WHY BUZZ?
Putting Lessac’s Y-buzz to work
by Crystal Robbins

The Lessac Y-buzz should be a part of every voice teacher’s curriculum. It cures a lot of ails. And it surprises me with new and original uses every semester that I teach. My students are an eclectic blend of nationalities and varied experiences. I often have theatre professionals from Los Angeles and students who speak little English in the same Beginning Voice Class. I routinely need to combat nasality, monotone speech, poor tonal quality, lack of projection, tension in the face and jaw, excessive nerves that lead to poor performances and inappropriate vocal placement, which leads to sore throats and strained voices. And it is just as likely that the theatre professional exhibits those qualities as the neophyte does.

What is the Y-buzz exactly? If you don’t have your Lessac book “The Use and Training of the Human Voice – A Biodynamic Approach to Vocal Life” handy, then let me share. Put your lips in a gentle “sh” position. Think of a slight yawn and hum on y. You are now humming on the Lessac French Horn. Play with it. Stay in the lower third of your register. Now invigorate that Y with a true EE. Keep feeling the sensation of yawn in your mouth and place the sound behind the two front teeth on the hard palate. The buzz should start behind the front teeth. Then you’ll feel it in your nose bone, and cartilage, up into the forehead and perhaps even in your head. After you’ve experienced that yummy buzzing for a while you even become sensitized to it in your head and neck and down the spine. Feel constantly the quality of YYYY and the quality of EEEE. Let the sounds marry and create a wonderful vibration unique unto them. If I were there, I’d coach you so that you had the right mixture of yawn and Y and E and gentle forward facial posture. I would make sure you placed the sound behind those front teeth so that when you pinched your nose to check, the sound remained the same. Getting it right might indeed require that an experienced Lessac teacher observe you and help you shape it and feed the Tonal Energy.

. . . but one thing is for sure, once your BODY recognizes the vibration, it commits it to memory and seeks it out and begs for you to do it again. It’s downright addictive, that seductive Y-buzz. The body tingles, it buzzes, it sings. It is alive and the cells dance.

There is a whole chapter in Lessac’s book, which gives many wonderful opportunities to identify and play with the Y-buzz and to put it into practice in your life. I encourage you to check it out. Why? The benefits of this little exploration are awesome.

1. Once a sense of forwardness is fully experienced (as is necessary in creating the buzz), nasality disappears easily, comfortably and is instantly recognizable to the student.

2. Once the spot of vibration behind the two front teeth can be identified and easily felt in the student, all full speech (or CALL) can be accomplished without any strain or stress on the throat. With continual exploration and experimentation, even the smallest, quietest voice distinctly improves from physically experiencing where sound is best placed.

3. There is a natural relaxation that occurs when the body is in “gentle turbulence” from the vibrations used in Y-buzzing. The mind relaxes, the heart stops racing, the nerves are calmed. My students have reported using it in times of severe trauma and stress and in feeling a sense of ease and control. This makes it an excellent tool before scene work, auditions and performances.

4. The Y-buzz has actually helped several students each semester with sinus

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problems. One student reported to his astonishment that he could now breathe through his nose for the first time in twenty some years. His doctor contacted me for information on what I’d been doing in class work, which would allow for such movement of congestion.

5. In that same vein, I personally have seen great results when I have had a cold. Recently, I was scheduled to film on a day when I was suffering a severe head cold. I concentrated on placing sound forward, even though I couldn’t hear myself and was clogged and nasal. I knew, however, the distinct FEEL of the Y-buzz. Through the Y-buzz work, I knew intimately how tone felt on the hard palate. I guided my tone to those well-known buzzy areas and the playback of my scene sounded clean and crisp and clear. No evidence whatsoever of a cold.

6. The Y-buzz grounds the voice and keeps the spiraling excitement of the scene, or the natural inclination for nerves in check. It is impossible to allow emotions to create a shrill or unpleasant voice with the Y-buzz firmly in one’s grasp. The consummate actor and user of the Y-buzz always has the necessary tools easily at hand to rein in the voice when in danger of losing all good tone.

7. In life, too, good command of the Y-buzz allows the user to stay fully in charge. Indecision, despair and uncertainty are kept under control. After learning Y-buzz, one of my students had the “voice” (as she called it) to fire her unproductive manager who had been manipulating her and sexually harassing her.

I like the fact that a tool used in my class can become a tool for life, that a student finds power in her voice and discovers the power within.

But don’t just take my word for it. Check it out in Arthur Lessac’s *The Use and Training of the Human voice,* (3rd edition, McGraw-Hill publishing.) I’ll be growing and maturing my own Y-buzz at the Lessac Workshop Intensive this summer. Master Teachers Sue Ann Park and Nancy Krebs are running the show and they can Buzz!

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