecure and the way I performed on stage would jar against the music. I simply wasn't being ME.

You know at times it felt like I was fighting against my natural self, forcing charisma and pushing to be something I could never be. I felt this way for a long time. I didn't understand who I was meant to be as singer. All the above mixed with a doubt in my own ability was a recipe for disaster. I was a mess on stage really; a train wreck waiting to happen and I wonder why people in the audience would give me blank unimpressed expressions!

Then one day I was once with a group of people who started discussing the local music scene. 'I just can't stand it when singers use that fake American accent'; a few giggle around a table. I distinctly remember shrinking in my chair when I realized they were talking about me. How embarrassing? BUT they were so right. Why was I trying to copy an American accent when I'm from the middle of nowhere in England? ... Because I knew nothing else! All I used to listen to were American rock bands. I was trying to be something I wasn't.

How many times have you been to see a band with a singer like that? It's uncomfortable to watch isn't it? It's hard to listen to the same old cycle of bands churning out metal with the front man trying his damned hardest to sound like James Hetfield. The vibe from the stage is wrong and people will sense that negative energy.

This can be hard to hear because like me you probably aren't even aware that you might be imitating other singers but time to get a reality check.

Tip 4...

Find your voice - record yourself

5. The singers curse.

Try as hard as we may, it's sometimes unavoidable catching a cold...it's annoying for sure. If you're really unlucky colds can sometimes develop into chest infections or a more serious respiratory illness like Bronchitis. I seem to be prone to colds, sometimes before, during or after lengthy tours and probably brought on by general fatigue. A few times I've had a cold develop into Bronchitis, which has caused me some real set backs. Sometimes I've been unable to sing for weeks and not only that it's taken me even more time to get my voice back into good shape.

Over time I've learnt to recognise the early stages of colds, coughs and chest infections because I've had so many over the years. I think experienced singers to a degree become hypersensitive to them. It goes without saying that using hand wash is a great way to help prevent a cold as well as keeping that healthy balanced diet and staying fit but what should you do when down with a cold?

If you're lucky and have a minor cold then regular menthol steaming of the voice can help keep it clear, plenty of room temperature water, good food and most importantly, rest. Try not to swallow phlegm and keep it off the chest, regularly blow your nose, this can in my experience decrease the chances of developing a chest infection. It's also important to refrain from using the voice aside from gentle exercising to maintain good daily connection and if you REALLY do need to sing then spend extra time warming up but be gentle and take your time. Change your

performance anyway you can to prevent unnecessary push and strain. Your voice is vulnerable under the stress of a cold and of course you'll carry an exaggerated nasality due to blocked airways. I've survived with common colds on tour many times but if you ever have the option to avoid singing on a cold then do so.

Mistakes happen when you try and sing through thick colds, chest infections, Bronchitis, Laryngitis and Tonsillitis and other like illnesses. This will greatly inhibit the voice and make singing nearly if not impossible. **DO NOT SING** in this state as it can create real damage to the vocal cords. The muscles in the throat could be so inflamed and swollen that the cords can't draw together effectively and using your voice in this state will make matters worse.



It still bemuses me that some managers, agents and record labels can pressurise their artists to perform with illness and risk causing permanent damage. I've seen this happen time and time again and also been under the same pressure. If you're really ill and struggling to talk then why oh why are you going on stage and risking permanent damage? You'll

probably sound like a strangled cat anyway right? Don't risk damaging the reputation of you and your band, have a professional attitude and look after yourself.

Tip 5...

Reduce getting illness - vitamins, supplements, diet, hygiene and cleanliness



6. Overconfidence and non-structured learning

Confidence plays a huge role in performance but finding the right balance is foremost. How confident are you? Are you the kind of singer that goes into auditions and performances feeling certain that you'll sing your best from the very first note or are you anxious, insecure and full of self-doubt?

Let me tell you that for years I struggled with confidence issues and even now I still get a little anxious one way or the other. It's only natural to feel this way but did you know that YOU have more control over your own self-confidence than you might think? If you suffer with a lack of confidence a good place to start is by getting hold of your inner voice, start telling yourself 'Yes I can!' rather than 'No, I can't'. Have a positive attitude towards singing, your voice is a gift so enjoy it and over time you'll quash that self-doubt.

Helping my students to build a healthy confidence is so important. However, I find the biggest cause of self-doubt in singers to be found mostly in their own lack of technique and ability. It makes a lot of sense; if you struggle to stay in pitch or have very little control over your voice then you'll naturally be a little shy and apprehensive about singing in front of people. One thing I try and tell my students is to simply let go of their inhibitions. In no time at all we're training the voice by making all manner of weird and wonderful sounds. The key is having a positive energy.

But what if you're guilty of being over-confident and too self-assured? Maybe you 'Know it all'? What if you just don't see the point in training because you've got 'natural' talent? For a while I was guilty of this and it hindered my progress. As a young singer I knew that I had a certain natural ability to sing and for a period I didn't consider training, I didn't see the need. I was over confident but what a mistake because in hindsight I've lost important development time and could have been a lot further down the line a lot sooner! The fable of 'The Tortoise and the Hare' springs to mind.

Also 'modesty' speaks volumes. You know some of the best singers I've ever come across are very modest people. Modesty encourages patience and cultivates respect in singers. Having the 'Know it all' attitude is only going to deny you the chance of furthering your development and skipping the basics will only set you back. Overconfidence encourages non-structured learning.

Having full control and a strong understanding of your voice is the key to success. The best way to improve your voice and ultimately build your self-confidence is by following a structured and systematic method of training. It will take time, it will be an investment in your talent and it will be hard work but with perseverance and dedication you can become a powerful, confident singer.

Tip 6...

Find structured learning with an experienced figure

7. Failure to find the right coach

In my early twenties I made the decision to take singing lessons. I knew this was something I had to do, especially if I wanted to be a professional singer. However, it was an interesting time for me because I was in my third year's service as a full-time Police Officer, here in the UK, having joined at the age of 18. I never studied at university and hadn't really travelled that far.

It seemed an impossible venture and at the time I was tied down to a mortgage on a new home and had various financial commitments that made the prospect of leaving my job seem unrealistic...yet there was a yearning in me. I needed give it a go; if I didn't follow my dream or at least try I knew I'd regret it for the rest of my life. It was important to me.

At the time it seemed the only way forward was to take lessons from a classical coach, which I did consistently for several months. It was a costly investment and having one 30-minute lesson every week just didn't feel enough. Eventually I decided to leave. I wasn't comfortable with my teacher; being stood in front of Piano singing theatrical songs from 'West Side Story' felt strange considering the CD's in my car consisted of hard rock, thrash, punk-rock, pop and metal.

With traditional / classical singing you can learn many wonderful techniques that can translate throughout all genres of singing. This is something I was initially confused about. I ultimately wanted to be a Rock singer but I didn't want to go through the process of learning classical material because it was alien to me. I needed someone with common ground, someone that wasn't just a teacher but someone, who was actually on the road, touring, living the lifestyle of the professional singer; someone relatable, competent and inspiring.

I like to believe that I can be that person for other aspiring singers. I'm proof that despite the obstacles you can achieve your dreams; it just takes time, self-belief, hard work and dedication.

I've made ALL the mistakes so that YOU don't have to. I'm now an award winning, prominent and very active touring singer; I know how to survive on the road under extremely demanding circumstances and can show you a systematic method of vocal training to make you a stronger, confident, capable singer so that when you're ready maybe you can continue to share the knowledge you've gained and also help to inspire others.

Tip 7...

Find a coach/instructor that you feel is right for you....

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel Tompkins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the top of the word "Tompkins" across the top of the signature.