

The Female Changing Voice

The female voice can take up to four years to fully change and generally begins between the ages of 10 and 14. Females go through their growth spurts approximately two years before males. Many physical changes occur which include a size increase of the larynx in thickness and length. The female vocal folds increase only 3 to 4 millimeters compared to the male's increase of ten millimeters. During this female growth process, the glottis may not be able to close completely because of an unevenness of the vocal folds. This is the main reason a female's tone may sound breathy or weak. Hoffer (1991) attributes these thin, breathy tone qualities to "muscular immaturity, a lack of control and coordination of the breathing muscles, and insufficient voice development."

There are different stages of classification of the female voice change stated by many authors. Based on information drawn from sources listed in my research paper, stages in the female voice change are generally categorized in the following way:

Stage 1: Prepubertal.

This stage occurs in females ages eight to ten or eleven. The quality of this stage is characterized as being light and flute-like. Females in this stage can switch between upper and lower ranges with ease.

The general singing range in this stage is the following:



Stage 2a: Pubescent/Pre-Menarcheal.

(Menarcheal refers to a woman's first menstrual period, usually occurring during puberty.) This stage is generally reached between the ages of 11 and 13, usually when the first signs of physical maturation are seen. In this stage, females experience a voice break around the range of G to B above middle C. Other effects from the changing voice include breathiness and difficulty singing in the lower register. Singing sometimes becomes more difficult and may be uncomfortable.



Stage 2b: Puberty/Post-Menarcheal.

Females ages 13-15 may experience a more husky or heavy quality in their sound. Their most comfortable range is shortened to around six notes, and lower notes are usually the easiest to produce. This is the most critical stage in the development. The tessitura can move up or down, narrowing the range. Changes in this stage are sporadic and unpredictable.



Stage 3: Post-Menarcheal/Young Adult

This stage usually occurs in females age 14 or 15. Their sound may be inconsistent and have some cracking in it, but there is a decrease in the breathiness and the tone will become fuller and richer. Also in this stage females may begin to produce vibrato.

