Mouth Positions with Explanation

Throughout this course I've made mention of mouth positions. I didn't want to begin with this concept because this is truly an optional way of practicing your singing. However, if you have trouble with enunciation when you try to sing, this is a great way to fine tune where you fall short.

Vowels - When sounding vowels, your breath flows freely through the mouth. Five of the 26 alphabet letters are vowels: A, E, I, O, and U. The letter Y is sometimes considered a sixth vowel because it can sound like other vowels.

Unlike consonants, each of the vowel letters has more than one type of sound or can even be silent with no sound at all. When a vowel sounds like its name, this is called a long sound. A vowel letter can also have short sounds. Whether a vowel has a long sound, a short sound, or remains silent, depends on its position in a word and the letters around it.

Long Vowels: If you really "stretch" these words using the bolded vowel you can hear that these sound long.
Ape, Lake, Gate
Eat, Eel, Feet
Ice, Kite, Bite
Oak, Lonely, Potatoes
Ukulele**, UFO, United

** this word CAN be used in a short vowel setting, depending on your geographical location. In Hawaii they say it with a short vowel sound. Instead of the "you" sound, instead we have an "ooh" sound for the letter U. I learned this by listening to Jack Johnson - a native of Hawaii.

Short Vowels: If you really "shorten/stunt" these words using the bolded vowel you can hear how short they are.

Apple, Axe, Sack
Echo, Nest, Edge
Insect, Bird, Panic
Mop, Off, Ostrich
Under, Up, Ugly

The letter Y: When a "Y" is found in the middle of a word, such as "symbols" it is considered a vowel. Why? The letter "Y" in this case sounds like an "I" - which is a vowel. Another example is when the letter "Y" is found at the end of a word, such as "cry" it's also a vowel. Again, this letter sounds like an "I."
**Consonants** - When sounding consonants, air flow is interrupted or limited by the position of the tongue, teeth or lips. The majority of letters in the alphabet are consonant letters. Most consonant letters have only one sound and rarely sound like their name. I'll give you one example of each letter unless otherwise stated.

- **Boy**
- **Car** (hard), **Scent** (soft)
- **Duck**
- **Fish**
- **Goat** (hard), **Giant** (soft), **Gnome** (silent)
- **Home**
- **Jacket**
- **Kick** (hard), **Knock** (soft)
- **Lion**
- **Man**
- **Nose**
- **Pig**
- **Queen**
- **Ring**
- **Sock**
- **Tiger**
- **LoVe**
- **Woman**
What Does All This Mean?

Here's the mouth position chart again with some possible phonetic voicings. Feel free to grab a mirror and speak these words. You'll see the mouth position much easier. Low Voice 1 (LV1):

**Man, Boy, Pig**

When you speak these three words, you'll form this mouth position. In this case, the first letter of each "MBP" creates this mouth position. If you choose not to say a word, you can also simply say "mmmmm" (using "M") and the same formation is produced.

http://vimeo.com/101534426
Low Voice 2 (LV2):

**Woman, Queen**

When you speak these two words, you'll form this mouth position. In this case, the first letter of each "WQ" creates this mouth position. If you choose not to say a word, you can also simply say "woooo" (using "W") and the same formation is produced.

http://vimeo.com/101534427
Middle Voice 1 (MV1):

*Eat, Eel, Feet* (long)

When you speak these three words, you'll form this mouth position. Notice that MV1 uses the "long" vowel.
In this case, the first letter of "E" creates this mouth position.
If you choose not to say a word, you can also simply say "eeeee" and the same formation is produced.

http://vimeo.com/101534425
Middle Voice 2 (MV2):

**Echo, Nest, Edge (short)**

When you speak these three words, you'll form this mouth position. Notice that MV2 uses the "short" vowel. This is considered a "rest" position, which really means that little to no effort is required to produce a sound. If you choose not to say a word, you can also simply say "ehhhhhh" and the same formation is produced.

Important: The image is a bit deceiving, but it is still very accurate. You don't necessarily CLOSE your mouth so that your teeth are together. It's just a graphical representation of little to no effort.

[http://vimeo.com/101542194](http://vimeo.com/101542194)
High Voice 1 (HV1):

Apple, Axe, Sack (short)

In the case of HV1, you CAN use this mouth position for both long and short vowels. This works due to the larger opening formed with your mouth. In this case, the tongue position helps dictate what your phonetics should be. This position is the "widest" position in terms of mouth voicings, but it's actually not too difficult. We use this often when we scream.

If you choose not to say a word, you can also simply say "aaaaayyyyyy" (using "A") and the same formation is produced.

http://vimeo.com/101542192
High Voice 2 (HV2):

Challenge! As with anything there are exceptions. The list below does include theoretical interpretations of the way a word sounds in phonetics, but not all of these words are easy to sing in the way they are provided. See if you can spot the ones that are absolutely 100% phonetically correct, but difficult to sing.

http://vimeo.com/101542193

- Car (hard), Scent (soft)
- Duck
- Goat (hard), Giant (soft), Gnome (silent)
- Kick (hard), Knock (silent)
- Nose
- Ring
- Sock
- Tiger/Thing
- Yell
- Zoo

About the "Th"
The "Th" is part of HV2, but it's tricky because you must use your tongue. The tongue simply goes in between your front teeth in the middle. In other words, this does
This is your "go-to" for any non-vowel base word, so there are quite a few of them. However, a few of these words don't "feel" right. Can you guess which ones?

SPOILER! Below are the results of words that don't FEEL right, but absolutely work phonetically. If you are still practicing then don't scroll down quite yet.

*** SPOILER ALERT ***

Ok. I just wanted to be sure you weren't cheating ;)
The words in red don't feel right, but why?

Car (hard), Scent (soft)

**Car (hard)** doesn't feel right because it doesn't sound like a "C/see" - instead it sounds like a "CU/cut" phonetic. The "CU/cut" sounds like a "K" instead of a "C" - but it does work. It might take some practice, but after a while you'll definitely feel it. "Scent" works just fine.
Goat (hard), Giant (soft), Gnome (silent)

Goat doesn't feel right because you can't really enunciate that word without forming an "o" shape. In the case of G, you'll most likely find and use words such as "Get (hard)" and/or "Generation (soft)." The letter G is tricky not only in terms of music but also in terms of mouth position. In the case of gnome it works ONLY based on tongue position.

Kick (hard), Knock (silent)

Knock doesn't work as well, but it DOES work. The reason knock is weird is because the tongue is forced to the bottom row of teeth, generally in the middle. This forces your mouth open for enunciation purposes. You have to combine a few positions as a general guideline (Do you know which ones? You might figure it out further below.) However, you can keep your mouth the same for the word kick. As mentioned earlier with "C" - since Car was a hard consonant, it sounds more like the "K" sound. This is also why knock is tricky. It's more of an "N" sound, because the letter "K" is silent.
Nose

Nose is tricky, and it's based on the same scenario with "C" and "K" that I've already discussed. However, if you change the word to something like "need" it would work very easily! Other examples that would work are "kn"eel" and/or even the word "neat."

Ring

Ring does work - even though we expect that the "R" requires a more broadened mouth position. So, here's the kicker that I haven't mentioned yet. The mouth position doesn't necessarily need to start with the respective letter. Upon further breaking down of a certain word, such as ring, you WILL end up using this mouth position. Check this out:

The word "ring" can be broken down like this....

R-----iini----guh. The video explains what I mean here. When you sing, phonetics is VERY important, as is enunciation. You actually need to enunciate a bit more when singing as opposed to talking.
It feels weird, and at times you may laugh at the way you are singing a certain word. But, when you break the word "ring" down, you'll actually use the following mouth positions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Formation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R----</td>
<td>MV2</td>
<td>rest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------iiiin------</td>
<td>HV2</td>
<td>CDGKNSRYZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------guh</td>
<td>MV2</td>
<td>rest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this case, you are only using two phonetics. The "rest" in phonetics <NOT singing> requires just a BIT more emphasis, but in the case of singing, unless you are looking to sing some seriously lip-curling country style vocality - and I'm not making fun of it – I'm from South Arkansas (originally from Texas), the "rest" or MV2 doesn't actually come out as much phonetically, but vocally you'll see there isn't much of a change. It tends to cause a low pitch issue. Elvis Presley would do this.

He would curl his lip (no - it wasn't JUST for looks) to allow the drawl to come out more. If you were singing an Elvis song and he used the word "ring" - AND you were trying to emulate (never imitate!) his voice, it wouldn't work this way.
Zoo doesn't feel right, but I bet you guessed that one. It works, yet again, because of the combination of various mouth positions you CAN use to sound out this word. You would begin the word "zoo" with this mouth position, and possibly end it more with a "WQ" position. If you chose to use the word zebra it would feel very natural.
The "...oo" phrasing in the word "zoo" doesn't allow the enunciation of the word. However, in the case of zebra we have a vowel that follows the letter "z." This creates a natural MV2 voicing. Neat huh?!

http://vimeo.com/101542195
Our next installment will apply what we've learned to the song "Ho Hey" by The Lumineers.

**Song Study: "Ho Hey" by The Lumineers**
Let's take a look at the entire song as they performed it live:

Click Here To Watch “Ho Hey” by The Lumineers
As you can see here, the overall theme is that the "Ho!Hey!" part is sung in middle voice.

This is really just a basic shout, which adds emphasis. There isn't much to explain in the first verse, as the lead singer keeps his voice rather low and quiet. This one is easy.

The next verse he brings it up to around middle voice, so we will definitely need to check out the reasoning for this (other than for dynamic purpose.)

Verse 1:

C              F
(HOI!) I've been trying to do it right
C              F
(HEY!) I've been living the lonely life
C              F
(HOI!) I've been sleeping here instead
C              F
(HEY!) I've been sleeping in my bed
Am            G      C
(HEX!) I've been sleeping in my bed  ("Hey" below is sung on C as a doubled vocal)
(C) - F     C - F (repeat as desired into Verse 2)
(HEY!)          (HOI!)
In Verse 2:

(Notice the male background singer sings with lead singer here and does the Ho! Hey! part as well. The female singer also sings during this verse, including the Ho! Hey!)

C                F
(HEY!) So show me family
C                F
(HO!) And all the blood that I will bleed
C                F
(HEY!) I don't know where I belong
C                F
(HO!) I don't know where I went wrong
Am              G              C
(HEY!) But I can write a song. (HO!)

In Verse 2 the lead singer brings his voice to a more middle voice, with a few exceptions:

"....belong" - due to the natural drawl of this word, the "ong" is difficult to sing in middle or even high voice. There aren't enough vowels to accent the "ong" part, with "o" being a short vowel. In terms of voicing, you would most likely actually close your mouth more during this part.

"....wrong" - hmm...."ong" is here again. The same situation applies from above.

"....song" - Baahhaha - again. "ong" is here, so we know that all the "ongs" should move into a lower voice.
Also note that "family" (eeeee) and "bleed" (eeeee) are easy because of the vowels used. Those are easy to accent.

Chorus:

\[
\begin{align*}
  &\text{Am} & \text{G} & \text{C} \\
  &\text{I belong with you, you belong with me, you're my sweetheart} \\
  &\text{Am} & \text{G} & \text{(C) --- implied/double vocals} \\
  &\text{I belong with you, you belong with me, you're my sweetheart} \\
  &\text{C - F} & \text{C - F} \\
  &\text{(HO!) (HEY!) (repeat as desired)}
\end{align*}
\]

The chorus is pretty easy, but you'll see alternating voicings. I bet you can see why. The "you" and, surprisingly, the "me" are in low(er) voicings. The "Y" in "you" is found at the beginning, so it's not a vowel. The "o" and "u" are, but since "y" begins the word, it's too strange to sing in this context as a middle voice.

With "me" there just aren't enough letters to work with, so the "e" vowel alone won't provide you with enough vocal shift. You'll also notice that both of these words are directly under a chord.

The chord itself hints at the middle melody of the vocals, but the vocals aren't required to perform this task.

In the first line you finally see a higher voicing. This is relative as all three singers at this point are singing. However, when you listen I bet you'll hear it as a high voicing. Everything else is self-explanatory. I did want to make mention of the very end when
they go into "sweet," which moves lower based on the chord progression.

Since the C Major chord gives us all three options, he can bring the vocals down for closure.

Verse 3:

(C) I don't think you're right for him
(F) Think of what it might've been, if you
(C) Took a bus to Chinatown
(F) I'd be standing on Canal
(Am) and Bowery.....
(G) And she'd be standing next to me.
(C) <---implied/double vocals

Verse 3 mostly follows the Verse 2 concept, but when I hear it, for some reason I find that he drops every ending word or phrase into a lower voicing.

Do you agree? When you examine the words/phrases you'll notice that every movement goes lower, which MIGHT be due to the chord progression from C - F. This isn't always the case, but it is much more natural to go from mid (or even high) with C Major to low (or middle) with the F Major.
The same can be assumed with Am, as A(m) is the relative minor of C. In other words, you can keep the same overall tone.

DO note that in the word "Bowery" he seems to move from middle to low - at least how I hear it.

If you tried to sing "Bowery" from middle and stay middle (or even to high) I'll bet you lose the tone. I sure do. The natural "drop" in the word makes you want to go lower.

Chorus:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Am} & \text{G} & \text{C} \\
&\text{I belong with you, you belong with me, you're my sweetheart} & \text{Am} & \text{G} & \text{C} \\
&\text{I belong with you, you belong with me, you're my sweetheart}
\end{align*}
\]

Bridge:

\[
\begin{align*}
&F & G \\
&\text{And love, we need it now} & F & G \\
&\text{Let's hope for some} & F & G \\
&\text{Cuz oh, we're bleeding out}
\end{align*}
\]

The concept of the chorus hasn't really changed. You just sing the "...heart" part in "sweetheart" this time.
Once you move into the bridge, you'll see that the vocalists seem to stay in high voice at the end of "...heart" from the chorus. Is that what you hear too?

The bridge allows a bit of room in terms of what words are actually hitting high or middle, because again - there are multiple vocalists. I think the overall tone is coded this way though.

It's important to note that "Let's" as well as "Cuz/'Cause" are barely even noticed in the chorus.

When you listen you might not even hear these words well. So, the movement from high ("now") to low ("Let's") isn't NEARLY as tough. It's really just implied more with a speaking voice.

If you removed those words completely, the overall pattern is:

- high > middle > high
- high > middle
- high > middle > low

The final "low" moves into the chorus theme again, which brings you into middle voice. The transition is SO much easier from low to middle, isn't it?
What Does All This Mean?

Overall, the concept is (1) there are multiple vocalists, so you won't find too many "guaranteed" highs in the song. The mixture of all three voices help the overall sound. When you listen to the song, I'll bet you'll find, based on HEARING their natural speaking voices at the beginning....

The lead singer sings mostly in low - middle.
The tamborine guy sings mostly in middle.
The cello player sings mostly in middle – high.

While I never heard the female cello player, it's most likely assumed her voice ranges in a natural middle to high. This could mean that her natural high voice is really a man's natural middle voice. Follow me there? It's one of the many secrets to finding a person that can sing background. Think of Simon and Garfunkel. Those guys both have a naturally middle to high voice range. BOTH of them. That's why their music is soooo hard to sing.

The Beatles are another good example. You'll find that they all seem to share an overall middle voice in terms of speaking.

Then, take a singer like Tom Waits, whom I adore both as a person, storyteller, and musician. You'll be hard-pressed to find a single song of his that ever moves from middle or low. Ever. Like - never ever.
He works his voicings by (1) using melodic and exotic chord progressions as well as (2) adding the "gravel" tone. This is NOT the same tone that is achieved in the new (and might I say really weird!) "screamo" voice.

This is the same tone that is produced by someone like James Hetfield. However, if you watch a live performance of Metallica, James Hetfield rarely, if ever, truly achieves the same vocal tone from an album vs. a live performance. Why is that? James Hetfield doesn't TRULY sing with a gravel tone. He adds it in. He emulates what is supposed to be expected in the world of heavy rock/metal/whatever those guys are. In other words....he doesn't actually sound like that.

When you listen to Tom Waits, his overall tone does sound like that. So, when he "adds gravel" to his voice, it's much more believable in terms of the way he naturally speaks.

The overall concept in this entire lesson is to show you that you can EMULATE a vocalist, based solely on the way they use their vocal runs (including vowels and consonants for safe measure). The goal is to avoid imitating. When you practice a vocalist's style of delivery you'll find it's much easier to get a feeling for the song. With my version of this song, I tried to keep everything the same. I just couldn't get to the "Ho! Hey!" parts because they overlapped some vocals.
Opposites Attract....

As mentioned in the demo, you may wonder why from F - G (bridge) the vocal movement is high to middle, where the F chord itself is usually a lower sounding chord. Of course, G is brighter. So, why did they sing from high to middle in the way they did?

The final chord from the chorus (which precedes the bridge) is a C Major chord. They are singing in high voice.

Chorus:

Am          G    C
I belong with you, you belong with me, you’re my sweetheart
Am          G    C
I belong with you, you belong with me, you’re my sweetheart

Bridge:

F            G
And love, we need it now
F            G
Let’s hope for some
F            G
Cuz oh, we’re bleeding out

So, from C - F - G we have a combination of high (...heart) > high (...love) > middle (...we need it) > high (...now).
When you strum the C - F - G chords, you'll hear a gradual movement of C = middle, F = low, G = high, right?

Remember: middle > low > high

A vocalist doesn't always follow the chords or notes in a song. Sometimes you want to create a dynamic opposite.

Because we KNOW that "...heart" is sung in high voice, we CANNOT go from high to low very easily (unless you are an amazing singer - it's really hard) so we have to adjust. Yet again, the C Major chord determines our starting point based on low, middle, and high voicings.

C = high voicing

We could go to middle if we wanted when we reach the F Major chord for the bridge, right? But aren't bridges usually a bit more emphasized in a song? This is usually the case with a bridge that doesn't even have vocals. So, we want to keep the emphasis alive. We don't want to sing low. It's boring - and it's downright difficult. Our only choice is to stay in the high range!

C = high voicing (stay there!)
F = high voicing
The word "love" is pretty easy to sing in high voicing. In low voicing it's not. This is because the "v" actually ends up being implied due to it being sandwiched between two vowels. You'll end up REALLY singing "looooooe" instead of "love" - trust me. You'll probably take a breath right on the "v" part in "love" - which will cause your lips to close a bit, even if you are properly breathing in and out through your nose. It's just a natural reaction.

Finally, we're left with the G Major, which comes in after the F in the bridge. We can't stay in high voicing all day, as this song feels like it wants to move through the various three-stage voicing, even if ever-so-slightly.

So, we need to bring the G down a bit. Let's close up the first line of the bridge. We choose middle voicing.

C = high voicing (stay there!)
F = high voicing
G = middle voicing

**How Did I Come To This Overall Conclusion?**
You may wonder how I figured this out. The truth is - just listen to the song. There's a constant flow that happens in it. You feel where the vocal movement wants to take you based on just three voicings. Sometimes when I say "feel" or "listen" it might seem frustrating, so a quicker breakdown might help:
This is how I approach every single song I teach.

1. I listen to the vocals FIRST. I figure out where the vocal ribbon takes me.

In this diagram, you'll find:
A/O = Middle
B = Low
C = High

2. I then connect the chords. By connecting the chords AFTER I listen to the vocals, I can then decide where I want to adjust things. When I offered the Hendrix collection I had to do this. Hendrix wasn't really known for melody. He always sounded rather the same. So, I first listened to his overall tone (which I found to be more middle) and then adjusted my vocals (for the good and the bad! lol) to what he was playing on the guitar. His guitar melody outshined his vocals. The opposite is happening in this song.
3. After I decide on vocals and THEN chords, and THEN how these two need to "meet" so to speak, I finalize it by playing and singing, keeping a mental note of where I sound bad. I examine the word that goes off pitch, and then see if I can adjust the word based on vowels and consonants. Am I allowed to make a short vowel sound like a long vowel? Sometimes. Yesterday's lesson talked about the word ukulele, where in Hawaii it is spoken with a short vowel instead of a long vowel. Instead of "you" for the letter U, they say "ooh" instead. While you won't find this option too often, it CAN be found.

Quick examples that I can think of are:
"Gonna" where it should be "Going to"
"Cause/Coz" where it should be "Because"

Sometimes you have to shorten the word for it to translate vocally. This is why it's important to understand vowels and consonants. Singing is just an elaborate way of speaking, and without vowels and consonants we have no way to speak.

**When You Practice....**

When you play this song, I want you to focus specifically on the reference sheet I provide. The chords aren't too tricky, and since we are playing from C - F repeatedly I'd like you to focus on working from middle to low as a general rule of thumb. When you get to parts that I coded differently than you feel comfortable singing, think about why you don't feel good in that given situation.
Does the coding move too high, too low, or what?

Pay very close attention to long and short vowels. Also pay attention to the consonants. This is only necessary IF you find yourself having difficulty singing a given phrase. If you run right through this song (be honest with yourself) then odds are you are perfectly in "tune" with the key of C Major using middle voice. The middle voice is an overall average in this song. To be honest, any song in the key of C Major will usually be a middle voice song. However, you can always change it to a higher C. You'll not find a low C Major voice key nearly as often.

http://vimeo.com/101640141

Print/View Coded Reference File

**Progressions in Low, Middle, and High**

Today's lesson is probably going to be the easiest way to combine the concept of melody as well as chord changes in finding the low, middle, and high voicing. I chose a singer that doesn't make voicings too difficult at all. Believe it or not my wife suggested teaching this song. I like to run things by her and I made mention that "the songs I'm offering might be a bit too difficult." The first thing she said was..."Jimmy Buffett dummy!"

(Seriously - that's what she said!)
So, I thought of the perfect song that only uses three chords, is in the key of A, and actually provides a bit of low, middle, and high voicing within each and every chord. This is what I was looking for!

**Let's Begin**

We need to take a look at the first verse. This time I'm offering you tab both for strumming AND fingerstyle.

I only covered the first verse with the tab, but it repeats over and over.

A

He went to Paris lookin' for answers to questions that bothered him so.
A

He was impressive, young and aggressive, savin' the world on his own.

D

But the warm summer breezes, the French wines n' cheeses put his ambition at bay
A

The summers n' winters scattered like splinters and four or five years slipped away.

<Ughh - I just noticed I misspelled "aggressive" - that bugs me. I fixed it on the reference file>
Strumming:

This is a simple strumming version at 100 bpm. There's no need to really focus on this, but I wanted to include it as a reference.

Fingerstyle:

This is the same version using fingerstyle at 100 bpm. Again, there's no need to focus on this, but if you want to play it more like I do then this is the way I play it.
Examination:

A D A
He went to Paris lookin' for answers to questions that bothered him so.
A D E7
He was impressive, young and aggressive, savin' the world on his own.
D A D E7
But the warm summer breezes, the French wines n' cheeses put his ambition at bay
A D E7 A
The summers n' winters scattered like splinters and four or five years slipped away.

The real focus is the movement from different voicings based on chords. As you know, the song is in the key of A. That means that "A" is our starting point in deciding where we want to go with our vocals. In most songs from Jimmy Buffett he sings in a middle voice. Because he does have a country influence, he tends to pull a few drawls here and there. When we get to them I'll let you know.

Brief Breakdown:
Line 1: Middle > High > Middle
Chords: A > D > A

This is pretty easy to figure out. Since the A chord sounds lower than the D chord, we know he either sings the "A" in middle or low, right? However, there's an E7 in the song as well. (Helps to look ahead - remember!)
So, since we also know that E7 is the lowest of the three chords we're playing/singing, we must assume for now that E7 is the lowest vocal we want to use.

Line 2: Middle > High > Low
Chords: A > D > E7

Based on what you just read, this should be self-explanatory.

Line 3: Middle > High > Middle > Low > High > Middle
Chords: D > A > D > E7

This one is a bit different than usual, because he DOES go from low(ish) to high(ish), which I previously said can be tricky. The reason this particular one works a bit easier is because the "...n' cheeses" from "French wines..." is still part of the A Major chord. In this case he is using a drawl. When a drawl occurs you aren't really singing. Instead you are speaking the word. If you listen to him sing it you will hear an IMMEDIATE drop in vocals to where he is really just speaking. A good rule of thumb is this: when you see a slang word, or shortened word, such as <n'> or <'coz/'cause> this word is usually spoken more than sung. The drawl is internal, not external. You literally pull your word inside by breathing instead of singing it out. When I give you a Dave Matthews study you'll find he does this CONSTANTLY - and he rarely goes lower than middle voice. It'll be an interesting examination that you can practice. After the low(ish) drawl you move directly into a high(ish) voicing. This isn't too bad because we're immediately striking a D Major chord after the A. During the initial
drawl your mind won't notice that there is a movement from low to high because you weren't actually singing anything. You were more speaking the "n' cheeses" part. In other words, there was no real need for a melodic approach to the vocals; therefore, there was no need to worry about which voicing you were actually using. It's not difficult to SPEAK from low to high. We do this all the time.

Line 4: Middle > Low > Middle
Chords: A - D - E7 – A

This isn't too hard to follow, with the exception of Buffett singing in a LOW voice on the D chord. Why did he do this? For starters, you, as a musician, know that this is the last line of the first verse. By looking ahead you don't actually see a chorus. In other words, you know that you must create a turnaround. The first verse has to wrap up.

You WILL hear that the "...and four or five..." goes a bit lower, but it's still in the middle range of the A Major. You don't hear a drastic change in the line until you reach the actual lower part for "...years slipped...." do you?

He ends the first verse in a middle voicing. This makes sense because another verse is coming up.
Voicings 101:

So, how in the world do you sing the first verse? Which mouth positions do you use? You'll want to start in the middle voicing realm, so it'll either be:

![Mouth positions MV1 and MV2]

The first one is MV1. The second one is MV2.

The first line says "He went to Paris..." so when you say the word "He" I bet you'll hear a certain vowel pop right out in front, right? Yep. The "E" in "He" is very easy to hear. This means, based on the vowel options, we most likely want to start with MV1. You could absolutely choose MV2 as well. The only issue there is you won't find the air you want to create the "H" from "He." It'll turn into a low voice based on the tone produced. We want to find that vowel and use it as a starting point.

This mouth position works ALL the way until you get to the high voicing for D Major. Which one do we use there?
We ACTUALLY use the low voicing mouth formation! What? Huh? <mind explosion>

Within each and every low, middle, and high mouth formation there IS a high, middle, and low - because we always have octaves to contend with. A great example of this on your guitar is the Low E and High E. They are both "E" notes, but the E's ring at different octaves.

In the case of the word "questions" we must start on the letter Q. If I wouldn't have coded this for you, when you say the word "questions" I'll bet you don't sound like Johnny Cash, do you? It doesn't feel natural to say the word "question" in a low tone. Even when you say "Can I ask you a question?..." the ending "?", based on phonetics, requires you to bring your voice to a higher pitch. When we ask a question we must inform the listener that we expect a response. By bringing our speaking voice up a bit the listener knows that they are expected to answer.
The same applies in singing. While Buffett isn’t actually asking a question (he is telling a story) the word itself is a natural word that illicits the need to bring the tone up. So, while we USE the "Q" mouth position from LV2 (to produce the "Q" necessary) we actually use the higher voicing range from LV2.

An even easier way to think of it (without any real theory) is the need for movement/emphasis in ANY vocal passage. Since the entire overall theme in the first verse is mostly in middle voice, the only logical place to bring up our tone would be when a chord ends up being a bit higher than the other chords within a line. D sounds higher than A, and therefore we need to create an obvious change. Bam! That's the super easy way to think of it.

One More Thing....

I want to stress that on your reference file you'll find a few underlined words. In most every case where I underline a word, the overall tone is subjective. When you pull up the full reference you'll find that most every time an E7 appears it's either in middle or low voice. While that makes sense, there are also a few times where it doesn't happen this way.

Here's an example:
During the beginning of the 3rd verse, you'll find that at the beginning everything is pretty copacetic. I do want to make mention real quick of the <n'> in the first line. In this instance it's not really so much in middle voice. Really, since it's a drawl, it's mostly in low voice. However, Buffett sings this a bit different in various recordings. He has taken liberty to enunciate "and" at times instead of <n'> - which most performers do from time to time. It REALLY sounds like he says "the bombs killed his lady in/an...." if you follow what I mean there. It all depends on which version you listen to AND how particular you are about slang usage. I was an English major, and it bugs me, but when singing we must work with logical syllables.

Beyond that exception, Buffett chooses to raise his voice a BIT from middle to high during the "...whole world was..." part. Because there are only three chords both above this part (line 1) and in this part (line 2), he creates emphasis to keep the song from sounding stale. Notice his movement is Middle > High > Middle > High > LOW. Doesn't this seem just like the hills on a roller coaster? Maybe even the way a song structure is presented like Verse, Chorus, Verse, Chorus, Bridge?

Again, the underlined parts really just give you an option. To decide what you want to do, pay attention to the INITIAL voicing for a given phrase.

Well the war took his baby, the bombs killed his lady, n' left him with only one eye.
His body was battered, his whole world was shattered, all he could do was just cry.
In this case, every single voicing starts in middle for each verse. This means that you can simply choose middle voicing for any underlined part. It stays consistent. In many ways this translates to guitar with the concept of playing Pentatonic scales. Blues guitar is the perfect example of this. You can play the Pentatonic minor scale over a Major blues progression because "it works." (The 1 4 5 progression - that's E A B in E major).

So, depending on your choice and/or ability, you can feel free to alter any underlined vocal phrase using the original voicing of the song. In the case of the final E7, we're LOOKING for a lower voicing, but you CAN bring it to a middle voicing if it is easier for you. This will help you avoid any pitch issues.

**My Version**

Here's my little secret: I have a VERY bad country drawl that I have desperately tried to fix over the last 15 years. It's just hard to avoid. When I sing this song, really I just stick to middle and low. I don't follow any format. I just glance at the word and know where I want to go with it. By saying this, it doesn't mean that I don't follow low, middle, and high, but I've spent a TON of time working on songs, and by now I have a way of seeing a word and knowing immediately whether or not I can truly hit that word vocally. In another tutorial I'll show you what "safe words" really mean and how they are applied. This will help you tremendously. Watch my demonstration of the song and you'll see what I mean. I don't REALLY follow the coded format I am providing you, but based on my vocals, the overall template still works.
The PTB/PDF practice files just include the first verse of the song both in strumming and fingerstyle. The overall concept is there though.

**Quickly: How I Figured Out Safe Words...**

What do I mean by "safe words" when we sing? Well, there are certain words out there that just don't feel like they make any sense to sing - like - at all.

I found this out listening to a Dave Matthews song.

It was one of the first songs of his I learned to sing because I loved the riff he played while he was singing. I have bolded the words that I had never really sung before.

In other words, I had NO idea where to go vocally on my own.

Here are the lyrics to "What Would You Say"
Up and down the puppies' hair
Fleas and ticks jump everywhere
'Cause of original sin
Down the hill fell Jack and Jill
And you came tumbling after
'Cause of original sin

Rip away the tears
Drink a hope to happy years
And you may find
A lifetime's passed you by

What would you say
Don't drop the big one
If you a monkey on a string
Don't cut my lifeline
If you a doggie on a chain
Don't bite the mailman
What would you say

I was there when the bear
Ate his head, thought it was a candy
Everyone goes in the end
Knock knock on the door
Who's it for, there's nobody in here
Look in the mirror my friend

I don't understand at best
And cannot speak for all the rest
In the morning rise
A lifetime's passed me by

What would you say
Don't drop the big one
If you a monkey on a string
Don't cut my lifeline
If you a doggie on a chain
Don't bite the mailman
What would you say

Every dog has its day every day has its way
Of being forgotten -
Mom it's my birthday
What would you say

Puppies' - Fleas and Ticks - Monkey - Doggie - Mailman – Bear?

Um...huh? I have NEVER heard these words sung in all my life. I was soooo lost. While most of these words WON'T be found in other songs, if I truly wanted to learn this song I had to figure out how I would sing these words. Period. So, what did I do? I used the syllables within them and I NEVER deviated from that if and when I ran across these words again. In the case of <Puppies'> I shortened it to "Puppy".

Puppy = Pup-py
Fleas and Ticks = Fleas-n'-Ticks
Monkey = Mon-key
Doggie = Dog-gie
Mailman = Mail-man
Bear = Bear

Phonetically each word would sound like this, disregarding actual syllable usage. I didn't include "fleas-n'-ticks" because we already know we can just assume it's a lower drawl:
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*The "L" requires the use of the tongue in the middle of the bottom row of teeth, but the mouth position is accurate in terms of positioning.

Since I sounded out every word (and while not all words LOOK like they sound, such as "bear" sounding out as "Bbb-aai-rrrr," nonetheless I would store these words in
my memory for any and every future reference. Believe it or not, these words HAVE appeared to me over time. Yes. Every single word except "fleas n' ticks."

Puppy = Harry Nilsson's "The Puppy Song"
Monkey = Dave Matthews' "Proudest Monkey"
Doggie = James Taylor's "Sweet Baby James"
Mailman = The Beatles'/Buddy Holly's "Mailman, Bring Me No More Blues"
Bear = John Mayalls' "The Bear" as well as Hendrix's "Three Little Bears"

Long Story Short....

When you run across a word that you THINK you'll never sing again, so you decide not to worry about it, always try to at least sound it out. Dwell on it just a bit. That one word could change the way you look at an entire catalog of songs in the future. I will expand on this in a future tutorial on "Safe Words."