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WHAT KIND OF SONG IS POURING OUT FROM THE CLASSROOMS PART 1: WARM UP IN THE CLASSROOM

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SUMMARY. This study explores the methodology of vocal warm-up in the context of Hungarian classroom music education, emphasizing the importance of age-appropriate, conscious voice training practices. Drawing on historical pedagogical texts and the author's extensive teaching experience, the paper distinguishes between voice training and warm-up routines, advocating for structured yet flexible warm-up sequences at the start of every lesson. Key methodological principles are presented, including body posture, breathing techniques, resonance development, and articulatory awareness. Rather than focusing on theoretical explanations, the study offers practical strategies to help children develop good singing habits.

Keywords: classroom music, voice training, warm up, practical examples.

Introduction

In Hungary, the first complex curriculum and instructions of elementary public schools were published in 1905, following the 1868 law[2] on public education, which established *compulsory education* (compulsory school attendance). The *Aims and Tasks* section of the subject called *Singing* was as follows: "*The formal aim of teaching singing in elementary public schools is to awaken and develop the sense of music and to cultivate the singing voice*." (Curriculum and Instruction 1905: 235) The *Method* section also states that "*The most important task of the teacher is to guard the pupils' voice with due care and as far as possible, to improve it.*" (Curriculum and Instruction 1905: 248)

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[2] https://net.jogtar.hu/ezer-ev-torveny?docid=86800038.TV#lbj0id48b2 Last accessed: 2 January 2025

Even 120 years ago, *singing* was the most important basic principle of Hungarian music education, which has achieved considerable progress. The most important methodological publications related to the subject[3] usually devoted a special chapter to the development of singing skills and voice training. Throughout the 20th century, studies mainly by classroom music teachers provided the basis for the knowledge of voice training, but there were also writings and books by classical singing teachers. The literature of the subject offers several exercises and types of exercises, discusses anatomical issues and voice training problems, thus providing ample explanation of *what* and *why*, but is relatively reticent as to the question of *how*. Thus, considerably less information is provided on methods of practical application, choosing the right text, conscious planning for the classroom, or the interaction between choir leader/teacher and singer. [4]

The present paper is an improved version of my earlier writings, based on many years of professional experience. [5] Its aim is not to describe the apparatus involved in sound training or the vocal problems but rather to describe the mechanism of operation and the methodological practices involved.

Voice Training vs. Warming up

"*When shall we start voice training? As soon as possible! [...] as soon as the use of the intellect has been acquired, then we can begin systematic*

[3] Chronologically: Kerényi György-Rajeczky Benjámin. Éneklő iskola. Vezérkönyv az Énekes ábécéhez. [Singing School. A Guide Book to the Singing Alphabet.] Magyar Kórus, Budapest, 1940; Ádám Jenő. Módszeres énektanítás. [Methodical Classroom Music Teaching] Turul Szövetség Könyv- és Lapterjesztő Kft. Budapest, 1944; Csillag Lászlóné-Kerecsényi László. Az ének-zene tanítás módszertana. [The Methodology of Classroom Music Teaching] Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest, 1966; Perényi László. Az énektanítás pedagógiája. [The Pedagogy of Classroom Singing Teaching] Tankönyvkiadó Vállalat, Budapest, 1957; Hegyi József. Az ének-zene tanítása. [Teaching Classroom Music and Singing.] Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest, 1972; Péter József. Zenei nevelés az általános iskolában. [Musical Education in Primary School.] Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest, 1973; Osvay Károlyné. Az ének-zene tanítás módszertana. [The Methodology of Classroom Music and Singing Teaching.] Krúdy Könyvkiadó, Nyíregyháza, 2007.

[4] The publications that most help the vocal training work of classroom music teachers in Hungarian are the following: Georgette Sinkovics's reprint book (Kórushangképzés – jóízűen. [Choral Voice Training – in a Good Mood.] Interkultur Hungaria Közhasznú Kft. Budapest, 2011.) and Bruckner Adrienne's writings (Énekelni jól! [Singing Well!] Kodály Intézet. Kecskemét, 1999.; Egy kis technika. [A Little Bit of Technique] LFZE Budapest, 2019.)

[5] Ferenczíné Ács Ildikó. Hangképzés az iskolában**.** [Vocal Training in the School]. Bessenyei György Könyvkiadó, Nyíregyháza, 1997; Ferenczíné Ács Ildikó. (Be)éneklési készségfejlesztés. In: Tanulmányok a levelező és részismereti tanárképzés tantárgypedagógiai tartalmi megújításáért. [Developing Warm-up Skills. In: Studies for the Subject-Specific Pedagogical Renewal of Part-Time Teacher Training] Szaktárnet-könyvek 8. (ed.): Maticsák Sándor. University of Debrecen – College of Nyíregyháza, 2015. pp. 37-72.; Ferenczíné Ács Ildikó – Pintér-Keresztes Ildikó. Pótvonalak – adalékok az ének-zene tanításához. [Ledger Lines: Supplements for the Teaching of Music] SZAKTÁRNET. College of Nyíregyháza. 2015. pp. 13-17.

voice training", writes Alajos Werner in the first half of the 20th century (Kerényi-Rajeczky 1940: 86). László Perényi emphasizes that "*not a single class should pass without a few minutes of voice training.*" (Perényi 1957: 205).

As a methodological book by Károlyné Osvay's states: "*voice enhancement is a task that runs through the whole singing lesson unnoticed*" (Osvay 2007: 43). Furthermore: "*Regardless of the constant voice correction and enhancement during the singing lesson, it is very useful to spend 4-5 minutes at the beginning of the lesson on* independent sound production" (Osvay 2007: 43). In the chapter entitled "Starting Songs and Folk Song Medleys", we can read the following: "*The classroom singing class should always start with singing together. The purpose of ensemble singing is to set the mood for the lesson, to solidify the songs learned in previous lessons, but it is also a kind of warming up; it is a way of getting the vocal organs working, of 'singing them in'*" (Osvay 2007: 49).

To move forward, it seems necessary to clarify the two basic definitions. Most of the literature uses the term "voice training", but it is also necessary to define "warm-up":

- Voice training: continuous, conscious control throughout the entire lesson or rehearsal process.
- Warm-up: an activity at the beginning of a lesson (or choir rehearsal) to warm up the apparatus involved in the sound production; preparation for the work process.

Warm-up should be done through exercises that develop children's voices according to their age, preserve the ringing and freshness of the voice, and help to teach clear intonation. The present paper focuses on methods of implementing warm-up activities related to the material of classroom music lessons.

In the methodology, singing together at the beginning of the lesson has a main function of repetition or preparation. A problem only arises if the previous lesson material was a melody with a large vocal range, such as *Dona nobis pacem*[6] or *Nachtigallenkanon*, [7] which have a range of ninth or twelfth. In such cases, the class is confronted with a powerful sound, or, on the contrary, the class is mute, being simply unable to produce the desired pitch. The teacher begins to encourage the singers, but does not think, as Adrienne Bruckner aptly put it (Bruckner 1999: 8), that this is like starting a gymnastics lesson with a tightrope walk or a locker jump without warming up. The parent notices immediately after PE class if his child goes home with an injury, but if his or her voice is hoarse or slurred, he or she may think it is caused either by having been too noisy or a respiratory illness.

[6] Example of sheet music: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dona_nobis_pacem_(round)
[7] Example of sheet music: https://musescore.com/user/16478/scores/4824736

It is, therefore, strongly recommended that warm-up should start lessons with due consideration and a gradual approach. This may have a different structure at different ages, but it can be varied enough without becoming too mechanical or boring.

Major Principles

When warming up, an important factor is *what* we demand, *and why and how* we demand it from the singer(s). The practice sequence should not be formal, but should be based on class, age, and ability, and should be thoughtfully planned and put together. It is natural to adopt and try out new exercises, but creating a good mood should not be the primary measure of good practice.

What should be kept in mind, regardless of age group:

- warming up should not be accompanied by a piano, as this obscures the real sound and works against clear intonation;
- do not sing with the class, listen to the turns of phrase;
- move from simple, short exercises with a narrow vocal range to more complex exercises with a higher range – keep in mind the gradualness of the technical sequence of exercises;
- raise pitch only in semitones, and step backwards in semitones at first; after a phrase or two, you can descend in whole tones;
- for older students (especially for choral singing), use “join-in scaling": starting at the same time, everyone should step out and then in where their own range is appropriate; for young children, delimit the desired range precisely;
- introducing a different exercise each time should be avoided, it is advisable to have a few basic exercises to which you can link the new ones;
- always start from the middle position (from a starting point around e^1, or from a g^1-a^1 base in the case of small children);
- present the exercises at the required tempo, intonation and with a perfect technique;
- a medium, natural volume should be used both when presenting and singing;
- give the right amount of breath at the start, both when we set off with a command or a hand gesture;
- lead the exercises with movements of appropriate character and meaning.

For choral voice training, the following types of exercises are recommended for warming up for about 10 minutes at the beginning of the rehearsal:

1. Exercises for body movement and breathing exercises
2. Exercises for improving resonance
3. Articulatory exercises
4. Legato and staccato exercises for expanding the vocal range
5. Exercises for relaxation

Exercises of types 2, 3, 5 can be combined with polyphony.

Of course, not all types can be used in a sequence in classroom music lessons, but it is optimal to schedule 2-3 phases in the first 3-5 minutes of the lesson.

Warming up and getting into function go hand in hand with preparing the body, developing correct breathing and voice building to promote the technique of speaking. It is recommended to concentrate on these areas first.

THE METHODOLOGY OF WARMING UP

Body Movement

Singing is not just vocal work; the whole body is involved in the process. Since only a body saturated with fresh oxygen can perform well mentally and physically, start warming up with a stretching exercise by an open window or in a well-ventilated room, standing up. When planning the sequence of movements, it is advisable to follow the principle of gradualness: after the muscles of the legs, trunk and shoulders, the arm work should be followed by the neck and head. Due attention should be paid to relaxing the muscles of the chin, mouth, tongue, lips and face. [8]

Correct Posture

STANDING POSITION

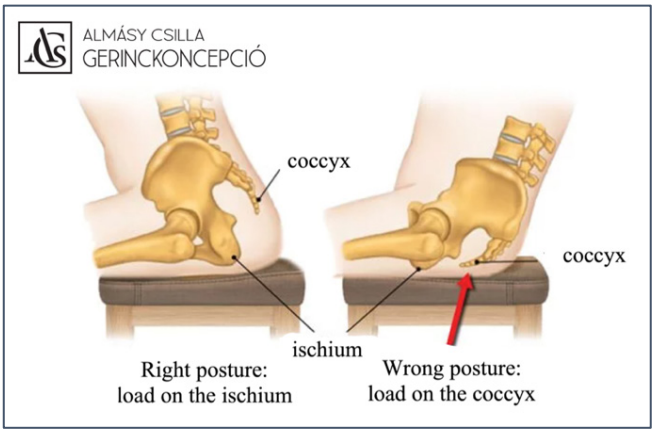
The correct posture is for singers to stand in a “small straddle” (the feet aligning with the hip) position, shoulders and arms relaxed, and holding their heads straight. It is also correct to have the hands slightly raised and interlocked in front. However, if the rib cage narrows because of the hands clasped together at the front or tightens because of the hands behind the back, this will negatively affect relaxed, deep breathing.

[8] Examples for this practice type can be found in: Ferenczíné Ács Ildikó. Hangképzés az iskolában**.** [Vocal Training in the School]. Bessenyei György Könyvkiadó, Nyíregyháza, 1997.

SITTING POSITION

Perényi's methodology book advises the following: "*When children sit in singing class, make them place their hands on their knees or next to the body, or on the desk*" (Perényi 1957: 201). Make an effort to get the position automatic during singing. If children sit leaning backwards and slightly slouched, as if on their spine, loading the coccyx, this can lead to low back pain in the long term and, in addition, breaks the air column for singing. The following illustration on the topic of spine protection shows the importance of choosing the right seating position.

Figure 1



Seating positions[9]

So, try to keep the children sitting upright when singing (but also in general), in the middle or in the front of the chair, depending on the size of the seat. They can put their hands on the tabletop or lift the book, score or notebook.

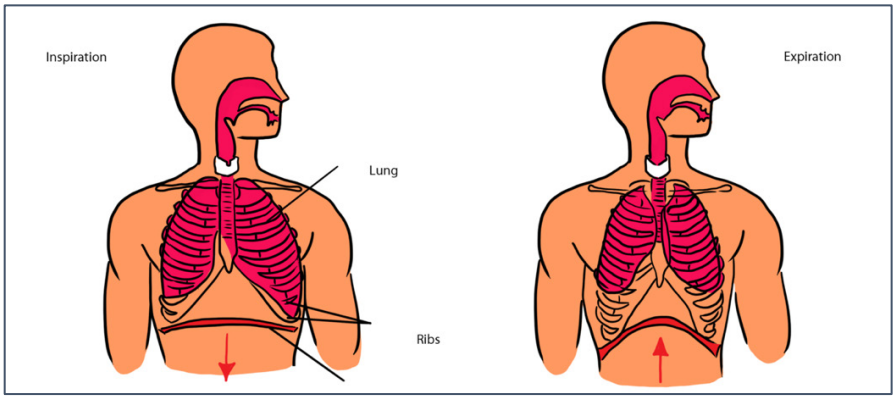
Singing and Breathing, Breathing Exercises

Ideally, correct breathing needs not to be taught, as it is something that one is born with. The teacher's most important task is to help children who breathe in visibly different ways and with the wrong habits in finding the right feeling.

[9] Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=473912128116016&id=100064916971648&set=a.413554457485117 Csilla Almásy, spine therapist, physiotherapist, health teacher (MEd), TripleX master trainer. Homepage: https://gerinckoncepcio.hu/ Last accessed and edited: 29 May 2025. Text translated by the author.

The physiological ratio between the time of inspiration and expiration at rest is 1:1. The ratio of the phases of breathing alters in the case of singing and speaking (vocalisation). The inspiration is shorter, faster and has a new characteristic compared to normal breathing, it becomes “deeper”.
The right amount of air is “just enough” to vocalise a phrase. By increasing the volume too much, we can have a particularly damaging effect on the vocal cords. Inspiration is good and natural when the shoulders are not elevated, the chest is relaxed, the ribs are raised to the sides, so that the lower parts of the lungs are filled with air.

Figure 2



Diaphragm[10]

For the waist area to expand circumferentially, another condition must be met: The diaphragm separating the chest from the abdomen is arched in the relaxed state, and the heart rests in the middle. In the inspiration phase, the vault flattens and descends towards the abdominal cavity, with the natural consequence that the abdominal wall protrudes slightly. After the active action of the muscles, the passive process of expiration is dominated by the relaxation phase. The diaphragm relaxes and rises, the protrusion of the abdominal wall ceases, the force holding the lungs out is reduced, and the lungs contract and the air in them flows outwards.

The following instructions should be avoided during teaching: take the breath “into your belly” / “into your diaphragm”; push/press your belly forward! Our breathing organ is the lungs, and we do not push/press anything when singing.

[10] Source: https://sing-like-a-star-courses.mykajabi.com/blog/what-is-singing-from-the-diaphragm Last accessed: 29 May 2025

The expiration phase of the singing breath is essentially the same as the physiological exhalation, but the duration is increased according to the length of the vocal delivery. This means that the correct allocation of the available air volume is the goal to be achieved, and the means to achieve this is to "ration" the air as needed. This is called *support or breath support* in the language of singers. The use of this term in practice, in teaching, can lead to a lot of misunderstandings and incorrect mechanisms. Without explanation, it can lead the singer to take an extra action (an undesirable effort): he or she is trying to press or squeeze, and he or she is reserving air and is not supporting breath. A misinterpretation of the term can lead to a few unnecessary actions, such as the belly-press.

We should rather not use the term "support" in the initial stages of vocal learning, but only describe its function: when exhaling, let the air flow freely, try to keep the air column loose and sufficient for the desired length of time. A steady flow is a prerequisite for a rich, well-toned sound.

After an initial body exercise, it is a good idea to continue the class with breathing exercises. Concentrate on two major phases: relaxed, deep inhalation through the nose (momentary hold with open glottis, see later), consciously controlled expiration (the raised ribs should not collapse, only the abdominal wall should flatten).

The aim of breathing exercises is to control the time interval of the actual (singing) breath release, so only do exercises that improve in this regard. Exercises aimed at holding or retaining air will not help.

Examples:

I. Controlled Breathing

The teacher signals not only the beginning of the breath and the expiration, but also the end, carefully preparing the way. After a slow, deep inhalation and a momentary hold, the task is to release the air evenly. The expiration should be made with the phonemes [s(ə)], [ʃ(ə)] or [f(ə)][11]. The aim is to practise the active expulsion of air for increasing lengths of time.

Technical advice:

It should be stressed that the aim of singing breathing exercises is not to hold/retain air. It is not swimming underwater. The task is to practice the conscious use of a sufficient amount of air to sing a given phrase or melodic progression. Hissing for a long time with parted lips does not achieve the goal, as it does not represent the use of air during the singing process.

[11] The notations follow the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

To get the right feel, it is best to practise with the lips relatively wide open and rounded. Accordingly, I myself use a rounding of the lips that is appropriate for the sound of the [ə]. For consonants, I first use the [ʃ]-sounding exercises, which make it easier to feel the intense blowing with a loose chin and rounded lips, and also give the teacher good control of the sound. If there is a steady, intense hiss, there is air underneath and an active outflow. If the sound is too soft and too light or switches off and on, it indicates inadequate lip position or insufficient air quantity. As soon as air is felt to be running out, stop the exercise, because further “squeezing” will result in forced muscle work.

During the breathing exercises, it is advisable to count approximately every second, gradually increasing the duration. However, it is not advisable to go beyond eight counts, as the available air is used up in the course of a tune lasting about eight beats, or, at higher pitches, even half the time when played intensively. For smaller children, it is advisable to work with 3-4 counts from the outset, i.e., it is recommended to finish the exercise on beat three or four. Closing requires more attention to technique: release on a signal (beat) and a soft sigh (h)[ə].

Blowing out with the [s] sound is recommended only after the stable use of [ʃ].

E.g., [ʃʃ] _____ (h)[ə]
[ss] _____ (h)[ə]

II. Staccato Exercise – Echo Play

Additional consonants can be included in the breathing exercises. The following example is intended as a kind of “diaphragm training”, a path towards staccato. The method is like the one above: intense consonant sounding with relaxed muscle tone – double-intensity pronunciation of the consonant with a rounded lip (with slight pursing) and a slight [ə] at the end, only indicating it. The chin, tongue and neck are relaxed.

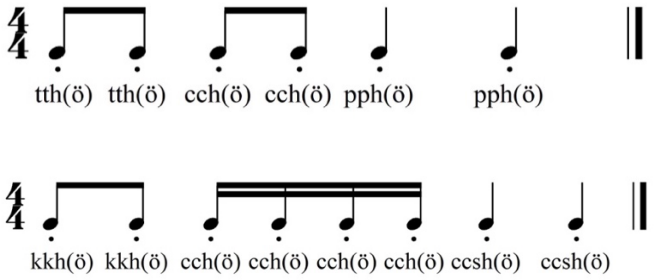
Suggested consonants for this exercise:

[pp] + (h)(ə), [tt] + (h)(ə), [kk] + (h)(ə), [tss] + (h)(ə),
[ttʃʃ] + (h)(ə), [ʃʃ] + (h)(ə), [ss] + [h](ə), [ff] + (h)(ə).

It is fun to combine the exercise with an increasingly complex rhythm. It is not recommended to stop and explain what you are hearing during the exercise. To ensure continuity of attention, immediately after the pronunciation, the students repeat the motif in an echoing manner, even several times, with

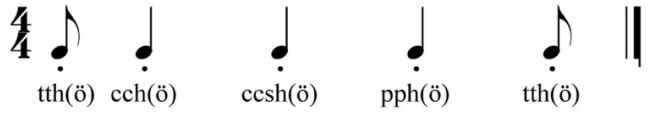
the teacher giving cues to draw attention to areas for improvement. To ensure that the response is easy to follow, the last element of the beat should preferably be a quarter note. For example:

E.g. 1-2[12]



Syncopating movement will make the play even more exciting:

E.g. 3[13]



If the articulation is intense enough, you are actually doing staccato exercises without explaining how the diaphragm and other organs work.

To summarise:

- If you follow the above process of breathing exercises, it is almost certain that the correct breathing technique will set itself over time. It is unnecessary to explain in detail the movement of the diaphragm, the rise of the floating ribs, and other – otherwise real – processes to students. With concise, concrete instructions and good presentation, the correct sense of function can be established immediately.
- The consonants used in breathing exercises should only be *voiceless*. Vocal cords *should not* be involved in this phase. Also, for breath-holding exercises, [ʃ] and [s] are the most recommended of the voiceless fricatives.

[12] See above for pronunciation according to IPA.
[13] See above for pronunciation according to IPA.

- For staccato exercises, voiceless stops ([p], [t], [k]) and the affricates ([tʃ] and [ts]) can be included. The inclusion of the consonant [k] should be monitored more closely, as it is backformed. The place of articulation of the other vowels is in front or more front and they are closer together.

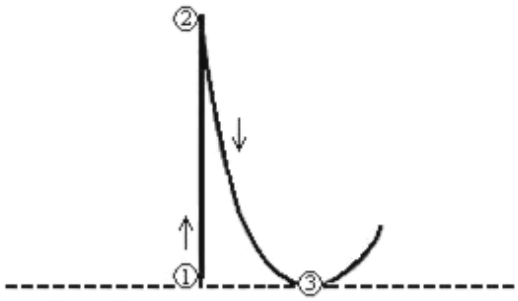
Vocalisation

Between the inspiration and expiration phases, there is a moment that has not yet been mentioned. This is a tipping point, best illustrated by the movement of the pendulum when it pauses for a moment before moving again. In terms of breathing of singers, this means that we should take a transition into consideration from expiration to inspiration and another switch vice versa. It is this latter moment that singers should pay particular attention to.

After inhaling, we do not immediately produce a sound. During a momentary period of holding the air, we prepare (in our mind) for the vocal delivery, we imagine the sound. The glottis is open, the vocal cords start to make a sound from this open position, gently resisting the starting airflow. The result is the only pedagogically correct way to start the sound, a soft start.

This is another factor which does not need to be over-explained to the pupils, and which should only be included in the teacher's implicit knowledge. It is easy to achieve with the right cue.

Figure 3



The phases of cue[14]

The position indicated with number 2 in the diagram above is the common moment of conducting and singing, i.e., the preparation for the vocalisation. However, holding one's breath momentarily is not the same as keeping back air. In the latter case, the vocal cords are compressed tightly before the outgoing air could reach them, so that the air mass accumulated

[14] Source: Ferencziné Ács Ildikó. Breathing and choir conducting. International Choral Bulletin. Volume XXXVII, Number 2 – 2nd Quarter, 2018. pp. 56-58.

in the windpipe exerts great pressure on the vocal cords, causing them to snap open. The result is a hard vocal start. This mechanism is wrong and should be avoided when singing and corrected if detected. Forced sound emission overloads the muscles participating in vocalisation, and prolonged misuse can lead to disorders of articulation.

The opposite of a hard start is when the volume of air flowing out does not immediately hit the glottis. If a large amount of air is expelled through the still open glottis before the actual sound is made, the tone initiation will be too “airy”, or “aspirated”, as defined in the literature.

Timbre

After the air exhaust causes the vocal cords to vibrate, the resulting sound changes significantly as it passes through the cavities of the vocal tract.[15]

This tract, a cavity system, is also a resonator, which affects the colour of the sound and amplifies it. The anatomical variation of the cavities explains the different shades of colour in the singers’ voices and the variety of tone types. Another important consideration is the register in which one sings easily and naturally. This means a limited vocal range in which the singer can produce the same quality of notes without effort, thus excluding low or high notes that could still be produced in the full physiological range but have no longer that much vivacity.

The individual’s vocal type is determined mainly by the size of the vocal cords: shorter vocal cords imply higher pitches; longer vocal cords imply lower pitches. In addition to the shape of the resonant cavities and the size of the vocal cords, body shape also influences the type of sound.

At school age, boys’ and girls’ voices can be classified according to soprano or alto, or possibly soprano-mezzo-alto. Gender classification is less common in primary school but is justified in secondary school.

Exercises to Develop Resonance

Instead of breathing exercises, you can start with a so-called lip trill exercise, which makes the correct use of air (intense support) audible. A lip trill is like when horses snort. Place the fingers next to the lips, move the face slightly sideways and upwards and begin to exhale evenly, starting with [p]. Too little or too much air will not trigger the lip trill, so this is a particularly good exercise for controlling the correct airflow. It can also be sounded without or with the vocal cords. The latter can be done by sliding up and down or by playing a given tune.

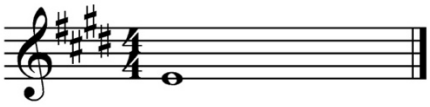
[15] The parts of the vocal tract are the larynx, the oral cavity and the nasal cavity.

The consonants [m] and [n] are, due to their resonant position (nasal consonants), also excellent for sound development by themselves, helping to sound to resonate in front.

Always start from the middle pitch when sounding them. This means close to the speaking pitch. Only by building on this can you develop the high and low registers. The middle voice is typically around *e*^{1}, but when working with young children, the centre should be around *g*^{1} and *a*^{1}.

Practice should begin on a single note. When forming [m], the lips are softly touching, the denture is loosely opening, the tongue is relaxed, and the soft palate is loosely rising in a yawning manner. But instead of listing all these and searching for the position, I suggest the following: start the sound with the consonant [m], while thinking and opening loosely to long [u]. It is a short but effective instruction. Breathing should only happen at the same time at the start, then everyone breathes at their own pace. After a few seconds, a round, unified sound is heard.

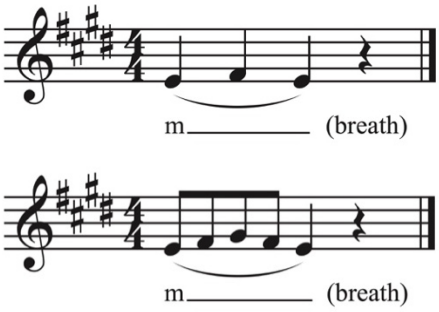
E.g. 4[16]



When singing in a group, it is particularly important to pay attention not only to technical factors, but also to the colour and power of the sound. It also requires practice to start and finish at the same time, and to get the pitch exactly right. The basic aim is to achieve a unified sound.

After a sustained voicing exercise aimed at equalising and sounding the middle tone (one note), it is recommended to switch between seconds or go in a range of thirds.

E.g. 5-6



[16] Source of the musical examles: Ferencziné 2015.

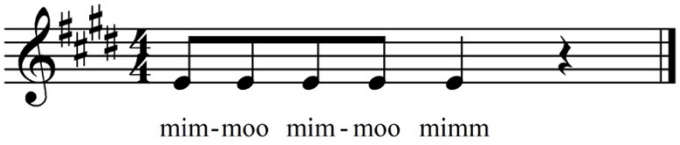
Do not go beyond a fifth interval in range for the resonance-building exercise. It is important to note that this type of exercise is not suitable for group voice training to learn pitches and increase pitch range. There is no individual control behind it.

One can also try descending melodies, but in this case, it is not always sufficient to give the initial or root note. It is important to make students feel the tonality securely, in which case the use of an instrument and giving harmony as a reference point may be justified.

Linking Vowels with Resonance Exercises

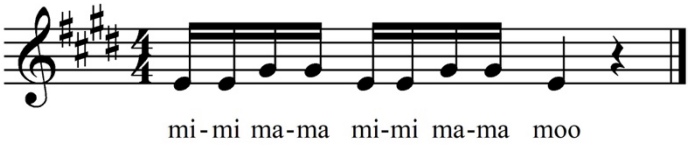
Initially, vowel shaping should be linked to the consonants [m] and [n], resonating at the front. There are three types of exercises and degrees. In the first phase, the syllables start from and return to a consonant.
Examples at the same pitch:

E.g. 7



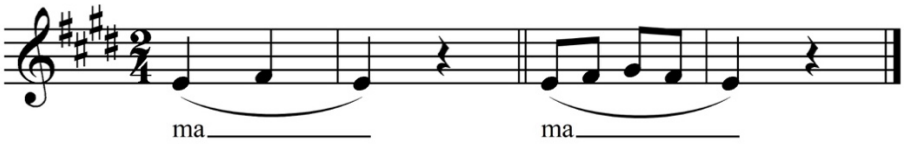
In the second phase, the consonant only precedes the vowel. In this type of exercise, choose from a selection of short vowels.
E.g., in a range of third, with jumping intervals:

E.g. 8



Proceed on to the linking of the sounds, that is, the legato singing, in the third stage of learning only. The vowels can be alternated freely:

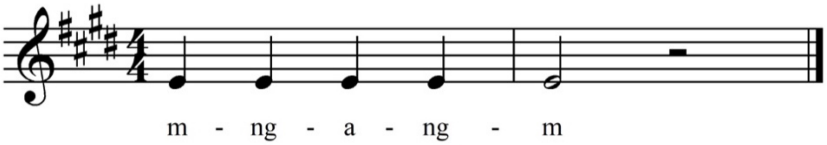
E.g. 9



It is recommended to take a gradual approach initially. Do not increase the vocal range of the exercises much beyond fifths, sixths, when singing in groups, and pay attention to pitch. Approach the two-line octave register with caution and avoid singing high notes with a voiced consonant start. At a more advanced level, the vocal exercises of Phase 3 can be used to increase range.

Technically, the exercise starting with the cluster [ŋg] is very useful. In English, the phoneme connection is most noticeable when pronouncing the words si**ng**, to**ng**ue, thi**ng**, lo**ng**, etc. Compared to the normal [n], the tip of the tongue is aligned with the lower denture, the blade of the tongue rises towards the soft palate as it approaches the position of the [g] sound.
A typical singing exercise is:

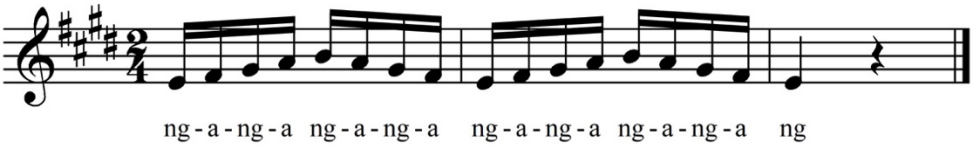
E.g. 10



After the [m], only the lips should open according to the [a] vowel, trying to maintain the training position of the [m] as described above. Actual opening (the elevation soft palate) only occurs at the change to [a]. Here the lips hardly move any further. On closing, the position of the lips remains unchanged at first, and the change to [ŋg] occurs inside. Finally, the lips also come together. The exercise is excellent for feeling the movement of the soft palate (the soft palate rises, the tongue flattens).

For nasal speakers or singers, we also recommend a version of the soft palate movement exercise with ascending and descending tunes to thirds or fifths. Starting position: mouth open to [a]. During scaling, the mouth and tongue do not move:

E.g. 11



The Articulatory Base - Sound Production

The sound produced in the larynx is amplified in the resonator cavities and becomes intelligible through articulation, the formation of the phonemes. The organs involved in the formation of the phones are the lips, the tongue, the chin, the facial muscles, the soft palate, i.e., mainly the oral cavity and the nasal cavity area. The result of the articulatory organs working together is speech, the utterance of words.

When singing, great attention must be paid to the correct formation of the phonemes. The vowels play a key role, as they are the carriers of the melody. The basic principle to remember is that we sing on the vowels.

The sequence of (Hungarian) vowels according to the opening and forming of lips:

i	*í*	*é*	*e*	*á*	*a*	*o*	*ó*	*ö*	*ő*	*u*	*ú*	*ü*	*ű*
[i]	[i:]	[ei]	[e]	[a:]	[ɒ]*	[o]	[o:]	[ə]*	-	[u]	[u:]	-	-

*the marked ones do not match exactly, but are close to the sound of the corresponding vowel of the Hungarian language

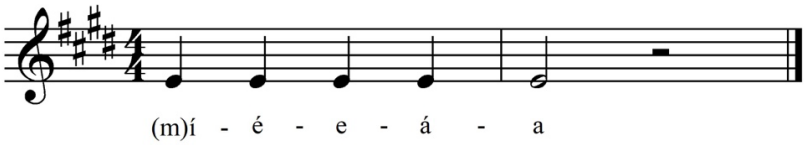
In this way, you go from a small lip opening to the largest and then gradually narrow back down.

In practice, it is not practical to sing this all the way through, and most frequently, only a section (4-5 notes) and the logic of the sequence should be retained when composing vowel shaping samples. For example, the following line can be used to form vowels in a chain:

(*m*)[17] *í – é – e – á – a* using phonetic symbols: [m] [i:] – [ei] – [e] – [a:] – [ɒ]

[17] Start the exercises with a vowel and leave out the voiced consonant if we are sure if a soft, mellow sound start is able to be produced.

E.g. 12



It is more common and more appropriate, however, to choose a sequence of vowels according to tongue position or tongue position and the degree of the opening of the lips:

(m) á – a – e – é – i	or	*i – e – á – o – u*
[m] [a:] – [ɒ] – [e] – [ei] – [i]	or	[i] – [e] – [a:] – [o] – [u]

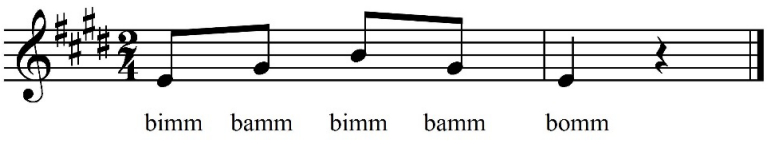
We can practice a harder version as well, when we juxtapose vowels that are far from each other according to their place of articulation:

(*m*) *i – a*	*i – á*	
[m] [i] – [ɒ]	[i] – [a:]	etc.

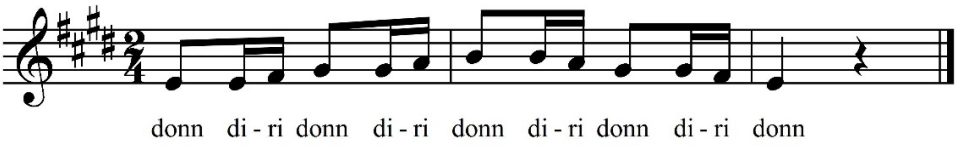
Attention to vowel shaping is already necessary in resonance exercises. The level of difficulty can be varied according to ability but make sure that the exercises do not involve a range beyond a fifth.
Naturally, the slower movements are sung with long vowels, the faster ones with short vowels.

It is consonants that make speech meaningful and articulate. Their role is to separate vowels. Their pronunciation is determined by the precise functioning of the organs and muscles involved in articulation. In addition to [m] and [n], which contribute to the improvement of resonance, the other labial and labiodental sounds are also used to advantage in the formation of sounds. These consonants help to “front” the singing voice. They can be used to further enrich the range of resonance exercises, such as the popular “bimm - bamm – bomm” and “dinn – donn” exercises.

E.g. 13



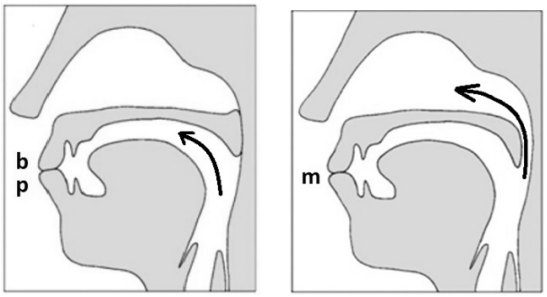
E.g. 14



Bilabial (plosive and nasal) sounds: b - p - m

The phoneme [b] can only be sounded by voicing, so it is a voiced (a sound produced with vibrating vocal cords), whereas [p] requires harder labial work and is voiceless. The sound [m] is also formed with the lips, but while the former two are formed in the same resonant location, [m] resonates in the nasal cavity. This phenomenon is possible because the uvula, unlike the formation of the other consonants, where it blocks the air path to the nasal cavity, leaves it open here, so that the air leaves through the nose (nasal vowels also include [n], and the cluster [nj]). The two different functions of the uvula, with the same place of articulation, are illustrated in the two figures below:

Figures 4-5



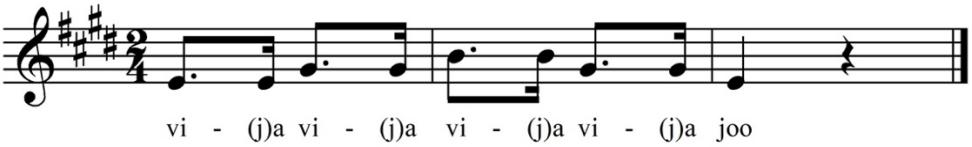
The two different functions of the uvula [18]

Labiodental phonemes: v – f

The sound [v] is voiced, [f] is voiceless. The gap is a little narrower when forming f, but both are excellent for starting a sound.

[18] Source: http://www.azlifa.com/pp-tute-2-answers/ Last accessed and edited: 29 July 2014

E.g. 15



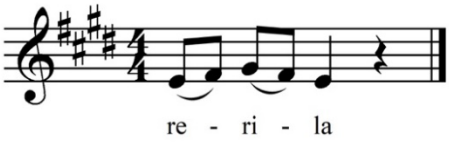
Alveolar (plosive and nasal) sounds: d - t - n

Like [m], [n] is a nasal sound. An excellent means to improve sound. However, when associated with certain consonants ([g], [k]), it sounds at the back, in the area of the soft palate.

Alveolar sounds (trills and approximants), but the barrier is positioned slightly further back: r – l

Both are voiced. In Hungarian, [r] is a rolled consonant, activating the tip of the tongue and relieving the root of the tongue and the larynx, from tension. At the end of a piece requiring much volume, or at the end of warming up or after a choral rehearsal, a glissando [r] or a few seconds of sustained, rolled [r] may be requested as a relaxation. The latter is also excellent for breath control, as it requires a steady supply of air. It is immediately audible if the airflow is interrupted. The following can be a vocal exercise with [r]:

E.g. 16

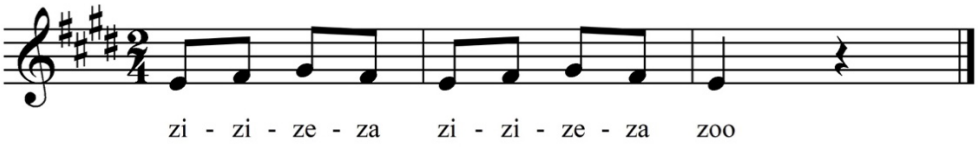


The looseness of the tongue is ensured by the syllables beginning with [l]. The tempo of these exercises should be as fast as possible, but the syllables should not be choppy, because the aim is to use the tongue in a relaxed manner (see example 23).

Some other alveolar sounds worth mentioning: s - z

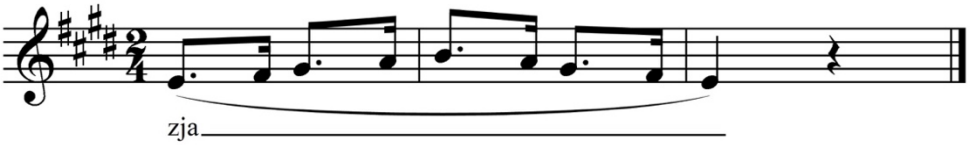
The unvoiced, hard counterpart of the soft, voiced [z] is [s]. The air expelled when pronouncing [s] makes a hissing sound, and its audibility and observability can help to develop breathing technique. The following is a practice example with [z]:

E.g. 17



In singing exercises, the consonant [z], or maybe [s] also, may be accompanied by a [j]: zja, sja. These sound combinations are an excellent way to start exercises climbing to higher registers:

E.g. 18



Some of the palatal sounds worth mentioning: j

The use of the approximant [j] is common in relaxing singing exercises (see example 24).

Last in the sequence is the ***glottal*** sound [h]. It is a consonant formed in the larynx and is produced when the vocal cords are 10 degrees apart. Its use is not recommended in singing, except for staccato exercises, as it can make the sound airy and involves a lot of unnecessary air emission.

The consonants [g], [k], [ʃ] [ʒ] and consonant clusters [dj], [nj], [tj], [ts], [tʃ] should not be used directly for sound production due to their formation in the back and the position of the tongue.

It is important for singers to remember that if a syllable in the written text ends in a consonant, try to pronounce it at the beginning of the next syllable. This will ensure that the vowel is filled in as fully as possible and that the singing is beautifully shaped and legato.

E.g., in writing:

„Sta- bat ma- ter do- lo- ro- sa iux-ta cru- cem la- cri- mo- sa”

in singing:

*„Sta- ba- **tm**a- te- **rd**o- lo- ro- sa iu- **xt**a cru- ce- **ml**a- cri- mo- sa”*

Consonants are not only crucial for correct separation of syllables. Their resonant positioning also affects the sound quality of the vowel that follows them. Each consonant has a different effect on the quality of the vowel that follows it. Let us pronounce and try to sound the following words at the same pitch: *bee – key.*

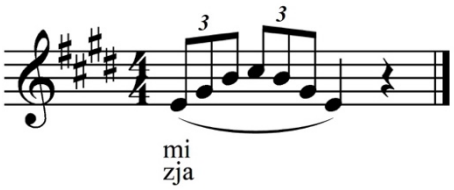
It can be observed that the [i] in the word “bee” sounds more front than the [i] pronounced after the [k]. This shift in tone is due to the back position of the [k] and the front position of the [b]. This gives the [i] two different shades, resonating in different places.

It is the teacher’s responsibility to choose the sounds consciously. A selection of practice and sound types can be chosen according to the lesson material.

Increasing the range

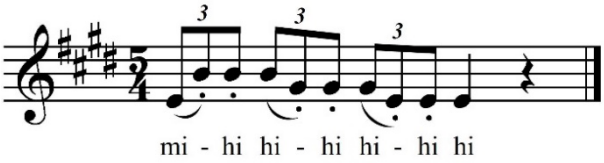
This is a less applicable type of practice for class-level work, as there are no high and low pitches to prepare for in monophonic singing.
If there are, try to find an exercise for the higher parts of the melody that is lively and easy but does not exceed the range of fifths or sixths. The vowels used should preferably be without the rounding of lips, so preferably the [i], [e], [a] sounds.

E.g. 19



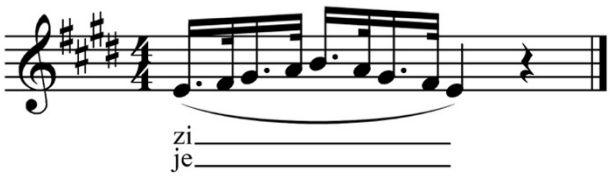
Staccato exercises are also very useful:

E.g. 20



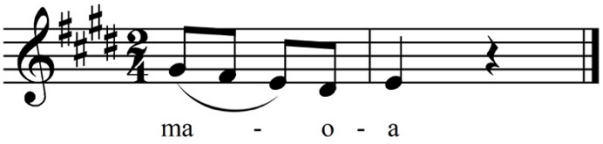
The use of dotted rhythm is always beneficial because it livens the class and gives momentum:

E.g. 21



To reach deeper registers, one is advised to use descending legato movements:

E.g. 22

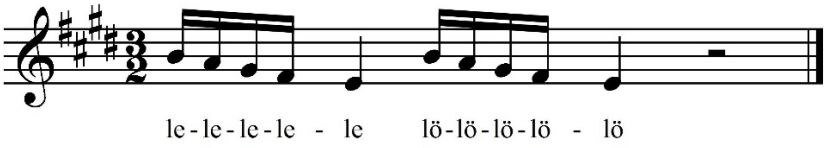


Exercises that move within the octave or beyond the octave for a class or children's choir should be used with great care. Starting from a high note should be left to solo singers.

Relaxing section - text exercises

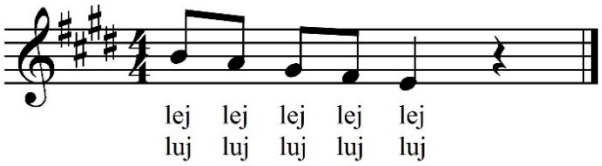
Introduce a warming up containing the expansion of range with relaxing exercises. The aim is consonant pronunciation with relaxed speech apparatus. The range does not play a role here, and there is no need to try to reach the same heights as before. It is advisable to stay between *d*^{1} and *h*^{1}. The volume is medium or even less. A quick-rhythm exercise is e.g.:

E.g. 23



An example for legato movement:

E.g. 24



When choosing texts for text exercises, pay attention to the properties of the sounds. Not all tongue twisters – just because they are funny – may be useful. In group sound training, as well as in resonance-building exercises, do not use text exercises to introduce high pitches.

Polyphonic Singing Exercises

These are intonation exercises and can be adapted according to the levels of skill. When do we talk about adequate intonation? By definition, we mean the immediate and accurate voicing of the given sound at the prescribed pitch. The first task is to consolidate monophonic singing. It is a matter of harmonising the sound from several sound sources at the same time so that it sounds uniform to the ear. When musical tones of the same pitch are played simultaneously, the resulting vibrations reinforce each other, and those of different pitches weaken each other.

Exercises improving resonance and the forming of sounds can help you to achieve equalisation. Conscious attention must be paid to the direction of successive melodies: a note that moves upwards is threatened by a braking force if it lacks sufficient intensity, and a note that moves downwards or jumps down may be brought deeper by some kind of inertia (Kardos in Péter 1973: 100).

The use polyphonic singing exercises is recommended only after the starting note is safely taken and the equalised, unison sounding is achieved. "*Even pure unison singing can only be fully learned in two voices. The two voices adjust and balance each other*" (Kodály 1941: Foreword). In his 1941 work *Énekeljünk tisztán* (Let us Sing Correctly), Kodály publishes and recommends a series of exercises based on the sound structure of the acoustic overtone.

Pál Kardos (Kardos 1969: 22), however, considers the third, more specifically the minor third (in relation to *sol - mi*), to be the most suitable initial interval for the development of children's two-voice hearing, since it is the most frequent turn in the melodies sung by children. In the next phase,

the *mi* can be combined with the *do*. The intervals should be accompanied by music without a melody, i.e., at one pitch, e.g. with the text *bimm, bamm, bomm*. The singing of the interval perfect fifth is only used if there is sufficient mastery of intonation. After a well-established *do*, the *sol* is imagined and then gently voiced. The *do* should always be the more compact, more pronounced of the two, trying to place the *sol* on top of the base.

It requires more concentration to introduce the three voices. The major triad is the starting point: the *sol* is placed softly on the root note of *do*. The third that comes in between should be the most delicate, the most sensitive.

Dynamics

"*When singing with the class, especially when teaching new songs, we tend to force more power and tone out of the children to achieve an illusory success and we think that then they can sing better. But we are wrong. Children who do not know how to sing will not get better at singing, but only those with better hearing and stronger voices will sing harder and stronger, at the expense of good style and good sound formation. To sing well and to make it sound well, it must mature in time and with patience*" (Kerényi-Rajeczky 1940: 88).

The definition of *forte* singing: the use of a relatively large volume of high speed of air with maximum engagement of the resonant cavities and increased pronunciation. In turn, *piano* singing is intense pronunciation with slower than usual air flow, maximum use of position and a lot of head resonance.

Decrease of volume and amplification is a technically difficult process, depending on the air supply and the use of the resonant cavities. The movement of the soft palate also plays a major role in ensuring the continuity of the transition. For a *piano* voice, it assumes a position like that of the production of nasal sounds, i.e., it descends. During *forte* singing, it rises sharply, providing more resonant space in the oral cavity. Thus, during the transition from *forte* to *piano* and vice versa, the soft palate moves intensively.

In school and in the early stages of voice training, the starting point should always be the natural, medium-strength voice. As long as the sound does not even out and produce homogeneous tones with the same colour, it is not worth expanding the dynamic set.

Forte singing, if identified with the word "loudly", can cause straining of the laryngeal muscles in young children, instead of intensifying the impetus of breathing. In fact, the term *forte* is only a graphic indication of the emotional charge attached to the meaning of the work. A *forte* can mean an angry, agitated state of mind, but it can also indicate resolution, combat, heroism, glory, joy, etc.

It may be useful to recite the text beforehand, to give a sense of the momentum of the words and the intensity of the recital. However, be careful not to let the speech turn into shouting. It should not be difficult to implement the well-formed text into intense singing.

Singing *piano* is an equally difficult task. A low voice reduces the child's, and even the adult's, mental alertness, and often involves loss of intonation, slowness of phrasing, slurring of speech, and a certain degree of physical restraint. Try to keep children interested while singing *piano*: ask them to breathe properly, to speak intensively and to form their voices intact. I suggest that the emphasis here should not be on the *softness* of the sound, but on its quality. A musical turn in *piano* music can be intimate, painful, mournful, but also hopeful, mischievous, playful, mischievous, playful, etc.

When using dynamic levels, it is necessary to emphasise the given character and not the degree of force.

Practices for 6–8-year-olds need to be addressed separately.
See more about this in the next volume:
(STUDIA UBB MUSICA, LXXI, 1, 2026)

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