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Improving or Eliminating Pitch Problems by [Maria Gini](#)

Article published on February 8th 2012 | [Music](#)

As we mentioned in a previous article, there is no cure for the individual who is medically tone deaf. Tone deafness is there to stay, and that individual will never be able to learn to distinguish between notes, and they will simply never be able to correctly sing the melody of a song.

However, for the majority of individuals with a persistent lack of pitch distinction there is plenty that can be done to improve or even eliminate the problem. , Often times one of the biggest obstacles a student must overcome is a lack of confidence that they can really sing in tune. Yet, once a singer learns how to improve their technical skills and improve control over the vocal instrument these negative feelings can be quickly overcome.

Since some singers who have never been given any satisfactory explanation for their frequent deviations from the desired pitch, they just assume they will never have the ability to hear and accurately match pitch or they must truly be tone deaf.

If an individual really wants to find out if there is hope for him or her as a singer, they should seek out a competent VOCAL COACH who can determine whether or not he or she is truly tone deaf, or if he or she simply needs to learn better vocal technique. A truly knowledgeable and experienced instructor will be able to make that determination by simply listening to the individual sing.

Many self-diagnosed tone deaf individuals or those who have lost confidence in their ability to sing find that by correcting their singing technique they can be taught to successfully sing in tune. In many cases a "pitch challenged" individual may be unaware of severe constrictions that are taking place in the vocal tract are the source of their pitch problem. With the help of a skilled vocal teacher, the student will be able to learn how to encourage relaxation and thereby learn to release the tension caused by these constrictions.

There are also ear training exercises that will help the student recognize the sounds and sensations of pitch when it is both incorrect and correct. Once the student's technique shows signs of improvement and he or she becomes more certain in his or her ability to hear and reproduce musical pitches the more confident and comfortable they will become with their singing voice. In fact in many cases, individuals who have pronounced themselves tone deaf go on to establish professional singing careers.

Training the Ear

It is nearly impossible for a singer to improve his or her pitch without the assistance of a competent voice instructor who has the knowledge and experience to address pitch inaccuracies, diagnose their causes and then present solutions that work, including some ear training and vocal technique instruction. For problems that are related to a lack of training or improper training, the voice and the ear can still be taught to work as a team in a more coordinated fashion.

Tone is one of the things that too often get overlooked whenever an individual is trying to improve pitch. In some instances a singer's tone may be too bright, meaning there's an over emphasis on upper harmonic partials, formats or the tone is too dark, lacking in upper partials/overtones. This may cause the singer's tone to "clash" with the tone of the accompanying musical instrument, making it more difficult to hear the fundamental pitch of the tone. If the instructor is able to help the singer change how he or she shapes the vocal tract and balances the tone he or she will have more success in matching the pitch of the accompanying instrument.

Some accompanying instruments may produce tones and vibrato that do not blend with the singer's voice or may throw the singer off. It is always advisable to choose an accompanying instrument that most closely matches an individual's own singing tone. A piano is almost always ideal for most individuals, while others may have better success with an acoustic guitar, for example.

When just beginning to train the ear to distinguish between different musical notes, it is wise to use a comfortable and "safe" pitch as this can eliminate some of the nervousness and stress that the singer might be feeling. In addition, a struggling singer will often times find it easier to hear and produce the desired pitch if they match or blend their voice with a singer whose pitch accuracy is precise and who has similar tonal qualities and vocal weights.

Many times playing the accompanying instrument loudly will help the student to hear the notes and the overtones of the instrument better. The loudness of the instrument may also help them feel less self-conscious about being heard, thus becoming more relaxed.

When helping an individual student to improve pitch through ear training, a competent instructor will avoid playing chords whenever possible. In fact it is best to keep it simple and just play the sung notes of the lead melody one note at a time. Using a piano as the accompanying instrument is recommended because the student can clearly hear the note and then sing it while the piano is resonating. This allows the student to listen to how the ring of his or her tone matches and is compatible with that of the piano. If it "clashes" with the instrument, the instructor will need to help him or her balance their tone. Once this is accomplished, try playing the same note again and have him or her sing back that note while the piano's sound is fading. The next step is to have the student sing back that same pitch after the piano has ceased making the sound. This will allow the student to "hear and repeat" as opposed to requiring the note to be sung simultaneously with the sound.

Once the student begins to match the pitch correctly more often, the instructor can begin adding the simplest major chord structure and have the student sing the note repeatedly. Once the pitch is matched correctly, the instructor should softly play the appropriate chord. Sometimes the other pitches in the chord will throw the student off pitch. Since this is a normal occurrence, the instructor should not let the student become discouraged. In fact the instructor should remind the student that just by singing more their technique will improve, their comfort and confidence level will improve, which in turn will improve their pitch.

It may seem obvious that an instructor should always avoid making insensitive comments or displaying frustration if a student's progress seems slow or labored, yet some instructors do just that, thus eroding the student's confidence and further impeding their development. A good instructor should always reassure the student that dedication, practice and perseverance will have its rewards.

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[Maria Gini](#) - About Author:

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Article Keywords:

Vocal Coach, vocal classes, vocal course, singing programs

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