



The Voice Behind the Mask

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE: As actors, one of the most important aspect of their job lies within their voice. Being able to have the upmost control and stability of their sound is how good actors can become great actors. This has posed the question upon many of, “how can we find our most natural voice?” We have decided to expand on this question and search to find the answer by observing actors in various stages of their training here at FSU.

METHODS: Eighteen students of various backgrounds were used in our examinations. The first step came in introducing a survey to our participants to learn more about the things that have affected their lives, and in turn their voices, up to this stage in their training. After the survey, we were able to begin closer investigations on each actor. All participants were given a monologue to perform. First at the beginning of a five-month period, and then at the end of it. In the time between, they were introduced to various exercises created by voice professionals that are stated to loosen the voice and allow a performer to connect to their roots.

RESULTS: From the beginning to the end of the examination process, great change was able to be seen within our participants. Not only did they discover freedom within their voices, but in their bodies as well. In viewing the performances, it was clear that many turned from looking and sounding like a person acting, to looking and sounding like a person living naturally. Acting isn’t about the performer believing what they are saying, but about getting the audience to believe them and remain in the moment. Acting is living through imaginary circumstances and bringing yourself into your performance.

CONCLUSION: Through our lives, we discover our voices by various means, but within that time, we are also faced with many hinderances. We are most in touch with our natural sound when we are babies and these outside influences have yet to touch our lives. Due to this, not a single one of our participants could be deemed as knowing their “natural voice.” Every person has faced outside influences even if they have come in different forms. This allowed our research to only show us improvements. With a neutral base in what we studied, we could expand and discover more about the voice. In our research we were able to not only answer the question of “how can we find our most natural voice?” but bring new light to the limitations we face and ways that the performer can break these barriers to embrace the voice hidden behind the restrictions in our lives.

INTRODUCTION

My research stands to answer the question of how to free your most natural voice as an actor in the performing arts field. To actors, the most important aspect of their job is their voice. Being able to have the upmost control and stability of their sound is how good actors can become great actors. However, this mindset serves as more of a hinderance than an advantage. Our natural voices are the ones we have at birth from the first time we cry. The impulse of sound should come from desire and instinct, not from control. How we are raised, and the norms of society impedes this impulse and through my research, I plan to find a way to break the restrictions we have been raised with.

METHODS

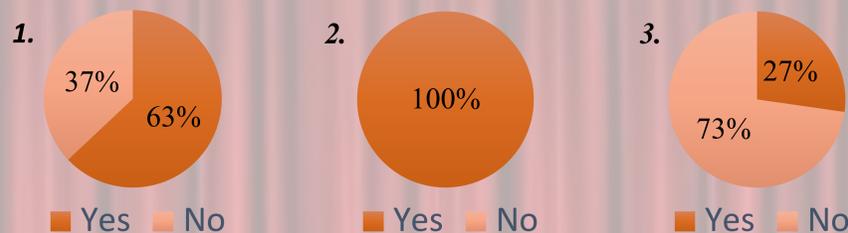


Figure 1. Do you have any siblings?

Figure 2. Have you ever been told to be quiet?

Figure 3. Have you been told you were too loud?

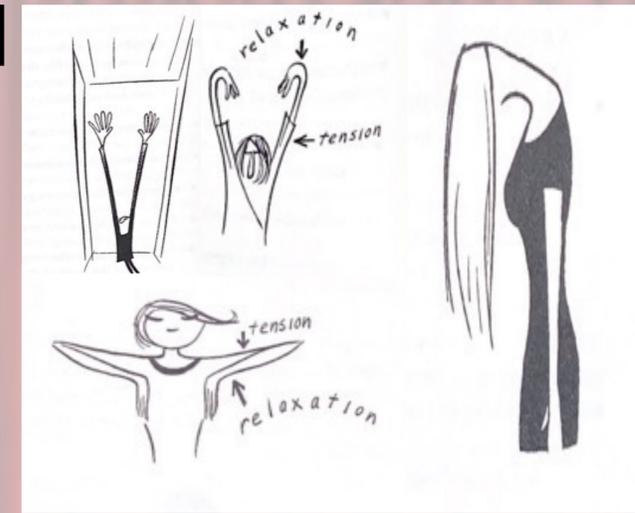
Shown are results from three of the questions presented on the survey given to our participants. While most questions had a varying percentage for responses, **Figure 2.** shows the one question with a unanimous result. This proves how, within our spread, not a single participant was free from any sort of outside influence. This gave us the base to continue our research knowing that everyone was lacking access to their natural voice.



Have you ever noticed how when you ask a child a question, they will give you more honest of an answer than most adults would, no matter how brutal? This is due to the fact that they haven’t yet learned to filter the things they say to fit the standards of society. Adults learn to sometimes circumvent the truth to avoid conflict or hurt feelings. This is exactly the type of barrier we searched to break. Social conditioning as we grow older is what prevents us from using our natural voices and following the impulses we feel. For our research, we asked all of our participants to never lie. At first, it sounded like a difficult task to all involved, but by the end of the five month period, not only were our actors freer with their speech, but we were all able to work in a more collaborative and trusting environment. To free the natural voice, you must also be able to free your natural words.

RESULTS

Please view this clip of a first and final performance of the monologue from one of our participants. In your viewing, assess for yourselves which performance feels more believable to you as an audience member. You will be able to tell, from our work and exercises on discovering the natural voice, which performance you are seeing. Feel free to email your thoughts and what you gathered from the clip. We are open for discussion and would love to hear what you think!



Above shows illustrations from Kristin Linklater’s *Freeing the Natural Voice* in one of the many exercises our actors partook in. The steps of the exercise are as follows:

STEP 1: Stand easily with your feet six to eight inches apart. Be aware of your weight evenly distributed over both feet; be aware that the weight of your body is balanced equally between the balls of your feet and heels.

STEP 2: Focus your attention into your elbow joints; rotate them forward and let them float gently up in front of your body toward the ceiling. This should involve your upper arms only. Now let your wrists relax. Then your forearms. Now let your upper arms drop heavily and hang loosely. Now let the wight of your head drop heavily forward.

STEP 3: With your eyes closed, run your mind’s eye down from your head to your feet and let it travel up from your feet, up through your legs, to your torso.

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Help us continue our research!