

On the Wings of Voice

How to sing with your heart's true voice!

By Kate Barbour

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Foreword

Every year for the past five years in early spring a blackbird has perched himself on the tree outside our window. It warms my spirit to listen to him singing his heart out from dawn till dusk. I suppose he's singing to woo his love-bird. The fact that his love-heart invariably keeps him waiting for at least two months before arriving doesn't put him off his constant singing. He never quits. Singing is what he does; singing is natural to him. Or maybe he just sings because he can.

I often wonder if he knows how melodiously he sings in the clear air of the day. Unlike most adults, he doesn't seem to have any reservations or hang-ups about singing. You see, singing is part of his natural habitat; singing is his way of being; and singing is what he does... from his heart. And so, he sings with confidence, with gusto, and with complete freedom!

Are you like this blackbird? Do you sing from your heart, with joy, naturally? Or, like so many adults, are you afraid to sing for all sorts of reasons?

Maybe you had the joy of singing knocked out of you during your tender years. Perhaps you even gave up singing due to unkind remarks about the "quality" of your singing you received from a parent, sibling, or teacher. But that's all in the past now, isn't it? Because now you have plucked up enough courage to start singing again, even with a view to singing in public.

Or maybe you are an experienced singer who has been experiencing a few hiccups with some aspects of your voice? You feel and know that you are not singing authentically, naturally, from your heart.

Well, wherever you may lie along this singing spectrum, you will find a lot in this book that will help you to improve all aspects of your voice and singing. Why? Because in your heart there throbs a burning desire to re-live the joy of singing you experienced as a child or as a newbie singer, and you want to share this joy of singing with others.

This book about the voice and singing has been written for both experienced and non-experienced singers. But unlike most books on singing, the author approaches the subject from a unique and refreshing vantage point. In "On The Wings Of Voice",

Kate Barbour presents a practical philosophy of singing from the heart which has been overlooked by mainstream voice coaches.

Kate discusses why many of the singing techniques you may have learned from mainstream singing courses fail to strike a chord in your heart (as a singer) and in the hearts of your audiences. She explains why you as a singer must first learn how to re-discover your natural (true) voice, which she calls your Ideal Voice. She also describes principles and practices for learning how to make this your habitual experience as you perform as a singer.

Kate maintains that only when you as a singer are able to access your true (natural) voice will you be able to avoid the endemic problem of vocal overuse and abuse that plagues most singers. This is a key “forgotten” aspect of singing. She found the invaluable benefits of accessing her true voice after experiencing a breakdown of her fragile vocal cords from damage caused by using “old school” methods of singing.

This is a truly inspiring book which offers you as a singer or potential singer insights into how to let your ideal voice out of prison. It covers both the psychological and physical factors of doing this, together with practical techniques that you can use to develop into a well-rounded, confident performer.

I suppose it is rather unusual for the husband of the author to write a foreword for her book. I could be accused of positive bias, couldn't I? Or even of negative bias? Yet, as a participant in Kate's life and career for over 16 years now, I think I know her rather well. In a nutshell, what comes across in her book and in her character is the purpose and passion she has in her heart for improving her own singing and for helping other singers uncover their natural, authentic voices. Enjoying singing from the heart is who she is; inspiring you to sing from your heart is what she does. Kate sings because it is her natural habitat and because she can. So should you... from your heart... in a way that naturally touches your listeners' hearts!

In closing, I can hear at this very moment the blackbird singing in full flow. His voice resonates with freedom. Unlike most human singers, his voice is not trapped inside a cage of mental and physical barriers. His heart/voice has reason that brain-caged reason knows nothing of. All singers need to start singing outside the cage!

Bill Barbour, April 2013

Introduction

You may be asking, “Why another book about singing?” I know, there are plenty of books on how to sing better. It would be a waste of time to only re-hash stuff that is out there already.

Yes, there’s a plethora of books about the singing techniques that are taught in mainstream music conservatories and by traditionally-trained singing coaches. But as far as I am aware, this is the first book on “finding one’s ideal voice.” This book covers a philosophy and practice of singing which puts the discovery of your natural, authentic voice at the centre of singing training.

It is rather bizarre that this “singing from the heart” aspect of singing, and the secondary factors that reinforce it, have mostly been set aside, forgotten, and lost through the centuries. And so, I have written this book to influence and inspire you, a professional or amateur singer, to discover your true voice, learn to listen more to your heart, and experience the pure joy of singing authentically.

You see, as a compassionate person, a classical singer, and vocal coach, I believe that more harmony on our planet will be a living reality when more people practice thinking, acting... and singing from their hearts. My vision-purpose-passion is to make the world a better place, one singer at a time, through heart-centred singing!

For me, singing from my heart has led to both inner and outer harmony, accord, and balance. And so, in this book, I discuss the principles and practices of true-voice singing that can promote harmony, accord, and health... at least within those who use them. What I don’t know yet is the extent to which living and singing from the heart can bring more harmony, accord, and balance more widely in society.

“You may say I’m a dreamer, but I’m not the only one!” John Lennon, Imagine.

Of course, it’s one thing to dream of living in a new age where heart-centred love and compassion prevail over ego-centric fear and selfishness. It’s another thing to make this a reality. Helping people to live and sing from their hearts is the value I add to this cause. And so, I hope that this book will encourage those with a similar dream to do what they can to promote a new era in which mutual respect, co-operation, unity,

and harmony will prevail.

Structure/ Outline Content of the Book

I have organised this book into three related parts: Part I, On the Wings of Voice; Part II, Singing from the Heart; and Part III, Finding Your True Voice. Part I is about the forgotten aspects of singing; Part II is concerned with what singing from the heart really means; and Part III is about a practical approach to finding your ideal voice.

In Part I, “On the Wings of Voice,” I discuss specific aspects of singing that have mostly been swept aside in current western society and the main reason for this. I then discuss *the roots of singing*, reflect on the natural *uniqueness* of each human being and on the suppression of individual uniqueness in western society, and explain the effects this suppression has had on the whole area of vocal expression.

To remedy this, I suggest you can become more authentic by *living and singing from inside out*, and discuss what this means. Claiming that *the power of authenticity* is the ultimate quality that distinguishes all outstanding singers, I conclude Part I by explaining why it is important to find your authentic voice. In truth it is like *returning home*.

In Part II, “Singing from the Heart,” I reveal some new scientific discoveries about the intelligence of the heart and how these relate to the voice and to singing. First discussing that *the heart is more than a pump*, then going deeper into what makes *the heart intelligent*, I explain what *the language of the heart* is and offer some advice based on my own life experience.

The next chapter, *From Heart to Art*, expresses my deep belief about why there is no genuine art without the heart. I go on to explain the connection between *voice, culture, and identity* and why it is important to become aware of these. In the context of freeing yourself from the cultural limitations imposed on you, I discuss *the healing power of the human voice*. The main focus here is on two aspects that can be healed through the energy of your own voice, namely, stress and identity. To round off Part II, I ponder over what it really means to *sing from the heart*.

In Part III, “Finding Your True Voice”, I explain the principles and practices of my vocal coaching. The core of my coaching lies in demonstrating how to discover

(uncover) and develop your natural (authentic) voice. I go on to reveal *seven aspects of singing*, one after the other.

You hear about the meaning, the importance, and the approach I have taken to develop these seven aspects of singing in my individual singing classes and workshops. I acknowledge the inspiration gained from the Swedish therapeutic singing school founded by Valborg Werbeck-Svårdström and from the Czech singing school set up by Rudolf Vašek.

However, the seven aspects of singing present the result of my own life-long journey towards the essence of authentic singing from the heart, and the power of the human voice. The seven aspects of singing reflect a holistic point of view where you and your voice are both the goal and the journey! My purpose is to inspire everyone who loves singing, regardless of experience and abilities.

As you may expect, I am well aware that the practical side of singing can never be explained properly by the written word alone. Therefore, I have created a few short demonstration videos to complement Part III of this book.

Part I: On the Wings of Voice

"Singing is a flow of life's energy. Both are gifts to be enjoyed and shared." Kate Barbour (2013)



1. Different Point of View

There is a commonly-held point of view of singing which is promoted by the media, especially the media which broadcasts television “singing-talent” shows. This viewpoint emphasises singing “performance.”

On these talent shows, singers are rewarded to the degree to which they “perform.” The few who make it through to the final stages of the competition are “performance-trained” by voice coaches. These singers then perform in front of an audience, are critiqued by a panel of celebrities, and receive votes from the public. The whole event revolves around singing performance that is assessed in terms of “end result.”

You may argue that this is an extreme example. And yet, it is not really much of an exaggeration. Obsession with “performance” in terms of tangible end results has reached epidemic levels in most professions, sports, and especially music and singing.

It is hardly surprising then that this fixation with singing performance in the media has filtered down to both voice coaches and singers. I believe this is also the reason why so many of them focus mainly on tangible aspects of singing.

There is no doubt that end results are important for voice coaches and singers alike. But the real danger of putting too much attention on tangible outcomes is that singers can easily lose the authenticity of both their voices and their self-expression.

Having an experience of being trained and also training others, I depart radically from those singers and voice coaches who push themselves and their clients to the limit in terms of singing performance. In my view and practice, there needs to be a balance between “performance-based” aspects of singing and what I call “heart-based” aspects of singing.

Tangible results-oriented singing may be seen as the “end,” but what of the “means?” A large part of the proper means lies buried like a special treasure in the human voice. This is where the **amazing beauty and energy** of the natural voice sits waiting to be unearthed, despite the performance-based perception of singing projected by the entertainment world.

Many things in life have both *tangible* and *intangible* aspects to them. Singing and

the human voice are like this too. Tangible aspects of singing are mostly about the end-result experience of singing; intangible aspects are more about the psychological, heart-based experience of singing.

If you were a new client of mine, I would be seeking to find out what you wanted from singing and voice coaching in terms of both tangible and intangible benefits. It is very important for me to strike the right balance between these two contrasting points of view. I do also respect that peoples' views can be spread all over the scale, further or closer to the ideal balance point.

Taking the middle way is often difficult. The reason is that most of us who live in the "consumer society" are being pushed towards the materialistic, quick-fix view of life. This way of thinking has to a great extent caused many to view everything only in terms of tangible outcomes.

Due to this, the means and the end of many aspects of life have become separated. In some cases, the destination is all that matters and not the journey. But with respect to singing, it is helpful to consider means and ends as two sides of the same coin: two aspects of life which are inseparable.

This is not the same as saying that the ends justify the means. In the case of singing and voice coaching, competent singing performance may be the main end but should not be the only end. Singing for the pure joy of singing is also an end in itself and practicing heart-based singing can be a useful means to an ultimate performance-based end.

So as you see, it's entirely up to you to decide what you want to get out of singing. Different people have different goals. For example, your ultimate goal may be to sing in public as a soloist, or to sing in choir or band. Or you may just wish to gain more confidence to sing in front of your friends informally. However, **singing doesn't need to be a means to an end; it can be an end in itself.** In other words, you may just want to sing better because of how it makes you feel, even when you are your only audience!

For example, my husband and I love to sing when we're in the company of friends and even when alone at home... because it's fun, relaxing, and uplifting. But singing from the heart wasn't always the case for me. When I participated in various training

courses for professional singers, the emphasis was mostly on the end results: the repertoire, interpretation, and vocal technique. Hardly any attention was given developing the quality of the voice in terms of apparently less obvious factors such as the physical and emotional state of the singer.

It was only after I came across the therapeutic singing methods which I discuss in this book that I realised that singing well depends on enjoying the singing process, not just the end result! This singing process includes certain intangible aspects and benefits of singing that I pass on to my clients!

Unfortunately, it is too easy for even excellent singers to lose the joy of singing because of the inability to strike the right balance between the end-result and the process of singing. Psychologically burnout, in parallel with flaky or damaged vocal cords, results in many singers giving up their singing careers earlier than planned. The singers who want to continue or return to the stage are understandably reluctant to discuss their psychological and/or voice-related problems openly for fear of losing credibility.

Recently, I read an article on a Mexican baritone who told his story about losing the joy of singing when he was twenty two. He was even considering stopping singing professionally for good. Fortunately, he had a close friend with whom he practiced only breathing for a year. As natural breathing with active diaphragm is crucial for singing properly, the young singer connected again to his authentic voice and re-discovered the joy of singing.

As you can guess, I like to help singers who need to get back in touch with the joy of singing, re-discover their authentic voices, get out of restrictive vocal and breathing habits, and enjoy the overall health benefits of singing. I combine this with some voice enhancing exercises which help them to further advance their singing technique!

I also enjoy helping people who believe they cannot sing. I love working with such clients as they are amazingly open to the process of discovering their authentic voices and haven't learned bad vocal habits. While a few of them may never learn to sing well, at least they will experience the many benefits of singing from their hearts!

Since this book is about singing and living from the heart, I will finish this chapter

with a quotation from Steve Jobs, the late C.E.O of Apple. Though he was certainly a person who focused mainly on tangible end results, he also realised the importance of the intangible, heart-based process and of following one's inner voice:

“Your time is limited, so don’t waste it living someone else’s life. Don’t be trapped by dogma – which is living with the results of other people’s thinking. Don’t let the noise of others’ opinions drown your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.”

2. The Roots of Singing

Scientists from the Centre of Brain Research in New Zealand have carried out many experiments supporting the idea that human beings have an innate ability to express themselves through singing. Though many people claim they cannot sing, this brain research points out that singing is as much a biological gift as speaking. This *discovery* just confirms my deep belief that the division of people into singers and non-singers is an artificially created concept which is so typical of modern western society.

I believe that all healthy people are able to sing. However, not all people are able to sing in tune from the start. To sing in tune we need to have a sensitive “ear.” However, with proper training, healthy people can learn how to coordinate their vocal cords and strengthen their musical memory.

Unfortunately, from an early age, those who are said to lack in singing “talent” are soon advised to stop singing. I have witnessed music teachers forcing less-gifted pupils to sing in front of the whole class after which they proceeded to evaluate the singers’ attempts in a humiliating manner. So, instead of developing children’s innate ability to sing, music teachers of this ilk create psychological blocks in children who are perfectly fine but only less talented. Other times, just a stupid comment from an older sibling takes the joy of singing away from someone for the rest their life.

Yet, my experience as a voice coach shows me that, with practice, “non-singers” I have worked with have been able to “tune in” to the different tone frequencies I demonstrate. Their musical “ear” improves as they sing regularly.

In addition, the quality of their intonation depends very much on their psychological and physical condition. The same applies to the gifted singers who lose their ability to sing on pitch when they are tired, nervous, or psychologically down.

Coming back to the idea that singing is an innate ability of human beings could explain why most indigenous people around the world sing without excluding anybody from their singing circle. Since indigenous people are supposed to represent the lifestyle of our ancestors, I have speculated about the possible development of singing and vocal culture and created a hypothesis:

Our ancestors who lived connected with nature felt a natural desire to express themselves through singing. They didn't think about the style as it sprang out of them spontaneously according to the environment they lived in. Singing was also linked with rituals, storytelling and spreading of legends and myths, that included the key values and models of behaviour of the given group of people.

The style of singing was formed by the environment, the way of thinking and the purpose for which it served. In this way people passed songs and style from generation to generation. One group of people tried to keep the original format while the other group sought new ways of expressing themselves.

Apart from this process there was the merging of different cultures due to the wars and movements of nations. Accordingly, new songs and styles emerged and with them developed various ways of perceiving the ideal voice and vocal performance.

This process is organic, and has been happening for ages. The beginning of audio-visual technology has affected the way we listen to and perceive singing. Due to this change a lot of aspects of singing have disappeared from people's awareness, which is one of the reasons why so few people regularly sing today.

So much for the possible history of singing. Whether it's true or not, I doubt it's possible to uncover the roots of singing by the so-called scientific "objective" method. On the contrary, I believe the roots of singing are possible to find only by looking inwards. The roots of singing and their growth, like all organic growth, grow from inside out.

Only by looking inwards can we connect with the collective consciousness and come nearer the truth. This leads me to share some experience and feelings that helped me reach the essence of singing inside me, and gave my life a new direction and deeper meaning.

The Roots of My Singing

When I was two years old I started to speak and sing fluently. It was so easy and wonderful for me to sing that I remember the lovely feeling until now. All family members sang beautifully, including all my great-aunts and great-uncles from my mother's side. So I believed it was natural that everybody in the entire world could sing. One day I had a strange experience. It was before I had started school. I was

singing one of my favourite folk songs and felt so great in my heart that I still remember the feeling of being lifted on the wings of my own voice.

Maybe it was a kind of trance. In this state of mind I felt overwhelmed by a desire to share this experience of perfect happiness with others. It was a pure, strong, beautiful wish coming from my innocent, child's heart.

From then on, every time I sang for my mother or grandparents made me feel my voice helped dissolve some of the clouds of sadness that I sensed from them. Today I know I was using singing to lift up my own and other peoples' moods, doing it intuitively and being free from any preconceptions. As a child I simply believed that singing was here to make us feel better.

Just after I started school, we had a very bad car accident. My left thigh bone was broken and had to be operated on. The operation was very successful but my experience at the hospital was more than traumatic. It shook my whole being to the core. Before the operation I suffered from excruciating pain that made me scream whenever the hospital staff lifted me. One nurse believed hitting me was the best way to stop me crying. Another nurse told me I should be ashamed of myself as my voice could be heard in the wards above and below. I was just six and a half years old!

I never sang while in hospital. And when I got home I did not start singing again. Instead, my parents bought me a piano, as I wished. Again I was fortunate, this time to meet a piano teacher who had a natural and fantastic way of teaching and motivating children. He was also a great pianist who could improvise on the piano for hours. He showed me how to love music. Today, I am very aware that music, sport, and nature helped my family and me to overcome some very challenging times in our lives.

I also remember joining a children's choir for a short time. One day, three other girls and I had to sing solo in front of the other members of the choir. Our choir leader was trying to find out which of us was singing out of tune. Though singing in perfect pitch, I found this experience terribly humiliating. Greatly disappointed, I left the "elite" choir immediately afterwards. I just couldn't understand why the choir leader was more interested in having everything perfect instead of loving us as we were and enjoying music and singing!

This experience led me to spend more time on playing the piano rather than on singing. Still, I always sang at school during the music lessons as I was good at it. I also sang to compensate for problems I was having with a school teacher. So, I used singing at school as a way of lifting my fragile self-confidence.

With growing awareness of my apparent singing talent, I started using it to capture the attention and approval of others. At the same time I began to experience the fear of losing this power, and the notion of not being praised for my performance made me very nervous. I believe this was the first *ego game* I ever played or became aware of. I desired fame and was absorbed by the idea of becoming a singing star who would be loved and admired by everyone.

To make my dream come true, I needed a singing teacher who would reveal the secret of becoming a successful singer. I started down a path which I believed could lead to the stage of success. Along this path I took some brave steps, changing my singing teacher many times. But despite this, my desired goal kept disappearing into some distant fog and seemed out of reach for me. More often than not I got deeply hurt when things didn't turn out as I believed they should, yet singing was like strong medicine that got me back on my feet.

It took me 20 years to understand that my heart wouldn't give up its genuine desire for singing, and that it was trying to help me find my real place in life. This was why it sometimes allowed me to taste moments of perfect happiness. I experienced this deep happiness especially when I felt a strong connection with my audience and when I practiced singing in an empty church accompanied by an organist.

However, these experiences were not as frequent as I would have liked. In fact, I had some years when singing in public was more about feeling greatly relieved after a performance. Relieved because I hadn't caught a cold just before the concert or that I hadn't forgotten the lyrics or missed the rhythm. Indeed, I often enjoyed the practice much more than the performance. Still, I am glad that during that period singing wasn't my only means of earning a living, so I wasn't overly bothered about it too much.

So when and how did I discover the roots of singing inside me?

Life itself was my guide. I began to understand my own voice and at the same time

learned to listen to the gentle voice within. I realized that everyone is unique and that it's a waste of time and effort trying to "become unique." I discovered that singing, like living, happens best when it is done from inside out. I believe that the source of true happiness for singing is already within the person who wants to sing. Also, it's never too late to return home to your authentic self to find the true essence of your voice.

My life and my singing have been and still /are intertwined to a large extent. Singing affects the quality of my living and vice versa. Singing is truly a great teacher about living. An "aha" moment happened to me when I realized that the roots of singing are deeply embedded inside each of us.

Uncovering your voice and allowing it to express your authentic self through singing is similar to giving your spirit wings. By doing this, you will also experience the whole universe within your being and the sensation that your voice is moving the stars.

I would like to finish this section with a fairy tale about the *King of Forests*. In this story I use symbolic language to describe my inner journey towards the roots of singing. As you read this tale, just keep in mind that we can (1) share life's energy, (2) experience unity with each other, and (3) receive vibrations of healing by singing and by listening to others' singing.

The King of the Forest

In the deep forest, far away from people, there lives the King of the Forest. Though he loves his solitude, he also likes to sit around the fire at night with three wild-forest women, who delight in singing for him. He enjoys the beautiful songs as he gazes into the fire and then turns his head up to the night sky that is drowning in the sea of stars. His heart is filled with indescribable joy. These three wild-forest women are very different from each other, as are their voices and songs.

The woman with the strongest energy is the red-head ***Liberita***. She sings lively songs with a vigorous voice about freedom and the joy of everyday living. She causes the others to dance around the fire and the stars to dance in the sky. In the circle next to her is ***Unitin*** – she has a long, black hair and a velvety voice. When she sings she often closes her eyes and her singing and songs cause human hearts to connect with

each other and the universe. The third woman in the circle is called **Medicony**. She is soft and light with long golden hair and a white, shining complexion. Using a crystal-clear voice she sings gentle songs which have the effect of healing the inner wounds of her listeners. From her heart a beam of unconditional love radiates into her sacred melodies. These beautiful melodies are carried by a little brook from the forest towards people's homes to serve them well.

The forest is full of lost souls: will-o'-the-wisps, who try to find the King of the Forest and his three singers without success. The reason is simple. They cannot hear the beautiful songs because their ears are directed outwards. Throughout the day they seek only the attention and approval of others.

At night they wander around the forest, hoping to meet the King of Forests and to find out about real happiness. The challenge for each of them is to learn how to listen within. Because it is only inside their own hearts they can hear the songs sung by Liberita, Unitin, and Medicony. And it is only in their hearts that they can meet the King of the Forests.



3. The Gift of Being Unique

Every person is unique in some way. It is a gift of Life. Imagine: your DNA matches no other in the entire world! Just as everything in the Universe vibrates, so every person, every flower, and every stone vibrates with individually distinctive frequency.

Unfortunately, current western society is dominated by a social system that suppresses the unique qualities of the individual. We have been conditioned to believe that we must “fit in” with the crowd and become more like others, just to survive. Within this social system, life is portrayed as a struggle for success and success is defined in terms of material wealth. All of this drives people to crave for material possessions and to consume material things. It also leads people to be highly competitive, not just in the workplace, but even in personal relationships.

Finding other dimensions in living seems to be almost impossible for those trapped in the materialistic rat-race. The reason is simple. It seems difficult to free ourselves from the collective programming which has been deeply-rooted in our subconscious. This applies also to our current vocal culture.

The Trap of Success

Driven by the desire to succeed, many singers try to copy those who have reached “the top.” They forget the simple truth that an important part of real success is being inimitable. Each person has his or her own unique vocal quality and it is best to develop this naturally.

Though I have believed this for a long time, I have often harshly judged my singing in terms of the external attributes of success that the singing industry people promote and reward. Even though in my heart I disagreed with their measurements of success, I ignored my heart and pursued the dream of singing success on their terms.

In this I failed to realize that my negative feelings were sending me a clear message from my heart to avoid the trappings and pitfalls of external success. This type of success was simply not beneficial for my personal growth. For a long time I didn’t understand that I was suffering from serious inner conflict similar to many other singers who try to “make it” - all in our attempt to feel better about ourselves!

When we break free from the limiting beliefs around us and within us, we discover

unique qualities within ourselves, including our voices. Suddenly even ordinary things of daily living become more interesting. We realize that making mistakes is a natural part of the school-of-life and necessary for our personal growth. Seeing ourselves as unique transforms our inner world for the better. This in turn positively affects our outer world.

In western cultures, we've been conditioned to be in control of any change we want to make in our lives. The common mantra is that personal change happens only by making it happen. This requires lots of will-power and determination, and even force. The complementary (Eastern) practice is to let change happen naturally and with ease. This is scary for many people, especially for those who cannot trust their intuition.

When it comes to singing, regular practice and voice exercises are necessary. This process involves discipline, determination, and a degree of voice control. But force is unnecessary. In fact, forcing one's voice can cause irreparable damaging to one's vocal cords.

Your Voice Is Your Path

I am fortunate to have been able to learn so much from my clients about this while helping them to uncover their true, natural voices. I keep reminding them that voice development is only possible if we first learn about our innate vocal dispositions. This involves being able to sense precisely what's happening in our bodies during singing. The sound of our voice is deeply affected by even tiny physical and psychological tensions within us. This means that our voice emits signals that transmit the mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical condition we are in.

If our goal is to imitate a vocal "model" whose voice differs from the natural quality of our own voice, this automatically creates tension that distorts our voice and the way we feel while singing. The same happens when we try to develop a singing technique without knowing the true value of our own natural voice. Therefore, we need to learn about ourselves by tuning into our body's sensations and by getting in touch with our feelings.

It is really sad to hear a singer whose voice has been manufactured in a *singing factory*. In most cases the owner is so uncomfortable with it that (s)he is almost

choking. Unfortunately, this often happens even to the most talented singers when they become blinded by their own consuming obsession to succeed at all cost.

My Vocal Awakening

For many years, I didn't fully respect my voice. With hindsight, I suspect my singing teachers did not know anything about this aspect of singing. The truth is that for a long time I wasn't able to ask the right questions until the day when life alone started asking me some hard questions.

This happened when one of my fragile vocal cords was damaged due to the unnatural demands I had placed on them. I ended up in the care of the Voice Clinique in Prague. Due to this experience, I had to radically change my basic attitude towards life, myself, and my voice.

This unpleasant lesson taught me that if we don't respect and love our voice unconditionally, and aren't aware of our unique qualities, then sooner or later we will misuse or abuse our voice. For example, if we try to fit into a cultural model of a supposedly ideal voice we miss an opportunity to be unique and stand out from the crowd. Also, we who chose to practice a repertoire which we aren't ready for damage our voice and hinder our progress.

Only when we realize that real perfection comes from our innate, distinctive voice qualities will we be able to rid ourselves of the fear of not being good (enough) as a singer. This approach actually helps us to develop our voice freely and at the same time removes the constant pressure of measuring ourselves against others.

Living life on inspiration, freedom, and love is healthy, constructive, and fulfilling. Living life based on competition and fear is unhealthy and destructive. The harsh competition between singers in big opera houses and theatres creates an environment full of tension. This leads to stress for singers and this stress comes out in their voices!

The fear of not being good enough is based on the collective assumption that life is a struggle. However, it is completely conceivable to leave the black and white world of winners and losers behind and enter a new world where each of us is an artist of our own life, and voice.

The joy coming out of our creative energy makes sure we constantly begin new adventures that life offers abundantly. For this reason let's praise the gift of being unique! Now, let the writer Alan Cohen inspire you with his story about an African tribe where everybody respects each other's uniqueness; this is the key to peace in the settlement.

They're Singing Your Song

From a story told by Alan Cohen in his book: Wisdom of the Heart

When a woman in a certain African tribe knows she is pregnant, she goes out into the wilderness with a few friends and together they pray and meditate until they hear the song of the child. They recognize that every soul has its own vibration that expresses its unique flavour and purpose. When the women attune to the song, they sing it out loud. Then they return to the tribe and teach it to everyone else.

When the child is born, the community gathers and sings the child's song to him or her. Later, when the child enters education, the village gathers and chants the child's song. When the child passes through the initiation to adulthood, the people again come together and sing his song. At the time of marriage, the person hears his or her song once again. Finally, when the soul is about to pass from this world, family and friends gather at the person's bed, just as they did at the person's birth, and they sing the person into the next life.

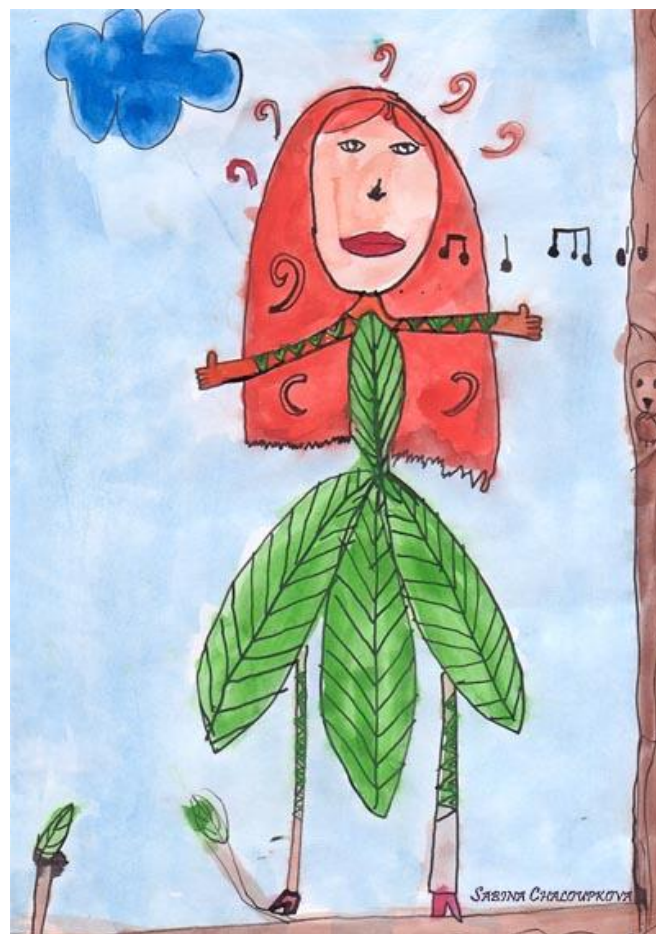
To the African tribe there is one other occasion upon which the villagers sing to the child. If at any time during his or her life, the person commits a crime or an aberrant social act, the individual is called to the centre of the village and the people in the community form a circle around them. Then they sing the person's song to them.

The tribe recognizes that the correction for antisocial behaviour is not punishment; it is love and the remembrance of identity. When you recognize your own song, you have no desire or need to do anything that would hurt another.

A friend is someone who knows your song and sings it to you when you have forgotten it. Those who love you are not fooled by mistakes you have made or dark images you hold about yourself. They remind you of your beauty when you feel ugly; your wholeness when you are broken; your innocence when you feel guilty; and your purpose when you are confused.

You may not have grown up in an African tribe that sings your song to you at crucial life transitions, but **life is always reminding you when you are in tune with yourself and when you are not.** When you feel good, what you are doing matches your song, and when you feel awful, it doesn't. In the end, we shall all recognize our song and sing it well.

You may feel a little warbly at the moment, but so have all the great singers. Just keep singing and you'll find your way home.



4. Singing and Living From Inside Out

If we get in touch with our real self – for example through singing – and if we also accept the gift of uniqueness, then we can easily tune into our natural state of being. As a result seeming “miracles” can happen.

Of course, when we define a *miracle* as something that goes against the laws of nature, then we have to keep in mind that our definition of these laws might be imperfect and limited. In fact, a miracle shows us that our understanding of reality is restricted.

When I managed to teach seventy-year-old Scottish ladies how to create digital stories on their computers, it was a miracle for them and their families. When those who have been told they don’t have either a musical ear or a singing voice starts to sing, it is also a miracle. Therefore, in most cases we do not go beyond the laws of nature. We create miracles *just* by dissolving our limiting beliefs about ourselves! And that’s exactly what I love doing for myself and with my clients.

I often remind myself to believe in myself and not in external authorities! Who are these external authorities? Politicians, teachers, church leaders, scientists, artists, business people, sports people... and more. Why should we believe in what they say instead of what we experience? Let’s take the scientists as an example.

The Miracles of Science

Although scientists are our great miracle-makers, they often have a hard time with miracles too. The reason is simple. Before they can claim something is true, they have to obtain the same results from many experiments. Also, since these researchers are constrained by many factors, including time, money, and their own and others’ vested interests, we shouldn’t believe everything they claim.

For example, we hear a lot nowadays about cases of so-called “spontaneous healing” but not from our doctors. The medical profession has been “programmed” to regard these occurrences as exceptions. Why is the well-known *placebo effect* used as a measuring tool to prove the effects of drugs instead of being studied on its own and regarded as a great medicine of the mind?

Only when the number of miraculous recoveries by spontaneous healing reaches a

critical mass might the medical community wake up and acknowledge openly the power of the body's self-healing qualities. (When the medical profession breaks through their limited beliefs by focusing on promoting health rather than only on fighting disease, then a true "miracle" will have happened!)

Waiting for the medical world to change first is hardly a recipe for success! As far as I know, there is no pill or placebo for singing. But by typing "vibrational therapy" into Google's search box, you may learn that staying healthy can be viewed as tuning your body into the right frequency. And the most natural way of doing this is through the vibrations of your own voice. So, have a try!

Art versus Science

One of the typical beliefs dominating modern civilisation is that art and science are separate. Accordingly, art is viewed as being based on subjective feelings and the ideas of artists while science is based on objective observations and the rational thinking of scientists. Who is more important in society: a scientist or an artist? What would Leonardo Da Vinci say about this?

Ironically, both artists and scientists are just humans who are influenced by and dependent on their own environment. Consequently, artists often cannot resist the pressure that society places on them to adjust their art to deliver what is expected and what will sell. In the same way, scientists can hardly become fully objective because of inability to completely shut out their subjective thoughts. For example, scientists are likely to disregard anything that could threaten their pocket or the world view of their peer community.

I believe that great artists understand aspects beyond the seeming chaos of life, while brilliant scientists exercise imagination. Also, both artists and scientists need to know themselves and their societies *inside out*. So, in this respect, any seeming separation between artists and scientists is blurred. The best artists like the best scientists are people with exceptional ability to self-examine and reach beyond the illusions of the five senses and others interpretation of "reality."

Growing Ideas from Inside-Out

In a nutshell, every great artist and scientist has the highly-developed skill of being able to interpret information beyond the limits of socially-constructed "truth."

Besides, everyone who ever created a distinctive piece of work has gone through the process of **growing the idea from inside-out, not from outside-in.**

So how do we grow ideas from inside-out? Before an idea becomes a part of reality it requires time to mature. The idea needs to be nourished by self-belief and faith. Unfortunately, the brains and hearts of many potentially great people lie idle because their owners lack confidence and feel isolated. Just as sad is the number of people who fail to evolve due to being blinded by a certain unquestioned *one and only* “truth” passed down to them by others.

“Faith is the confidence that you will achieve what you set your heart on by listening to and following your heart. This is an inside out process.”

Kate Barbour (2013).

This open-minded type of faith is important for any singer. It is a faith that comes from listening to the gentle voice within!

Rudolf Vasek, a Czech professor, was a pioneer of voice development. **He was both an artist and a scientist.** His inner guidance and faith in the potential of the human voice helped him to acquire practical knowledge about ways in which *every* voice can be trained to make huge progress. The only condition he discovered was that the voice has to develop in harmony with given natural laws that define the ideal functioning of vocal cords and the human body.

His singing method was based on scientific knowledge disclosed by German voice specialists whom he had learned from prior to 1938. Unlike other singing teachers, he wasn't looking for pupils with inborn vocal quality, because he regarded this as less important. He helped dozens of singers to reach their full potential and become successful opera singers. However, his controversial views and singing methods didn't find enough listening ears among other teachers in Czechoslovakia, though he rescued many famous professional singers from serious voice problems.

Today, there are only a few of his students alive. I was fortunate to meet one of them, Miloslav Dvorak. He taught me principles and practices he had learned directly from Rudolf Vasek, especially exercises which had rescued his damaged voice and career.

Although Rudolf Vasek appears to have been ahead of his time, I believe the principles of his method will survive. He often repeated: **“The barometer of**

correct singing is the pleasant feeling in your throat.” This has become one of the basic principles of singing *from inside out* which is now part of my vocal coaching.

Learning how to sing from inside out is mainly about exploring our inner landscape of feelings and sensations. On the physical level we re-discover our natural way of breathing and we learn to manage some of the tiny muscles we didn't even know existed. Then, through voice resonance and the “inner ear” we become familiar with our body again – and how it can serve us as a musical instrument.

On more subtle emotional and mental levels we learn about how our thoughts and emotions influence our bodies and how they reflect in the sound of our voice. Once we uncover the underlying principles, the door to complete vocal freedom opens. For some people this can lead to the world of opera; for others it can mean regaining self-confidence with multiple benefits, such as helping us create harmonic relationships or find a better job. Indeed, on the way to uncovering our natural voices the opportunity to find ourselves lies. The best way for this to happen is ***from inside out!***



5. The Power of Authenticity

The best gift we can give ourselves is to be ourselves. When I think about the singers who have inspired me during my life, they have all had one thing in common: they have been ***authentic***.

Authentic or genuine singing projects incredible energy, since it comes straight from the heart. Such a way of singing can strike an audience with amazing vigour, no matter the singer. It might be a popular singer, a young child, or a street singer. The same applies to playing a musical instrument. I have experienced a few music productions during which the musician and instrument became as one. The effect of this on the audience, including me, was complete absorption into the music as we had stepped into a world without time and space.

The Irish Wild Beauty

I remember once being taken by my Scottish husband to an Irish pub in Edinburgh where a live Irish folk band was performing. I didn't expect anything more than some pleasant Irish rhythms and melodies. But what I experienced there is still beyond my understanding.

In the band there was a young, violin player with long, thick black hair. She wasn't stunning in looks, but her performance on the violin was so captivating. She literally hypnotised the audience with every single tone.

Right in the middle of her solo performance one of her fiddle strings burst. A moment after this a string inside my heart burst and there poured forth an unstoppable stream of joyful tears. Why? Because I had just received a serendipitous message that told me that it was time for me to stop suppressing the something that this girl was living fully and openly in her way of playing the violin. To this day she is a symbol of a being who is genuinely free and who projects her natural and genuine beauty. Such is the power of authenticity.

Releasing the Life Energy

To *sing authentic*, it is crucial to become completely immersed in your voice and song while singing. Only then does your singing become amazingly powerful, and this has nothing to do with volume or vocal technique. It has everything to do with the

ability of our human voice to dissolve blocked life-energy in ourselves and others. I mean that type of emotional blockage which hinders people from experiencing genuine joy and sadness.

It's not a coincidence that singing was a way of living for Afro-American slaves and that singing played a key part in their liberation from slavery. Similarly, all the big singers have left such a big impact in our collective mind, that their names and the impact of their singing cannot be forgotten. For me these names include Edit Piaf, Ella Fitzgerald, Luis Armstrong, Maria Callas, and Frank Sinatra. From the living legends, I include Barbra Streisand, Placido Domingo, and Jose Carreras.

Though the main idea of this book is about the forgotten aspects of singing, I would now like to focus on a style of singing which originates from the cultural environment of Western Europe. This style of singing assumes that the human voice is capable of huge development.

Beyond the Artificiality of Art

A highly-developed singing technique is a basic requirement of an artistic way of singing, nowadays known as classical or operatic. Singing as an *art* form requires from a singer an *artificial* process. During this process a singer can develop her/his singing abilities to a level that is prescribed by a specific group of people in society called the musical and cultural elite. Besides, every music genre entails a particular form of vocal expression which requires certain technical skills and style.

Every professional singer has been influenced by a certain vocal model, which not only assumes the level of vocal technique but also requires the acceptance of some artificial features, which we call mannerism. It is so easy to lose oneself in the *artificial* process of becoming an *artist*. The more demanding the technical requirements are, the easier a singer can lose the power of authenticity. This happens mostly in the world of classical singing, as the singer has to perform like an athlete. This is one reason why it is so difficult for professional singers to stay natural.

Nowadays, it is rather an exception than a rule for a potential opera singer to have the opportunity to uncover the natural qualities of her/his voice. It is certainly not something that is commonly found during training at music institutions such as conservatories or academies of opera and music.

Natural Voice Development

Voice development should go hand in hand with learning to understand what one's natural voice is. But this is seldom a priority of the training that potential opera stars receive. The main focus is on technique and the knowledge of repertoire and other music skills.

Jonas Kaufmann, the renowned tenor from Germany, writes about it pointedly on his website. For years he suffered from voice hoarseness – a symptom of vocal overuse. He couldn't find a cure for this despite the support given by his vocal coaches and advisors.

During these years he often wondered whether he would be unable to finish his performance on stage each evening. He found himself in the frustrating situation of not having control over the most important part of his career, his own voice. He couldn't speak about his problems with colleagues because it was a taboo. So he continued searching for a suitable singing teacher till he found one.

This teacher opened his eyes. First she discovered Jonas' natural voice, which was surprisingly darker and more compact than Jonas thought. In this process he got rid of all the artificially-created vocal mannerism, which was the root of his voice problems. Finally, his new singing teacher helped him psychologically. As a result, Jonas regained his self-confidence and again found great joy in singing. From that moment his career took off. Not only did his performance improve greatly, his acting reached new levels, because he was free to focus on playing the part authentically instead of anxiously observing the condition of his voice. This is a story about how an average opera singer became a real star in the world of opera.

Jonas Kaufmann's case isn't unique. What is rather special is the happy ending. Hundreds of promising young opera singers leave their careers prematurely. They never reach their true potential because they fail to develop their voice in harmony with its natural quality. Essentially, vocal cords are such a delicate instrument that every type of wrong technique, especially those based on force, always results in some sort of vocal problem. Many young opera singers have far greater repertoire than they have knowledge of their own natural voice.

I finally got rid of exactly the same vocal problems as Jonas Kaufmann's, which had

led me up a blind alley. It doesn't matter that my singing career is more like a "professional hobby." I haven't performed in the Metropolitan opera, but I have certainly gone through the same agony as any singer who has ever suffered from vocal difficulties.

I credit my turnaround to the combination of two things. One was the Swedish therapeutic singing school founded by Valborg Werbeck-Svärdström; the other was the exercises of Professor Rudolf Vasek. Through this combination I did not only become free from my voice problems; I also found much deeper joy in singing, discovered that fear is the biggest enemy of any singer, and saw that authentic power can emanate only from people who know themselves and their voice. Only then can singers feel relaxed and free. Only then can singers experience the fantastic feeling of becoming one with music and the sound of their own voice. During these magnificent moments one can experience that the voice sings almost by itself and that one flies on the wings of voice!



6. Returning Home

Singing is truly a gift, as it enables us to connect with our hearts. Singing opens a path for us to return home - to ourselves – and away from the world of illusions.

We can accept this gift only when we first look at singing from another point of view – quite different from the one promoted by the media, the music world, and organized religion or from some of the well-established cultural traditions.

Still, there isn't anything much new in my point of view! If you are little interested in the life of indigenous people or other people living in harmony with nature, you certainly know that these people never forgotten the power hidden in singing. They haven't become *too smart* by losing their innocence. Therefore, they have stayed connected to a deeper wisdom about the life-giving energy that so many of us need to re-discover.

Though I have met many fantastic people who inspired me and passed on invaluable experience, I know now that they were really confirming the most important answers that lay within me. Instinctively I have always felt that singing offers much more than our modern society teaches. I have always known that every person is unique, as is their voice, and that the best way of living and singing is from inside-out.

I have always quivered with joy when listening to somebody singing authentically. It's like balsam for my soul. However, it took me a long time before I started giving these principles my real attention and applying them to my own living. My desire is that more people will discover that singing authentically is available to them and how much it can lift their spirit on wings of joy...

On my way to finding myself, I realized my calling in life wasn't only to sing for others but also to help others to sing from their hearts. Kate Barbour (2013).



Part II: Singing from the Heart

1. Your Heart is More Than a Pump

In the first part of the book, we have looked at the forgotten aspects of singing. I have pointed out that there is a hidden power in singing that goes far beyond the world of entertainment. In the second part of the book we will look at **the connection between the voice and the heart and what it really means**. I chose to bring together what ancient spiritual wisdom, science, and art say about this and how I have experienced it in my own life.

Your heart is more than a pump. It has its own intelligence. This “knowing” lies at the core of ancient wisdom and has played a key role across many religious and spiritual systems throughout the history of mankind. For example, the Egyptians believed that all consciousness, including life itself, resided in the heart. The Mayas thought the heart was the seat of the soul, and the Buddhists reviewed their wisdom in the Heart Sutra. Judaism points to keeping a balance between the mind and the heart, while Christianity says that the heart reveals our true identity!

Also, the indigenous people of many tribes speak of the wisdom of their ancestors and claim it lives in their hearts. Yet, in our western cultures, priority is still given to the logical, rational mind rather than to the heart. Hopefully, the recent findings by some scientists about the intelligence of the heart will prove to be a major re-discovery and more.

The Challenge of Seeing the World through the Heart

In the past few years, some inspiring books (both spiritual and scientific) have been published on the intelligence of the heart. There is plenty of information about this subject online.

Tapping into the wisdom of sages, being inspired by indigenous people, and listening to seminars online regarding the intelligence of the heart is one thing. Being able to apply this knowledge in everyday life is quite another.

In our present-day materialistic society, many *consumers* of spirituality gain a head-level understanding of the subject and not a heart-level application of it. The reason is simple: **we don't really recognize the language of the heart** because the

language of the brain is taught and rewarded in our educational system and in wider society!

If we want to practice the language of the heart, we need to find people who are willing to speak the language of the heart and to give it a place in their living. Having a “heart-to-heart conversation” means to speak openly, to share experiences without feeling that one might be judged, misinterpreted, or see one’s information misused in any way. So if we want to practice the language of the heart, we need to learn how to trust and be trusted.

How can we do this? In the rush of everyday living there is a little time to explore our inner world and understand the interaction between our heart and our mind (brain). Depending on the environment we live in and on our personality, we either let our mind dominate our heart or the other way round. Our heart and mind are often in inner conflict. We talk about the heart wanting one thing and the mind wanting something else.

The problem is that we have little understanding about the relationship between heart and mind, so most of the time we learn by trial and error. Only when we go through some kind of personal crisis do we wake up and open up to giving more space for the heart to guide us instead of just the head.

I am no exception. However, I have had great help all way along – you’ve guessed it – from singing and music. My heart has been bruised more than once and the repairing and learning process has been supported by the wonders of singing through the heart, which I will reveal later in this part of the book. For now I want to address another important issue: *the closed heart*.

In my life I have met too many people whose hearts were closed because of some bad experiences or because of their upbringing. It is understandable. Besides, our materialistic environment hardly supports people to *open their hearts*. There is a great tendency for people nowadays to suppress their hearts and emotions.

When I lived in Sweden, I found that most Swedes believed that human emotions were to be suppressed and controlled. Rational thinking was everything. By contrast, when I lived in Spain, I discovered that most Spaniards believed that expressing emotions had a large part to play in their society.

Of course, it is important that we express emotions constructively, and this means being connected closely with our heart. Expressing our emotions positively and constructively is essential for building a harmonious life and healthy relationships. Expressing our emotions negatively and destructively leads to *disharmony* and *disease*.

For me, living with a closed heart is a poor choice, as the heart is the most powerful organ in the body and does much more than pumping blood. The heart has its own “brain” and intelligence. Without heart intelligence we can easily get lost in life. We need to **create a balance between our hearts and our minds, between emotions and thoughts**. Such balance brings us *inner harmony* which is the best environment for personal growth, health, and real fulfilment. What is within is what will be manifested without.

There are three important questions that we can explore in this connection:

- 1) What is meant by intelligence of the heart?
- 2) What language does the heart speak and how does it communicate with the brain?
- 3) How does one connect to one's heart?

I will cover the first question in chapter II/2, *The Intelligence of the Heart*, the second question in chapter II/3, *The Language of the Heart*, and the third question in chapters II/6 and II/7, *The Healing Power of Voice* and *Singing from the Heart*, respectively.

Also, the importance of the heart in art is revealed in chapter II/4, *From Heart to Art*. This topic is further developed in chapter II/5, *Voice, Culture and Identity* as the sense of our authentic Self comes from the heart. It's about finding our true voice beyond the limitations of our own culture.

2. The Intelligence of the Heart

“Living from the heart is business – the business of caring for self and others. Understanding this will take us past the age of information into the age of intuitive living.” Doc Childre, The Institute of HeartMath

The new scientific findings about the intelligent heart are fascinating! They could be the key for positive development in the world, which is so much needed in this time of extraordinary change. It is beyond the frame of this book to go into the details about these discoveries, so I have picked three phenomena which are important in connection with the human voice and singing. The main source of information for me has been the *HeartMath* Institute.

When I first came in contact with the scientific data about *the heart's intelligence*, I thought to myself: “It is high time that somebody gave us proof of the extraordinary power of the heart.” The wonders of the brain are great, but the wonders of the heart seem to be even greater. And best of all is when brain and heart work together in harmony! There are three aspects of the intelligent heart that I regard as most important:

- 1) The electromagnetic field around the heart
- 2) The “brain” in the heart
- 3) The heart's impact on our awareness

The electromagnetic field around the heart

Have you had an experience of being either attracted to or repelled by certain individuals? When somebody opens her heart and smiles, can you also feel a warm wave of subtle energy coming towards you? Perhaps then it is not surprising to learn that the electromagnetic field of the heart is 5000 times stronger than the electromagnetic field of the brain, and spreads to a few feet around each person.

As everything in the universe is holographic, so every object, every cell, and even every subatomic particle is surrounded by its own electromagnetic field. This field is dynamic, not static. It is a dynamic flow of energy in the shape of a doughnut - called *torus*. The torus can be viewed as an intelligent system that organises itself to keep balance and to thrive.

It's even more fascinating to know that our hearts constantly send and receive messages from each other through their energy fields. Of course, this happens most of the time beyond both our awareness and our connection to the *quantum field of all possibilities*. If this sounds like science fiction to you, I urge you to find out more about quantum physics. Then you may realise that our everyday life is probably more *fictitious* than we want to believe.

I've noticed that some people are more sensitive to the energies around them than others.

Be that as it may. It's a good start to become aware that your electromagnetic field is your power station and one of its purposes is protection. Take good care of it!

In the world of collective singing, I believe one reason that people enjoy choir singing is because the sound of unified voices recharges their energy fields. And when the singers know how to breathe properly and allow themselves to sing from their hearts, the effects on overall well-being can be incredible!

The “brain” in the heart

In 1991, Dr J. Andrew Armour found out that *the heart can think, as it has “a little brain.”* Then, almost 20 years later, scientists from the Institute of HeartMath found that in the heart there are several kinds of proteins, neurons, support cells, and neurotransmitters which can also be found in the cerebral brain. Apparently, the heart's complex electrical structure, with its network of 40,000 neurons, allows it to work independently of the cranial brain. Therefore, we can truly learn, remember, feel, and sense through our hearts!

When we *learn something by heart* we mean that we can memorize it word for word. Similarly, most of us remember only things that are “close to our hearts,” by which we mean things that are important to us and which we can “feel.” When we don't perform as well as we expected, we often excuse ourselves by saying, “My heart wasn't in it.”

So, being passionate about something is really about involving our hearts in the process. It isn't about disconnecting from our minds; it's about using both our hearts and minds. With the power of positive emotions like enthusiasm, love, compassion,

and appreciation, we can reach a state of being in which our heart and the brain are in harmony and our emotions and thoughts are in perfect balance.

The Heart's Impact on Our Awareness

How do we know that our thoughts and emotions are in balance? We do so by listening to our hearts! The beating of our heart isn't only mechanical palpitation; it is also an intelligent language system that influences our perception and reactions. While *negative emotions* disturb heart rhythm, *positive emotions* harmonize it.

When heart rhythm is disturbed and so out of synchronicity with the brain we are in *a fight or flight* mode. In this mode we act at survival level, which is the lowest level of our existence. Learning how to shift from a negative emotional state to a positive one is the key to getting and maintaining a higher level of being, which I believe is our natural state. (See the chapter on *The Healing Power of the Voice* for more on this.)

When we feel positive emotions such as appreciation, love, compassion, or joy, there is *harmony between brain and heart*. This is the optimal state of being that brings sharper thinking, clearer perception of the world, stronger intuition, increased creativity, and better communication with others. Scientists at the Institute of Heart Math call this condition *coherence between mind and emotions*. When mental and emotional coherence is strong, our awareness expands. When such coherence is weak, our awareness is reduced. Our vision, listening abilities, thinking, and feeling are all influenced by the strength of coherence (harmony) between thoughts and emotions, between heart and brain.

Therefore, the state of *coherence* (unity, harmony) should be a starting point if we want to thrive rather than only trying to survive. It is a door to a life that can bring us real fulfilment. It isn't a solution to all problems – what some call the Holy Grail or the Only Way. But it is the inside-out approach.

When we remove the conflict between our heart and brain, the root of the problem, we enter into a higher level of being. We who live in such inner harmony see the world and ourselves with expanded awareness. Therefore, we don't create problems, but rather see and create solutions everywhere. So the first thing we should all learn is how to create Inner Harmony!

Voice is the bridge between the mind and the heart

Now let us bring the voice into play. Since the vocal cords are placed between the heart and the head, they do reflect with precision what happens between the two. People often ask me if I can teach them to control their voice when they get upset. My advice on this is always: “Get to know your voice and you will learn how to manage your emotions.” The voice is the perfect bridge between your mind and heart. Its vibrational energy is a source of personal power which can be unlocked at any time of your life!

3. The Language of the Heart

I belong to no religion. My religion is Love. Every heart is My temple. ~ Rumi

We speak about “a heart-felt” truth or say “my heart wasn’t in it.” A friend may encourage us by saying “follow your heart.” When somebody close to you betrays your trust or breaks a promise it “hurts your heart.” If the pain is severe we say it is “heart-breaking” and speak of being “heart-broken.”

These expressions may describe what is happening more accurately than we imagine. In reality, our heart communicates with us through the subtle language of sensations or through the less-subtle language of feelings and emotions. It also communicates with us through what has been called “a quiet voice” of intuition.

How does physical communication happen between the heart and the brain? The heart sends impulses through the nervous system not only to the brain but to the whole body. It also produces hormones, sends pressure waves and interacts with the environment through its electromagnetic field. The Persian poet Rumi, who lived in the 12th century, expressed the language of the heart in a beautiful and poignant way and in accord with what scientists know today:

“The energies of the heart are constantly flashing forward in an unbroken series of rushes, waves, and pulses that you will feel in your body. By experiencing these waves moving through you, one after the other, you get back in touch with your natural state.”

As I mentioned previously, positive emotions such as appreciation, love and care create a harmonious wave exchange between the heart and the brain, also called entrainment. This state enhances mental capacity, strengthens the immune system, and makes us resilient to stress. We can create a harmonious inner environment by consciously directing our attention to the heart and listening to its *loving language*.

The ***loving language of the heart*** is based on the simple truth that each of us is an individual expression of life’s energy as a whole. Therefore, our human heart has a holistic “logic.” It always sees beyond right and wrong, beyond winners and losers, and chooses the middle way: a path which brings the best for everyone involved. As somebody wise once asked: “Do you want to be right, or do you want to be kind?”

The heart tells us to be kind, not only to others but also to ourselves. It has a language based on respect. It teaches us how to live a life in harmony, without hurting anything and anybody.

“The heart has reasons that reason does not understand.”

—Jacques Bénigne Bossuet

The Heart Can See, Hear and Speak

Also, the language of the heart knows no fear. That’s why all our courage comes from our hearts. The heart knows the deepest kind of love, the love that needs nothing in return.

As the intelligent heart is capable of seeing beyond appearances, it communicates in an unexpected manner. If there is danger, it might even send a spicy word to our minds to get our attention. Though it will give us many hints, it will never force us to do anything, because the heart respects the gift of free choice. So, don’t expect any forceful language from your heart! By contrast, the voice of the ego is loud and the language is out of proportion. The voice of ego knows only opposites. It doesn’t know the middle way of life that leads to harmony.

If you have tried following your heart you will know that it is not always easy. The heart often tells us to do what might not be the most popular thing to do. It doesn’t ask us to check for the approval of others, because it wants us to be free and independent.

Listening to our heart makes us full of genuine self-love and at the same time full of compassion for others. It often tells us that our vision can be realised and then nudges us to undertake risky journeys or become pioneers. It instils in us confidence and courage. It teaches us that if we want to receive a lot we first must give a lot. Ultimately, most of us are afraid of hearing the deepest truth: what the heart really says is: ***“give it your all!”***

But before we can hear the voice of our heart, we need to learn how to recognise it among the other voices talking to us at the same time. The voices in our minds coming from our parents, our teachers, society in general, and especially the voice of our ego all tend to drown out our heart’s voice.

Singing can help us clear out this constant mind chatter. Singing can help us silence “monkey-mind,” as can meditation. Ironically, singing can take us into the silence that opens the path from our mind to our heart. Only then we can hear the *quiet voice* within.

Reaching Peoples’ Hearts

Singing is also the perfect language for us to use when we want to reach the hearts of others. Naturally, it works only if we sing from the heart. It is the most powerful way of expressing our passion, our feelings, and our thoughts.

Like many others, I was touched by the story of the Scottish lady, Susan Boyle, who performed on stage in front of a critical jury and a sceptical audience during the first auditions of Britain’s Got Talent, 2009. Within seconds she had the audience standing, applauding, crying, and the panel of judges dropping their jaws. Within a week she became a world sensation. Youtube video went viral. This lady has a beautiful voice, but what makes it irresistible is how she sings authentically, from her heart!

4. From **Heart** to Art

I strongly believe that art should touch our hearts. It should express something beyond material reality. It should open a door for us to the world of harmony, where real love, beauty, and truth reside. And so, the main purpose of art should be to bring harmony into our everyday lives. For me, art is about living my life in dignity and living it from the heart.

The story of Susan Boyle is a good example of what I call the way *from heart to art*. There must be a strong sense of identity to pursue the path of an artist and Susan is a person who knows her heart and so knows why she sings. Some people see her as a simple woman, but they forget that *simple* doesn't mean *stupid*. When simplicity is combined with the intelligence of the heart, it can project amazing power.

Remember, the main hero in Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" is Frodo. His biggest asset is his heart... which he always obeys. He uses his greatest asset without having a huge intellect or any magic powers.

The Power of Genuine Art

Genuine art that comes from the heart has the capacity to transform our way of perceiving the world and to change how we look at ourselves and others. Earlier I described how an Irish violinist helped me free myself. Also, over the years I have had other transformational moments where music was the catalyst. Somehow, these moments have never happened during great performances in front of large, euphoric audiences. They have always come as a surprise. Let me share with you one special event that didn't turn out as I expected...

Vivaldi and the Golden Fish

The night before I slept like a baby. I was happy that the theatre play I had written for my students had gone well. And I felt so joyful and thankful the next morning. By nine o'clock I had to leave. The rehearsal of Vivaldi's "Gloria" with a Swiss-Italian choir was starting at 10 a.m. I was one of the soloists. I didn't mind the rising temperature. It was an early June morning and the weather forecast came with a health warning that temperatures would climb to 37C.

So, I was looking forward to spending time in a beautiful Baroque church away from the heat. Due to my deep satisfaction from the performance the night before, I was thinking to myself: “*Whatever happens today, I will take it gracefully.*” An hour later, full of optimism, I opened the heavy iron door of my favourite church. It had become my personal bolt-hole in the centre of Prague to escape from the traffic noise and pollution.

When I entered the church, I heard the sound of heavenly music which was filling the whole of the main chamber. I saw musicians playing violins and cello, and recognized they were practicing bits from Vivaldi’s “Four Seasons.” It was a pleasant surprise for me, as I hadn’t known about this part of the programme. I just wondered who the violin soloist would be. I listened and enjoyed every note. They were all Czechs and excellent players.

Soon it was time for the Swiss-Italian choir to practice Gloria. I shook hands with the visiting conductor. He looked more German than Italian and I immediately noted he was the *clockwork* type. I felt comfortable, especially when I found out the alto soloist was a pleasant and intelligent woman. We both sat with closed eyes on the beautifully carved wooden bench and listened to the choir. At that moment, everything was just perfect, like a dream...

And then it happened. I was startled out of my reverie by music that sounded more like Ravel than Vivaldi. I opened my eyes and saw the conductor waving the choir to stop... He went with his score to the orchestra and checked their scores. Then he said in English with a soft accent: “The choir has a different version than yours. It won’t work.”

So I left the church with my colleague for cup of coffee in the café nearby. When we returned to the church we were told that people were trying to get the right music score from the Internet. Therefore, we had our practice only with a small keyboard. I was extremely careful with my voice and sang half of my normal volume.

My violinist friend came to me and whispered: “Come on, Kate, give it a blast!” I sighed and gave him a funny look. “My voice isn’t a violin. Let me keep the best for the evening.” Then I thought to myself: “I wish the instrumentalists could understand more about the human voice! They seem to believe you either have it or not. You either have an expensive instrument in your throat or a cheap one!”

They envy singers for not having to practice for six hours a day like they do. But they forget that having a cold is a big deal for a singer. I didn't have a cold then. I'd just experienced a week of trying to be a singer, an actress, a production manager, and a singing coach in one person. Yes, the love of art can be dangerous. I promised myself I wouldn't put myself in such a situation again. No more would I behave like a masochist!

After the rehearsal, I went home in a Metro full of sweaty people. I wanted to have a rest in a cool place, which wasn't possible since there was no air-conditioning in our flat. When I got home, my husband didn't ask any unnecessary questions, as he's clever at mind-reading me. I lay down and tried to sleep but couldn't. I felt exhausted. This was a performance I had been looking forward to so much. What could I do?

I counted all the people I had invited. They might stay at home because of the heat, I silently wished. However my inner voice told me to keep calm, though I didn't know who would be playing the oboe in my solo piece and whether the conductor would resolve the issue about the scores. In my heart I felt I had only one choice: to surrender. So after my siesta, I went back to the church in my evening dress wearing minimal make-up to avoid my face from melting in the sun. I was prepared for everything... or so I believed.

When I entered the church, I was re-directed to a small chapel in the back of the premises. While stepping up on the old wooden stairs, I heard the violin solo from the Vivaldi's "Spring." It sounded amazing. Every cell in my body started to dance. I carefully opened the door and beheld the soloist, a young man with long hair having a love affair with his violin in front of the chamber orchestra! No, he wasn't an exhibitionist. He was just losing himself in the music.

His relaxed concentration made me rejoice as much as the tones flooding out of his beloved instrument. Suddenly, I knew everything was going to be fine. The conductor told me that the rest of the orchestra, including the oboist, would arrive just 40 minutes before the concert. I saw calmness and determination in his eyes. So I left the chapel with the delicate tones from Vivaldi's "Autumn" ringing in my ears.

In the corridor, I met a nun who showed me into a small inner yard with a tiny garden and an even tinier pond. She said: "What a shame I seldom find time to sit

here to enjoy all the beautiful flowers and the golden fish in the pond.” I nodded in agreement and replied “Yes, what a pity! This little hideaway is like a Secret Garden, a tiny paradise!” I didn’t even finish the sentence and she was back at the door, waving at me and mumbling something. Then she disappeared into the building and left me alone to contemplate.

I sat there quietly, appreciating the incredible peace which emanated from this place. In the distance, I heard the Vivaldi’s violins buzzing like bees. The evening sun was flirting with the water in the pond while the golden fish were playing hide and seek. I thought to myself, “This is Perfect Art!”

P.S. I sang my solo without the orchestra, accompanied only by the oboe. Golden Fish with Vivaldi. Perfect of course!

The Perfect Art

So once again, I experienced that **perfect art isn’t about perfect performance** but about **how deeply it can touch the human heart**. Though all artists must work hard to learn their craft, art is and must stay a living thing, innocent and free from any programming and manipulation.

Unfortunately, this seldom happens in the musical world of big stage performances. I guess it is the reason why I am not attracted to it. I am not the Diva type. I think my approach to singing has always been more introverted. I experience life more like the instrumentalist, the poet, the painter, or the photographer who lives expectantly yet patiently waiting for something spontaneous, unexpected, and surprising to unfold.

5. Voice, Culture and Identity

Each of us has been shaped by the beliefs, values, and norms of the culture(s) in which we were raised. One's world view is often based on the particular group identity we are conditioned into by parents, teachers, peers, and leaders of society.

Even so, each of us also has an individual identity which is independent of the nation, culture, or group we belong to. Within this individual identity is a unique quality we receive at birth: the quality of "voice." Yet for various reasons, few of us are encouraged to develop our voices naturally.

I discussed this earlier in the chapter on *The Gift of Being Unique*. Here, I would like to explore why so many of us apparently lose our authentic voices and how we can reclaim this precious asset.

The Limitations of Group Identity

I am feeling optimistic. People who know their true identity might still be rare in today's world, but their number is growing. I have always found them in all the countries I have lived in. Yet the majority of people live only in and through their group identity, and they spend much time on defending this group identity.

Political and religious conflicts are caused by people who believe that their way is the only right way. It is sad. The horrible consequences of intolerant behaviour based on such pig-headed beliefs have been witnessed down through the ages, and they are still happening. What have we learned?

I grew up in a communist country where carefully-controlled group thinking was the key to keeping such an inefficient system intact. I soon realised that group thinking must be fed by fear, otherwise it cannot survive. When I moved out of Czechoslovakia in 1989 at 23 years of age to Sweden, a so-called democratic country, I discovered just a different type of group thinking that was also fed by fear. It was not a fear of losing one's life or being reported to the authorities by secret police. It was a fear of losing one's job, losing face, losing the support of family and friends, or losing popularity. These kinds of fears were for the most part hidden and suppressed, but still quite damaging.

So, I learned that fear in general is the energy that keeps us from expressing our authentic self and our authentic power. Consequently, we lose balance and fall out of harmony, especially within ourselves. This negative emotion causes our heart and brain to be out of synchronicity.

Fear makes us unable to manage stress. It paralyses us into inaction or it stimulates us to become overactive, obsessive, and paranoid. Fear causes some of us to become aggressive (fight mode) and others to be submissive (flight mode). Fear can even cause the same person to alternate between the fight and flight modes, depending on the situation. This depends on coping strategies and overall personality. But living under constant fear causes our energy to be used up with survival thinking and survival acting. This leaves little if any energy for personal growing of any kind.

The Obstacles to Finding True Identity

Although difficult, it is possible to find our true identity beyond the culture we belong to. The main obstacle is our fear of being different and of being “punished” in some way. There is also our fear of the unknown. “*Who do you think you are?*” is the protest of the group when you try to be different. “*Who am I without them?*” is our fear of the unknown.

Fear is the voice of our ego-mind; it is not the voice of our heart. Love is the voice of our heart and it urges us to let go of fear and to become who we really are: peaceful beings. It’s true that many people still believe that most people behave like predators in a survival-of-the-fittest social environment. I disagree with this view and say that such people have *chosen* to be predators as a coping strategy to take advantage of others. As free-will beings, we choose what we believe, become what we truly believe, and live with the consequences of our choices.

Group identity can also be defined as a systematically-developed net of predominant thought of what is wrong or right, ugly or beautiful, boring or cool within a specific group of people. Unfortunately, this net first formed as a loose safety net soon becomes a socially-constructed, rigid matrix which few even seem to escape from, like a group-think Hotel California cult.

One of the ropes that ties people down is the obsession with performance. Most people in western societies are image-centred and not moral character-centred. In

such a world, one's status (e.g. from one's job) and appearance (e.g. one's material possessions, words, and projected image), take precedent over one's authenticity (i.e. who one really is). Yet, in a world that seems to reward form and pretence over substance and genuineness, what can one expect?

When it comes to singing, many would-be successful singers are willing to swallow the form-over-substance singing matrix pill if they think it will lead them to "the top." Consumed by "making it," they are prepared to do whatever it takes, even if they have to behave in underhand ways to get there.

The Solution Is You

Like everything in life, our experience of singing tends to go through peaks and troughs. *It is like a wave.* Every singer experiences ups and downs. In my case, my numerous ups and downs have helped me find my *true identity*. Together with the methods I have been able to learn and practice, these singing peaks and troughs have helped me to uncover my authentic voice. This is a liberating process in which all our fears dissolve in the sound of the voice and in the light of awareness. This is what I help others to experience in training.

In the chapter, *The Intelligence of The Heart*, I pointed out that when negative emotions disrupt the connection between the heart and the brain we become inefficient and out of sync. And of course, this is strongly reflected in our voices. Therefore, getting into a state of coherence, i.e. harmonious cooperation between heart and brain, is the key to being ourselves. Only then can we learn about our authentic voice.

Being in a state of inner harmony is the key to good singing. Once you learn how to sing from this relaxed state of being, there is a bonus. You can use voice and singing to get back to inner harmony whenever you feel your heart and brain are out of sync.

Dissolving Fears

When I work with non-singers, the first thing we need to deal with is the fear of being judged for making "wrong" noises. It is the fear of being heard by somebody who might make negative comments or laugh. So we take away "the net of right and

wrong” by learning to accept that all noises are okay and that all the tones we make are part of a huge symphony and part of a learning process.

By keeping this new perspective in our hearts, we can start the process of uncovering the voice. I have wonderful experiences with “newbie-singers,” especially those clients who believe they cannot sing. They are much faster in finding the distinctive qualities in their voices because they haven’t developed any habitual ways of singing. They haven’t found ways to hide behind their voices. They also have a more objective attitude by not being attached to a certain vocal culture.

When I work with good singers, I have to deal with the “group identity” mind, which some find hard to break away from. I let them hear different ways of singing and show them how these can be achieved. For example one of my clients, let’s call her Petra, sings in a prestigious choir. She came to me to improve her technique as she was suffering from hoarseness after rehearsals. So, we first dealt with her hoarseness. But then we had to get her away from the habitual group identity of “being a choir singer.” She was very surprised to find out that her voice was much bigger and richer in colour than she was aware of. The reason was simple. As a little girl, she had been told by a choir leader to use just her head-voice. So, she reduced both the volume and the colour to a minimum. When she heard her strong, rich voice for the first time, she was genuinely shocked!

Another example is Ann, my client who is a folk singer. She came to me when she was suffering from a serious voice problem and being attended to by a voice doctor. Once her vocal cords were restored to health, I started teaching her how to be gentle with her beautiful voice. The biggest breakthrough happened during a class when I asked her to sing as if she were completely drunk. I wanted her to lose the grip she had over her voice and let it out freely.

During this exercise, she found her *natural, liberated voice*. She admitted that with her earlier singing she had been adding “a little tear” to her voice, which is a typical *colour feature* used by many folk singers. Today, she prefers her voice without adding anything to it, and the result is amazing! She also used to be very nervous when singing in public. Now she has gained a higher level of self-confidence and enjoys her performances much more than before...

As long as you identify only with a group – be it rock music, church choir, folk music, or opera – and simply imitate that vocal style, you are hardly likely to recognise and understand the unique quality of your voice.

Beyond Group Identity

I've been fortunate to have had the opportunity of living in five different countries/cultures and of trying different vocal styles. This has meant that I have experienced losing my group identity a few times. In turn, this has experience made me look inwards to bring out the identity which is only mine, independent of any group.

I always smile when different nations say about the others that “they are strange.” For me, culture is just a theatre stage for us to experience, experiment with, and thrive on... and to outgrow. Experience of living in different cultures can be viewed as a stepping stone on the way to reclaiming one's inner freedom.

I am now convinced that it is unhealthy for us as singers to identify too closely with any group since it can cause us to give up our individual, natural *voice*. **By liberating our voice we can get in touch with our true identity. Then we can also become free from the fear of being ourselves!**

Let me finish this chapter with another example from my coaching classes: One of my male clients felt very shy when we were doing simple exercises for uncovering his voice. He said: “*I feel naked when I have to sing in front of you.*” I answered: “That's all right. I love your naked voice and hopefully you will be the next one to love it. Then you will be free!”

Though he hasn't found his authentic voice yet, I know the day will soon arrive. I have plenty of patience since it makes me so joyful to hear the naked voices of my clients! You know what? It is the most beautiful music one can ever hear!

6. The Healing Power of the Voice

“When understood and used properly, the human voice is an ideal diagnostic and therapeutic tool.” Wayne Perry, Sound Medicine: The Complete Guide to Healing With the Human Voice

I wrote previously about how ancient cultures and indigenous people valued, and still value, the intelligence of the heart. They also appreciate(d) the healing power of sound and the human voice. For example, it is now well-known that the Egyptian pyramids served as huge vibrational stations where the spiritual elite spent time to tune into higher frequencies of consciousness. Similarly, in other cultures and religious traditions, singing and music have been used for centuries to expand human consciousness and connect to the source of energy which created us and which we are part of.

During the past hundred years, this ancient knowledge has been re-discovered, and so a lot of therapeutic methods using sound and singing have been developed. If you are interested in learning more about this, I recommend a book by Wayne Perry called *The Complete Guide to Healing with the Human Voice*. This book gives a comprehensive overview of the voice’s incredible health-enhancing properties.

I wrote previously that ***the voice is the perfect bridge between the mind and the heart***. Its vibrational energy is a source of personal power which can be unlocked at any time of your life! Also, the healing capacity of the human voice and singing can affect us at least at four levels.

At the physical level, singing is an activity which gives us ENERGY. This happens especially we can breathe deeply and naturally and when we know how to make the vibrations of the voice permeate our whole body. *At the emotional level*, singing can help us to release and dissolve blocked emotional energy. It can help the heart and the brain get into a harmonious, coherent state. *At the mental level*, it can help us to identify self-destructive thoughts and replace them with positive ones. And *at the spiritual level*, singing can help us to expand our consciousness and heal our deepest traumas.

Learning how to get into a relaxed state is a basic skill for anyone who wants to sing well and at the same time enjoy the health-benefits that singing offers. There are a lot

of good singers who cannot perform or even practice without tension in their throats and bodies. This reflects in their voices and in the sound energy they project around them.

Here I would like to make an important point: **The healing power of the voice isn't automatic. Our access to it depends on how we use the voice.**

I have chosen two aspects of singing that are important parts of my vocal coaching and beneficial for health. Nobody needs to become a qualified voice therapist or psychologist to understand and practice these. One is related to **stress**, the other to **identity**.

In brief, the therapeutic value I mostly focus on in my vocal coaching is as follows: I show my clients how to de-stress and teach them about authentic voice. By doing so, I help them to get closer to their true identity, which is the only source of real self-confidence/ self-belief.

The Negative Consequences of Stress

Now I want to discuss how stress affects us and especially how it affects our sense of identity.

Throughout the medical scientific community, it is a well-known fact that stress induces and aggravates most disorders and diseases. When our body is free of stress, our immune system remains strong and we enjoy vibrant health. The self-protective and self-healing powers of the human body are truly remarkable.

When our body's immune system is weakened, for example by habitual fight/flight activity, we become susceptible to disease. The ability of our cells to restore themselves decreases. This stress reaction of our body may be helpful in the fight/flight mode of physical survival, but apart from this, most types of stress disrupt the coherent connection between heart and brain. Stress of this nature negatively affects our performance, reduces our mental clarity, and impairs our ability to communicate effectively with others. Therefore, to live healthier (and longer), we need to learn how to manage stress!

Stress and the Human Voice

The human voice is a perfect mirror for reflecting the degree of stress a person is dealing with at any given moment. The human voice is also a perfect tool for releasing both the cause of stress (e.g. negative emotions) and the consequence of stress (e.g. muscle tightness, increased heart palpitation, shallow breathing, and decreased digestive activity). Used properly, the human voice will help to restore the energy levels of an exhausted human system, especially one that has been suffering from prolonged periods of stress.

As mentioned already, fear is the most common source of stress. For example, the fear of being judged or the fear of not being good enough can disturb our balance. It just adds to other types of situational stress, such as tight deadlines, inter-personal conflicts, an unhealthy diet, or an inactive lifestyle.

Therefore, in my singing sessions I always place special attention on creating a stress-free environment in which everyone can feel comfortable. It is an atmosphere which allows my clients to make any mistakes or noises they choose to. In such an atmosphere, everyone can relax and switch off all external controllers. This creates space for dealing with the major internal controller that plagues so many of us as singers. I'm talking about the critical voice that rattles around the inside of our brains and which needs to be silenced.

The Critical Voice Inside – How To Switch It Off

There are many ways of switching off the (hyper)-critical voice within. I recommend to all my clients that they simply acknowledge the critical voice is there, but do all the exercises in spite of the chattering of the critical voice. By doing the exercises, they will find that the critical voice soon quietens.

A super way to silence the inner critical voice is to learn how to love oneself more, in a healthy (non-narcissistic) way. Natural singing and healthy self-love go hand-in-hand. From my experience as a voice coach, I have discovered that many women suffer from a distinct lack of self-love.

When it comes to singing, it is my experience that too many women seem very reluctant to accept and appreciate the innate beauty and quality of their voices... until they are shown how to. Then, with practice, they soon learn that singing can feel

great in the throat as the tone flows freely out of the body, and the quality of their singing improves.

Then there is another matter. Once those women acknowledge that their singing sounds good to them, they often find it hard to believe that their singing could ever sound good to others. This often happens to those who have the most beautiful voices!

There is no doubt that we hear our voice differently from what others hear. Even so, I am sure about one thing: ***it is impossible for a healthy, relaxed voice, with clear resonance to sound anything but good!***

The Voice Isn't the Key Until It Is

There are lot of singers with voices far removed from what I call an *ideal voice* who have success in their singing careers. Why is this so? Because a successful career as a rock or pop singer isn't built entirely on the quality of the singer's voice.

The majority of singers within the entertainment industry don't need to search for their ideal voice because the voice they have works well enough... until it doesn't. Due to improper breathing, most of them cannot sing with full vocal resonance without forcing their voices. Sooner or later these singers develop voice problems serious enough to threaten their singing careers. Also, many of them sing in a limited range and do not expand this range beyond what they believe is necessary. I could go on!

So, what is the key to their "success?" Repertoire, musicality, personality, ambition, self-confidence, drive, focus, marketing, and a very good agent!

I don't criticize these singers. They've probably had to work extremely hard to succeed in their singing careers. Once upon a time I found it painful to listen to them performing. Nowadays, when I listen to anyone singing with a raw and unhealthy voice, I just try to imagine them singing with their natural, authentic voice, unrestricted by any voice blemish.

Still, many singers with unhealthy voices seem able to perform with reasonable self-confidence. However, I often wonder to what extent their self-confidence is genuine. Of course, it could be a case of "ignorance is bliss." Then I imagine what finding and using their "ideal voice" would do to their self-confidence and performance.

Whether working with experienced singers or newbie singers, I have discovered that when they learn how to breathe correctly their self-confidence is boosted, for singing and in general. Proper breathing relaxes the voice, dissolves stress, and allows the voice to release its best quality. It also helps the singers to enjoy their singing to a higher degree.

Dealing with Psychological Blocks

Sometimes, while a client is engaged in practicing a voice exercise, a psychological blockage will surface. This can happen with experienced singers and newbie singers alike, although the patterns of psychological blockages tend to differ between these two groups. Here I will touch on a type of psychological blockage common among some of my newbie singers.

Most of the psychological blockages of newbie singers can be traced back to something they experienced as a child. The most common stem from negative comments about the quality of their singing. A parent, sibling, school teacher, or music teacher criticized their singing ability and left some deep-seated fears about the quality of their voice and of singing. I have learned from experience that I must help these singing clients resolve any psychological traumas before they can make any progress with their singing.

While on this subject, I should add that I can foresee that extreme cases require me to call in an expert psychologist. Until now, for clients with non-extreme psychological blockages, my help has sufficed to break through their blockages. I generally encourage them to change their viewpoint from “judge” to “observer” and “explorer.” Then, the practical exercises help them to reach a point when competence breeds confidence. That is the real break-through.

Of course, there are a few clients who have general self-management issues which can disrupt efforts on my part to coach them on singing matters. I have learned how to deal with such clients and know their symptoms. These include a host of excuses for their apparent need to constantly postpone appointments and their payment of fees; the urge to speak about their problems rather than to practice singing; lack of concentration; cancelling lessons at the last minute; and entering into long email dialogue several times a week. Such clients tend not to remain my clients very long,

because I have learned how to let such clients “disqualify” themselves from the services I provide. I don’t want to be the one in need of psychological help.

Therefore, though I work with some aspects of singing which are truly therapeutic, I leave the serious cases to qualified therapists. I focus entirely on ***uncovering the authentic voice***. By doing so, I am also helping my clients to recognise the hidden power of their voices, which they can use as a source of energy and healing all day long!

Coherent Singing

I make no apology for stating this once more: ***We can uncover our authentic voices only when we are in a coherent state***. This coherence happens when heart and brain are in harmony and our breathing is relaxed, deep, and smooth.

One way to come into this balanced, harmonious state is *to feel in awe*. This is the child-like state of playfulness and openness which we can experience both physically and emotionally. Another way is to use ancient vocal techniques like overtone singing or toning with seed syllables. Also the sound of a Tibetan bowl is sure to help us enter a state of inner harmony.

When we are in a state of disharmony, the voice becomes distorted and non-vibrant. It tenses and causes us to feel that we are struggling. So, *tuning our beings into harmony* is a key first step to better singing.

In my experience, the benefits of authentic voice singing go far beyond singing for fun and pleasure. For me, the study and practice of “ideal voice” singing is a key catalyst for my personal growth. In fact, my practical philosophy for living and my practical philosophy of singing are in harmony. Authentic singing, which I also call “singing from the heart,” is similar to smiling from the heart. It touches both singer and audience and lightens and lights up the world.

Lastly, training others in the art and science of authentic voice singing is my way of contributing to my community. It is a gift and a delight to share the skills I have learned with those who enjoy singing from the heart. When this gift takes the form of artistic expression, the results can be truly amazing!

7. Singing from the Heart

“When you know yourself you are empowered. When you accept yourself you are invincible.” Tina Lifford

Singing from the heart has been the quest of my life. I am still learning new things every day - about the heart, about the voice, and about living. It has been a fascinating journey as I have discovered forgotten aspects of singing that have changed my life. I simply cannot imagine who or where I would be without singing.

I might still be only dreaming about finding my ideal voice instead of having found it. Fortunately, I found a path less travelled by that led me to a real treasure trove of singing pearls and singing sense. Out of this treasure of singing wealth I am now able to help others find their own path to *singing success*.

Becoming a star and “singing just for joy” need not be mutually exclusive. Too many people lose the joy of singing because of straining to become a successful singer. Why this appears to be so is perhaps due to the methods and disciplines that certain singing schools burden their students with.

However, this process can be reversed by teaching people about singing from a whole being therapeutic point of view. For the student or client this involves him/her in learning how to improve their singing in a natural way, with ease of breathing and another method I call the hidden and forgotten aspects of singing.

Fallen and Sleeping Stars

Some of my clients come to me as *fallen stars* in need of some voice therapy that will heal their damaged vocal cords. Others come to me as *sleeping stars* in need of some voice therapy that will build their self-confidence for singing. Both types of *stars* soon discover that the singing methods they learn from me start to move other aspects of their general health and well-being, far beyond voice and singing.

Unfortunately, there are lots of people who would love to sing but believe they can't. There are also a lot of people with latent singing talent who don't understand what they've got and how to express this talent properly. Winning a singing talent competition and becoming famous is for the very few, and often singing talent is only one aspect of this media-manipulated journey. This pathway is strewn with the

broken spirits of those who believe they have no value because they didn't gain the approval of those who manage the singing-media circus!

I have written this book especially for these two groups: The people who would love to sing but believe they can't, and the people who can sing and who want to find their natural voices by unlocking the power that is hidden in the forgotten aspects of singing.

The Singing from the Heart Principles

Many times I have heard people saying: "He/she sings from his/her heart." I have found that the art of singing and the heart belong together. Therefore, in a nutshell, the characteristics of singing from the heart are: 1) vocal identity, 2) vocal freedom, and 3) harmonious heart-living.

It all starts with the process of getting into a harmonious state to uncover your natural voice. Then come learning and practicing different ways of developing your voice to gain *vocal freedom*. This is not only about vocal cords; it is also about psychological freedom to creatively express whatever you want to express through your voice. So vocal identity and vocal freedom are interconnected.

While words are the expression of cerebral intelligence, the sound of the voice - when connected to the heart - is the expression of emotional intelligence. The heart knows how to express what it feels through the vocal cords. This is the highest level of singing. Children do this intuitively. Artistic singers do it consciously to touch the hearts of their audiences.

Unfortunately, if you select a song or an aria which is beyond your vocal abilities at a given time, you cannot experience vocal freedom. As a result, you can neither sing from your heart nor use the sound of your natural voice. A distorted voice loses most of its acoustic qualities, especially the spectrum of overtones unique to every individual.

Through experience, I have reached the conclusion that the healing power of the voice and artistic singing are inseparable. Every professional singer who separates these two aspects of human voice, even if unaware of doing so, is disconnecting from the heart and is singing only through her/his head. In some cases the result can be impressive, but I believe there is no art without the heart!

As I wrote earlier, art is something that is a natural part of life and living. For me, art is about living with dignity and self-respect in and from the heart. The first place to find the source of joy is in your heart. From inner joy you can then touch others around you with a joy that radiates outward to the whole universe! And what better way to start doing this than through singing from your heart?

Yes, you can find the roots of singing inside you. By doing so, *Liberita* will bring you vocal freedom, *Unitin* will help you connect to your heart and the heart of others, and *Medicony* will help you find your authentic voice, which will bring healing energy to you and others whom you sing for!

III. Finding Your True Voice

“I became the singing teacher I wished to have all my life!” Kate Barbour

I teach ***singing as a conscious process***. Valuable universal principles of singing learned from a few masters and my practicing these let me now believe that almost everyone can learn how to sing better.

No doubt you know people who are self-taught piano or guitar players and play intuitively. It is a real gift. There are also singers who sing intuitively without any training, and it works *naturally* for them. However, even these singers would gain many advantages by understanding singing as a conscious process!

In the previous chapter, I described the three important aspects of singing from the heart, namely, (1) vocal identity, (2) vocal freedom, and (3) connecting to the heart. I pointed out that understanding these helps us to experience a coherent state of being which can bring growth to all other areas of our lives. Here, I will explain the seven aspects of singing critical for finding and developing your true (authentic) voice:

1. Natural Breathing
2. Resonance
3. Flow
4. Mindfulness
5. Imagination
6. Emotion
7. Self-expression

Before we get into each of these, let me mention two specific ways of vocal coaching which I use. First, I sit opposite you and sing every exercise for you and then ask you to repeat what you have heard. Sometimes we sing together, but always facing each other. Second, I work without using any additional musical instrument (except for a tuning fork or a xylophone, and the human voice which *is* a musical instrument). No other musical instrument (even as a piano) disturbs the ambiance between us!

By observing closely what I do you activate mirror neurons in your brain, which speeds up your learning. By listening to my voice you learn to appreciate how the physical, emotional and mental processes influence the sound of your voice. Also, the

connection between your ears and vocal cords help you on the subconscious level to mirror what happens in my throat! This happens automatically without the need to control it by the analytical mind. This is why it is so important for you to listen to singers with healthy voices and singing habits because they are helping you to program your subconscious to reach the same vocal quality. It is also the reason why you should avoid vocal coaches with damaged or strained voices.

To sum up: You imitate what I do on conscious level by learning various exercises. At the same time you tune in what I do on a subconscious level – in other words you learn intuitively. As the intuition and subconscious mind are connected to the heart – **singing from your heart is something you learn with me from the start** even when it comes to some very basic exercises!

Just consider that the Italian masters didn't know anything about the scientific discoveries about the human voice. Still they knew how to pass on the secret of Bel Canto singing to their students. From heart to heart. (Bel Canto means BEAUTIFUL SINGING.)

Now I will now discuss the seven aspects of singing that are essential for finding and developing your *ideal voice* - the voice free from all constraints so it can reveal its inherent beauty...

1. Natural Breathing

“...this fear of not having enough air, this convulsive clinging to the material air, it is the crudest enemy of a correct respiration process.” (Valborg Werbeck-Svärdström, *Uncovering the Voice*, p.173)

Breathing shouldn't be an issue for you as a singer. If it is, then it blocks both your vocal identity and your vocal freedom. Singing can hardly be enjoyed and done well when there is a permanent worry of running out of breath at some point while singing. Also, bad breathing technique is likely to have a negative impact on your vocal cords, especially if you try to inhale as much air as possible too quickly.

The ideal breathing technique for singing is when you *breathe naturally*, which can only be done when completely relaxed. Babies and children can still breathe like this. It is called diaphragmatic breathing. This type of breathing is also recommended as a way of calming nerves, lowering blood pressure, and dissolving anxiety – in fact, as ways of dealing with stress.

The diaphragm is a special type of muscle located between the chest cavity and the stomach cavity. It divides the respiratory system from the digestive system. When it moves down during inhalation and up during exhalation, it works like an air pump and also gently massages the inner organs around it. When we laugh loudly, we always breathe diaphragmatically, which is why laughing is mostly good for our health!

However, the natural breathing I help you with is not just about deep abdominal breathing. There is also natural breathing which expands the ribcage sideways and causes “breathing to your back”. When we are in a state of awe or engaged in smelling the roses, we are activating this other type of breathing which is most beneficial for singing, as well as for our health. It can be compared to what is called “calm breath”. The inhalation happens without struggle, peacefully and naturally. The exhalation is at least three times longer. (A trained opera singer can sustain a tone for at least 30 seconds!)

Supporting a tone from the diaphragm means using your respiratory system like an air pipe. If you cannot use your diaphragm during singing, you engage in a vocal

production which distorts the voice in one way or another. Your tones are either breathy or too tight. Both can cause problems with vocal cords.

Valborg Werbeck-Svärdström came up with a wonderful exercise, which she called the exercise for *forgetting breathing*. It is a process in which natural breathing is re-activated and you don't need to think about breathing at all, because your body does it well and by itself. According to Werbeck breathing exercises have to be carried out together with vocal sounds otherwise one cannot reach the experience of effortless singing.

Professor Rudolf Vasek promoted singing on “residual” air after he discovered that healthy vocal production doesn't need any more air than speaking (about 500 cm³). Also, while inhaling during singing, you draw in air naturally through both your mouth and nose.

I often do a test with my clients. I get them to sing a tone first with a full breath and then with half of the air being exhaled before starting to sing the tone again. The results are amazing. The first tone is usually longer but by no more than five seconds. When Rudolf Vasek's method is practiced regularly, your voice is capable of sounding in perfect resonance while using the same amount of air as you do while speaking.

Natural breathing cannot be explained in words - it has to be practiced. However, natural breathing is the foundation for uncovering your authentic voice. Without breathing naturally you will never be able to find your true voice! Yes, anybody can sing without breathing correctly, but the result will always be a vocal sound that hasn't fulfilled its potential.

2. Resonance

There are resonant voices and there are voices that cannot be heard in a big room. The difference is often just in how people use their voice, not in the innate properties of the vocal cords. A resonant voice is one that has a special ring with the capacity to penetrate through a jungle of voices and sounds.

Children own this distinctive resonance - until they lose it for various reasons. They lose it even before puberty, because they start breathing shallowly and become more self-conscious. Many children then start to manipulate their voices according to the vocal culture they live in. As a consequence, they lose their clear resonance.

Everyone's voice has a specific spectrum of overtones which makes it unique; as does every musical instrument. These overtones are like rainbow colours in a light spectrum. When we sing a tone, there is the frequency of the tone, for example c1. But there are also small tones sounding around this tone at the same time. If we reduced these overtones with the help of a computer, every voice would sound the same. The richer our voices are with the overtones, the better acoustic quality our voices have.

When it comes to resonance, there are problems with terminology. Different people talk about resonance in different ways. Due to this, I would like to explain my practical approach to voice resonance:

With every voice, my goal is to create an instrument that can play freely across registers (breast, mixed, and head voice). A lot of singers suffer from having to deal with a voice break or even two breaks between the registers. I give them exercises to train the voice so there are no breaks. From this the vocal range develops substantially, depending on how much they practice, of course.

These exercises were designed by Rudolf Vasek. Now I will briefly describe the principles of these exercises, which are rather different from the norm.

Like Rudolf Vasek's singing school, I work with small tones – in pianissimo – which are created through the sound NG. I also work with singing that uses only residual air, relaxed jaws, and open throat. This leads to the voice becoming more flexible and at the same time becoming anchored in the facial mask, including the head. As a

result, the head/facial resonance is present across the vocal range and adds a shine to the voice as well as the acoustic quality to carry the voice through a space.

It is more difficult to work with male voices because their vocal breaks to the upper register are distinctive. However, due to the technique which professor Vasek called *voamix*, the male voice can achieve high tenor tones in full resonance, instead of a breathy falsetto voice. In general, this applies only to male voices which are naturally placed higher: baritone and tenor voices, but not bass.

Working with small tones in pianissimo helps your vocal cords to become more flexible, so they are able to react to a tiny air impulse. For me this is a double “win” situation. You learn to create pianissimo from the beginning, plus you learn to produce a sound without pushing from the throat. This means that beautifully resonating NG sounds can grow stronger without losing their acoustic quality. This is the key to vocal freedom.

A voice that is anchored in a facial/head resonance becomes a compact and flexible instrument. The NG sound gives you an experience of inner vibrations which help to develop your musical ear and improve intonation. By practicing overtone singing, your ear’s sensitivity develops and your intonation and resonance become automatic.

This vocal technique works very well on anybody who wants to learn it. I enjoy watching some of my client’s amazement when they hear their voices in the beauty of full vocal resonance!

3. The Flow

Once we have activated natural breathing and beautiful resonance, we need to let the voice flow into the “small forms” of language. Unfortunately, the world of sound and the world of speech are created on different principles. This is why you can often hear two types of singers. The first types are those whose songs can be understood well but who sing as they speak. The second types are those with beautifully sounding voices but whose lyrics cannot be understood (many opera singers fall into this category).

With both types of singer, the relationship between words and sounds is out of harmony. For both words and sound to be clear, a singer has to be trained in how to put these together without reducing either of them.

There is only one way to do this. ***It is by learning how to pour the vocal sound into the words.*** The throat needs to be open, the resonance needs to be strong, and the sound needs to permeate every word without changing the quality and compactness of the voice. Sounds easy, doesn't it?

This is simple to achieve **by practicing on one tone.** Learning how to sing through consonants is equally as important as learning how to shape pure vowels. When it comes to consonance, the work of lips and other speech organs is important.

In today's society, where lazy ways of speaking are so common, many clients have to realize how much the flow of the vocal sound is reduced by not fully engaging their speaking muscles. “Lazy mouth” is the first obstacle which needs to be dealt with!

While working with vowels, many of my clients find it surprising what the lips and tongue can achieve while shaping sounds, both negatively and positively. Closed vowels are easier to keep in resonance, while open vowels tend to fall out. However, it is important to achieve a vocal sound that keeps the same quality through all the different types of vowels.

Practicing on one tone is an easy way to find out where your vowels are uneven. It also helps to detect any other problems such as uneven and unsupported exhalation, tight throat, and tension in the jaws. In one way or other, all these problems disturb the beautiful, natural flow of the vocal sound.

When you have mastered vocal flow, you will keep the same quality in the voice regardless of the language you sing in. However, it may surprise you that the sound does not only flow out of the mouth but also through the head and the facial cavities, including the ears. For proof of this, just try singing anything on the letter M with your mouth closed!

Flow is also about keeping your energy level high and staying in the (present) moment. It is about your ability to stay focused and to become one with the tone. Since this is such an important skill you need to develop, I will treat it separately in the next chapter.

I like to point out that your voice should move forward like the stream of a big river. When your voice gets into such flow, the resulting energy that emerges can be amazing!

4. Mindfulness

Throughout this book, I have often mentioned the coherent state – which is the harmony between the mind and the heart. Mindfulness is a name for a state of active, open attention in the present. This is a state in which you are able to become the observer of your own thoughts, feelings, actions, and reactions, as well as environment around you. It is about being fully awake and living in the moment.

Mindfulness helps you become the observer rather than the judge. Lots of people have psychological blockages which create serious obstacles for the free flow of their vocal sound. Some people have a huge need to control the sound, to keep it inside, and to criticise it. Other people whose confidence is low want to have constant confirmation as to whether the tone was right or wrong. Training these people how to become observers is a useful way to help them overcome all these psychological obstacles.

While discovering and playing with your voice, it is important to stay neutral. Curiosity and openness are other desired states of mind that make the whole process an interesting adventure rather than a series of tasks to perform. One way of helping you to uncover your authentic voice is to teach you about mindfulness.

Mindfulness is that state of relaxed concentration that you need as a singer regardless of whether you are practicing or performing. In other singing circles trainers call this *focus*. However, mindfulness is a gentler notion. Focus can sometimes be interpreted as forced concentration – like trying too hard – which mostly causes your vocal production to deteriorate.

For me, the ideal state for singing is to become one with my voice and to immerse myself in the music. At the same time, the observer in me is watching everything inside and outside.

Mindfulness is also important for *intonation*. I have discovered that when singers are tired and/or cannot concentrate, their intonation is affected in a negative way. Of course, the same applies to rhythm. I have noticed this many times even with professional singers. Therefore, it seldom helps try harder. Instead, they should take a break and come back with a fresher mind!

When singers perform in a state of relaxed concentration it helps to break the ice with the audience. It has a calming effect on the audience and develops an atmosphere of trust. Mindfulness combined with good breathing technique also steadies the nerves of singers who may suffer from stage fright.

Practicing mindfulness is useful while singing... and to improve other areas of your life. It reduces situational stress because it makes you aware of the *observer*, thus making you open to choosing a more suitable response instead of reacting automatically.

For singing in public, singers need to learn mindfulness to avoid falling into emotional turbulence when a performance doesn't go according to plan, or when they are criticised in public. As an observer you don't take anything personally, which always helps you to escape from an unpleasant situation relatively unscathed.

5. Imagination

Mindfulness and imagination might sound like contradictory terms, but they are closely connected. The mind's ability to play inner movies is incredible. It is the creative part of the brain which allows this; without it we wouldn't be able to live our lives independently and creatively. When we let the mind drive us, our imagination becomes more of a hindrance than a help. This is why mindfulness and "the observer" play such an important part in using imagination for our advantage instead of to our disadvantage!

The intelligence of the body is astonishing. Every good singing teacher knows this. When a singer gets into a song and plays a positive inner movie, the voice automatically expresses what the singer sees. This is then transmitted to the listener in such a way that some sensitive individuals might even see the same inner movie as the singer! It has happened to me twice, but the main point is that what happens in our minds as we sing influences our voices!

I train you to become aware of this beautiful gift of playing positive mental movies. During our practicing sessions, we use images and metaphors even to speak about some voice issues.

It is much more effective to say to you: "Let the tones flow like a river and feel its energy!" instead of "Use more breathing support, improve your resonance and pronunciation, and focus only on singing!" The mechanical language of the left part of the brain might work on some, but in my experience, speaking in pictures is usually much more powerful.

I have met some musicians who like to assign certain colours to certain chords and keys. Singers like to speak about a dark colour, a full colour, or a light colour to describe different voices or vocal expressions.

I encourage you to see different colours while singing. This is complementary to the chakra system I use to let you focus on different parts of your energy centres while singing. Let me assure you that there is a quite a big difference between singing a yellow tone c1 and singing a blue tone c1!

Using the imagination is absolutely crucial to every singer who wants to become a great interpreter. There's nothing more boring for me than listening to a singer who doesn't use the gift of imagination and instead sings the same song in a same way as a robot! So I ask all my clients to picture vivid images while singing a song and to let their voice tell the story!

6. Emotions

While the mind works with images, the heart works with emotions. Singing without the heart is not an option for me. You should learn how to sing from the heart because it is the main way to connect with your audience.

The word “emotion” is made up from the word *motion* prefixed by the letter *e*. For me, *e* is the perfect symbol for the word energy. I interpret e-motion as *motion of energy (or energy in motion)*, which is exactly what it should be in music and singing, because it uses the language of the heart!

When we sing a song or an aria, there is already a given *emotional frame* to the piece due to the lyrics and the composed music. Then we have to make a conscious decision whether to follow this emotional frame or whether to create another one.

If we choose to create a different emotional frame, we might be violating the original intention that the composer of the piece had in mind. I find it interesting that opera singers are trained never to violate the original emotional frame of an aria, yet “popular singers” are often expected to create their own emotional frame of a song. Thus it would seem that opera singers have to work within *prescribed emotions* while pop singers have to dig deeper into their own *emotional landscape*.

On closer inspection, this contrast is not as stark as it might seem. Opera singers are quite restricted by the form, but the best opera singers create a dynamic role (instead of a static one) by mastering both vocal colours and emotions. Feeling the emotions changes the voice, although in some cases expressing deep emotions might work against the voice. For example, if an opera singer experienced a negative emotion, like anger, despair, or sadness, as if it were real, they would surely find it difficult to sing!

When negative emotions are really felt physically, they disrupt the body and trigger a fight or flight reaction. This causes the heart to beat faster and blood to rush to the arms and legs. The whole body is on alert mode, which adversely affects the voice. Therefore, dramatic emotions like sadness, anger, and fear have to be expressed creatively in a way that triggers the same feelings in the audience without disrupting the balance of the singer.

Singers have to learn the various ways of expressing negative emotions in a song without feeling them intensely while singing. Strangely enough, expressing negative feelings in a song can be of therapeutic value to the singer. This is because the singer has to practice overcoming these negative feelings by becoming an “observer” of them. It is about singing with compassion for the pain rather than feeling the pain personally. Compassion is then the healing energy which transforms every human experience into something positive.

I believe that singers can honestly sing only about their own experiences. At least they need to relate to a song from a personal experience which evokes in them a similar emotional understanding. I find it easy to recognise when a singers don't empathise with what they are singing about, no matter how fantastic their voice might be.

Pop and rock singers are less restricted by demanding technique and form. For them, there is more freedom to pour emotions straight into the song. Of course, the results can vary greatly.

I do admit that I am not a fan of rough and damaged voices, especially those which are amplified by the use of sound-blasting equipment. There is nothing attractive for me in listening to someone screaming out her/his pain. But even here, I prefer to listen to a singer who has transformed the pain into compassion for the pain and so expresses this in a way that uplifts listeners who may be dealing with a similar experience.

To express dramatic emotions is a great and creative process. There are effective ways to do this by playing with emphasis, colours, volume, contrast, tempo, and pronunciation. This is something that drama schools teach very well and a lot of singers would benefit from taking some drama classes to learn how to do this. However, the most important thing at first is to understand that there are many ways to convey an emotion and that the human voice is capable of mirroring all of them!

It is often true that positive emotions are more enjoyable to express than negative ones. Positive feelings enhance vocal performance and they can be fully experienced whenever we choose to have them! Positive emotions can even help to overcome technical difficulties because the power of positive energy causes every cell in the body to work better. For example, expressing joy is something that every voice will

do automatically when the body feels it. Pretending to be joyful is something to be avoided, as both the singer and the audience feel the truth!

It is not so difficult, then, to spot when professional singers are having problems due to emotional instability in their personal or professional lives. Mastering emotions, especially stressful negative emotions, is a critical skill to learn, especially for professional singers!

7. Self-Expression

When you find the sound of your authentic voice you can open a door to your heart and easily see what is in it! It gives you the wonderful experience of letting your voice express whatever you choose it to. Not only will you find vocal freedom by using your authentic voice. You will also find inner freedom and the communicative clarity that accompanies this. You can create your vocal identity by fully being your authentic self!

Many people find it hard to convey what is in their heart. If you have ever tried to go through life “wearing your heart on your sleeve,” you will know that it can be a risky business. However, as a singer it is possible to learn this, even if you are an introvert.

For extroverts, it is easier to let go and sing out, but they can also stay on the surface of the song. Therefore, the overall impression might not be great. For introverts, it is easier to dig deeper under the surface of the song, but they might have inner barriers to break down in order to express the song. Still, both extroverts and introverts, and even extroverted introverts and introverted extroverts can find ways to *own the song*, since this is the basic condition of artistic self-expression. And all good singers are also artists!

When a singer doesn’t own the song there is a feeling of disconnection in it. As singing students, my colleagues and I often experienced the stress of having to handle a substantial repertoire without really “owning it” emotionally. In particular, I noticed early on in my singing career that only the pieces that I made truly mine received a positive response from the audience!

Being able to handle high tones and runs in a Mozart aria might impress some, but it will not move anybody. Therefore, I coach my clients to work with a song until they own it, until the piece of Handel’s aria becomes their personal experience.

I recommend you listening to other singers, not to copy them, but to be inspired! Why would you want to mimic another singer when it does nothing to empower you?

You might be thinking “*Who Am I*” to create my own version of a song? My answer to this is: “You will create your own version anyway, so why not do it properly?” Few, if

any, are capable of copying somebody else completely, so why not redirect your energy to being an authentic singer?

Of course, there's often that other skeleton in the closet. Most people are afraid of being original because they cannot face any sort of disapproval. Cultural rules about what's in and out, what's good and bad are often swallowed as given, but they present a huge impediment to our **freedom of self-expression!**

The irony is that when people break the rules they often get slighted to start with, but gain many followers later. At the end of my book, *On the Wings of Voice*, let me restate what I have said many times already:

Singing can give your soul wings, but you have to become free first! If you stay in a cage, it won't matter whether you have wings or not!

P.S. Self-expression is about "giving your all". It's about transforming the energy of fear into the energy of love!

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