

So I figured I'd put together a little something explaining some techniques and exercises that I've learned over the years. I'll stress that by no means do I have all the answers, nor do I proclaim to have perfected anything but here's my two bits on what I do.

First of all, I have to credit most of my techniques to Melissa Cross. Her DVD "The Zen of Screaming" outlines many key elements with regards to "extreme singing" and in my opinion is a must for any aspiring extreme vocalist at any level.

I'll also stress that these are tips and techniques that have worked for me. There are other practices out there that may work better for you so here goes.

Probably the most obvious advice is to drink room temperature water before you perform. Avoid cold water. In my experience, it will shrink your vocal chords and limit the range that you may normally achieve. Think about what happens to your junk in a cold pool...same concept. If you know you'll be singing, try to avoid milk, coffee or anything that would tend to coat your throat. A beer or two before you perform never hurts but keep moderation in mind because you certainly don't want to a) get wrecked and b) dehydrate yourself to the point where you have issues rehydrating while you sing. Not to mention (from personal experience) looking like a jackass on stage and severely screwing up your voice. No one wants to hear or see this...especially your band mates.

If you're sick and have no choice but to perform, sadly, cough medicine likely won't help you belt out those higher notes. If you feel as though taking medicine is the only means to feeling human again and cough syrup is your only option, chase it down with plenty of lukewarm water leading up to your performance. This may render the medicine moot since its purpose is to coat and sooth your throat so use your own discretion on this one. Getting plenty of rest on the day of the show will go a long way. Having played sick plenty of times these are things that I've taken from my time as a vocalist. This all works for me because sometimes I need to sing in somewhat of a cleaner voice and having my throat feeling "clear" helps me hit those higher screams. On the flipside, I've seen some of my death metal buddies chug down milk or coffee to get that disgusting milky film in their throat which helps to get that low death metal gurgle. That wouldn't work for me but it does for them so there really isn't a right or wrong practice with this. Figure out what you want to achieve with your voice and move on what works for you.

Try to sing EVERYDAY and if you do, make sure your warm up is productive. By that I mean stretch your vocal chords and ensure that everything in there is loose. Obviously if you're just belting out some Testament in the car while you're driving, a warm up likely isn't going to happen. However, if you're going to productively practice or perform, a good warm up is extremely important and beneficial in both the short and long term. A couple of things you can do to stretch the vocal chords is to stick your tongue out as far as you can for about 5 seconds and retract it. Do that about 10 times. This stretches the muscles you use when you sing/scream. Next (and this is difficult to describe in words) is to press your lips loosely together and blow (sort of like you're motorboating the air). While doing this, alternate a really low pitched sound to a mid pitch to a high pitch, taking breath between each pitch change and holding the pitch for 5 seconds. Go through a round of each pitch 10 times and you can alternate

sticking out your tongue (as mentioned above) between each cycle. Something else you can do as well is simply open your mouth as wide as you can, stretching out every muscle in your face, then, closing it. When you close it, make a duck face as hard as you can (almost as if you want to turn your face inside out through your nose.) Do that 10 times (you can work this in the sticking out of the tongue and lip pressing blows as mentioned above) If you're performing, you may want to find a corner where no one can see you because you're going to look and sound like a fool but hey...it's the price you pay for greatness. These exercises will loosen up all the muscles in your face which believe it or not will really help in your performance. If you're sick and you have to perform, it's important that even though your body isn't cooperating, your voice is and (for me anyway) it's all in how you treat your body leading up to the performance and the warm up. Plus, it certainly doesn't hurt to do these exercises a few times a week even if you're not performing to keep everything loose.

Now, on to the screaming!! The following technique has helped me for years and I literally haven't blown my voice (sick or not) since implementing this. Again this is hard to describe in words but here goes. When you're screaming (like anything) there is a right way and a wrong way and the following is the easiest way to describe how to do it right. Get a pencil and put it between your teeth and scream something, BUT, envision the sound coming out of your mouth and going OVER the top of the pencil. This is the correct way to belt out those screams and I guarantee in the end, you'll save your voice. With practice, you'll develop power in that technique to the point where it becomes second nature whether you're going really high or really low. If you do the same thing and envision it going under the pencil, that's wrong and actually you'll never get as much power doing this and eventually you'll likely blow your voice because you're using the wrong muscles in your throat. I know it will feel natural to go "under the pencil" when doing the guttural low vocals but trust me when I say if you adapt the "over the pencil" technique through your entire range, your vocal stamina will thank you. Try this technique and hopefully you'll quickly see what I mean.

Steve