

Ready for your



Charlotte Regan talks to Vocal Process about the launch of their new endoscopy video downloads

Earlier this year, the UK's first endoscopy video ebook was launched, the initial release in a series of ebooks containing footage of a healthy larynx performing various vocal tasks. The endoscopy films are the brainchild of Jeremy Fisher, one of the directors of Vocal Process, a voice company whose ethos 'sharing information – promoting expertise' is embraced in these products.

Fisher describes himself as a visual learner who's always been interested in how things work, and says he was fascinated the first time he saw endoscopy film. 'You don't really think of what's happening when you hear someone sing or when you speak or sing yourself. It's quite eye-opening when you see it for the first time – that all it really is is two pieces of muscle and fibre and tissue flapping together in various different forms.' Such footage, however, especially of healthy voices, had not previously been easily accessible for many people. 'We've used endoscopy films on our courses for years and people have come up at the end and said, "The films are great – can we buy them?", but the answer was no, you couldn't, because either they were rented out specifically to us or they just weren't available. So I thought let's do something specifically downloadable, available to anyone. There are a few videos out there that are only available to universities or research students. It's a hierarchy, a sort of closed shop. I just thought, no, let's get them out.'

The ebooks are aimed, says Fisher, 'at anyone interested in voice and what their voice looks like'. Customers so far have included singers, voice teachers, singing teachers, speech and language therapists, classroom music teachers and even biology teachers looking for a more lively alternative to textbook illustrations. Singing teachers, Fisher explains, have found it very useful 'because often they have knowledge about voices and how they work, but putting that knowledge across to other people can sometimes be both tricky and time-

consuming'. And many singers 'are finding that seeing the film really helps them to focus in on what they're doing. So they see it, they hear it and then they're trying it out while they're watching. I've had such good feedback from people saying this is really useful.' So far the take-up has been very healthy for what is really quite a specialised area: when the first ebook was released it was being downloaded on a daily basis from locations around the world.

Fisher and fellow Vocal Process director Gillyanne Kayes both underwent endoscopies in the course of making the videos. Fisher in particular talks enthusiastically about being hooked up to machines and exploring his voice while watching it on screen, and it's been an education for him too: 'Often you think you know what you're doing and then you get the cameras down there and you see whether you are actually doing what you think you're doing, and sometimes you aren't so you need to change it.'

Two different types of camera have been used in the filming process – a nasal endoscope, which is a flexible tube, and an oral stroboscope, which is rigid and sits on the tongue. The latter restricts movement within the mouth more, but gives incredibly clear footage of the vocal folds. Hours of film are then edited down by Fisher to a few minutes for each video. Graphics help to indicate the areas that the viewer should be watching, and voiceovers – again, done by Fisher – talk through what appears on the screen.

The first video, *Looking At A Voice*, which forms an introduction to viewing the larynx through endoscopy, uses just a nasal endoscope. Once the various structures that can be seen are identified, the film shows five vowels being spoken and then sung. The second ebook, *Modal to Falsetto I – Making the Change*, which came out in April, makes use of footage from the stroboscope as well as the nasal endoscope and is more detailed, demonstrating the male and female voice

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flipping between a modal (speech-like) set and a falsetto set. Forthcoming videos in the series will look at constriction and release, more modal and falsetto, and resonance.

Fisher is delighted with the footage that they've achieved, filmed over a number of sessions at voice clinics. Some of the most stunning shots come from the modal to falsetto footage, where the undulating and flapping movements of the vocal folds are incredibly clear. 'What's fascinating about the opening sequence,' comments Fisher, 'is that you see them undulating and then they carry on undulating while the back of them opens – that's extraordinary footage. There's a big thing with singing teachers at the moment about breathy speech, and the difference between breathy speech and falsetto. That's why I did this film, because there is a huge difference between breathy speech, where the folds are open at the back but still undulating nicely, and falsetto, where they're actually slightly closed at the back but they're flapping about... That's something I really want to get out because I think it's going to put a few myths to rest.'

He explains that as voice experts, both he and Kayes are able to control and demonstrate with great exactness when they're filming at the voice clinic. 'What's fascinating about filming endoscopy stuff is that really what you want – and certainly what I wanted for these films – is very clear movements, very clear manoeuvres, so you can see exactly what was moving and what wasn't. Having led five major endoscopy sessions in the clinic, I know that you've got to be pretty skilled to be able to hold one thing and move something else, and make sure that it's really clear – and there's only so long you can

have the camera there.'

Naturally such footage is valuable and though Fisher has wanted to do something like this for some time, he was concerned about the films being copied and sold on, as frequently happens with digital files. The Ebook Pro system was the first practical method he found of password-protecting the content and he is very confident about the security it provides. The ebook system also means that rather than sending off for a CD and waiting a week for it to arrive, the file can be downloaded and viewed within minutes of hitting 'buy now' on the website.

The two ebooks out so far seemed very reasonably priced – *Looking At A Voice* at £5 and *Modal to Falsetto 1 – Making the Change* at £7.50 – given the amount of work that goes into putting just a few minutes of video together, and 10 per cent of each sale goes to charity – the British Voice Foundation, of which Kayes was a director for three years, and the British Association for Performing Arts Medicine which helped Fisher when he snapped a tendon in one of his fingers.

The most requested topic, constriction and retraction (finding an open throat) is now also available. *Constriction and Release* (£7.50) shows independent movement of the true and false vocal folds giving a 'tight' or 'clear' sound. In the final section Fisher performs two different types of constriction simultaneously. Or as one surgeon put it, 'strangling yourself from the inside'. Perhaps this one should come with a health warning! ■

All ebooks can be downloaded from www.vocalprocess.co.uk



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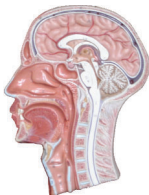
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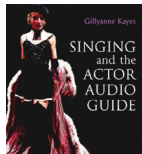
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