

Using the breath for musical effect

It's more than just oxygen -- it's a part of the musical experience. Music judge and coach Kevin Keller explains how.

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By Kevin Keller, Music Judge/Coach

There are a number of things that make a group "musical". One of the primary tools is the **delivery of the breath**. Yes, the *delivery* of the breath. The breath is the most important part of each and every phrase; more important than any note that you sing. Furthermore, the breath concludes the musical phrase rather than starting it.

When the breath is the most important part of the phrase **and** it concludes the phrase, you must energize the end of the phrase to raise the musical value of the breath. You will also sustain the energy through the phrase and build it, as opposed to plodding along and falling into chord worshipping (whether you intended to or not!). This reinforces the lyrical message of the song. Musically, you can sing louder, softer, faster, slower, more/less color, more/less texture. Just about anything you believe will work actually will work. You manage your breath better, because less air is expended needlessly at the beginning of the phrase. You improve your synchronization on attacks and releases. When the breath is "ordinary" (re: a place to get air), all that you can do is exactly what you were doing with dynamics, texture, color, tempo, etc. This is not musically appealing!

Take one of your repertoire songs and perform this exercise. Sing 32 bars where the breath is ordinary, a place to get air. Then sing those same 32 bars and focus on making the breath the most musically interesting part of the phrase. See what results you get and which you like better.

There are a host of other things you will discover a focus on the breath will bring. Enjoy!