

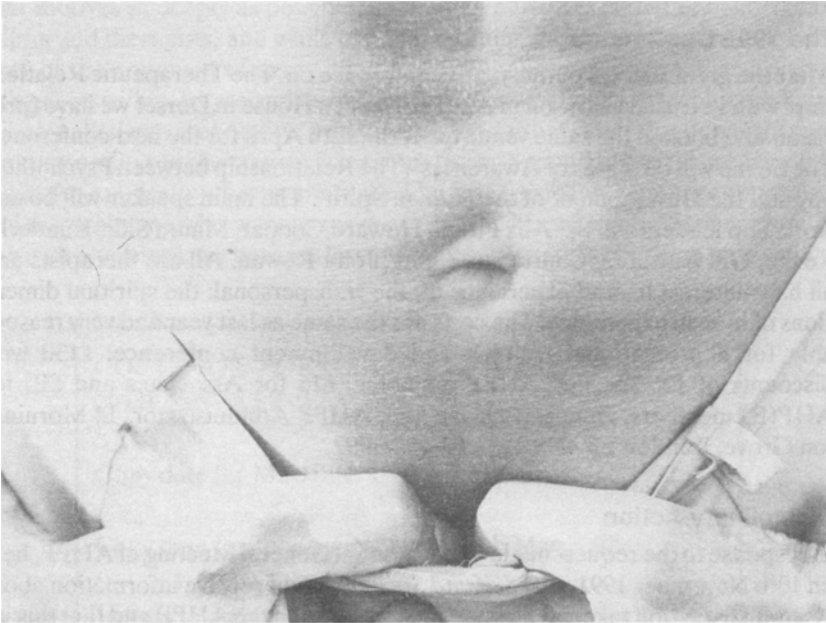
VOICework

by Melinda Moore Meigs

In the January '91 issue of *Self and Society*, I edited a number of articles on Music and Healing, which is a vast subject and includes voicework. The two articles in this issue explore this specific area of music therapy.

Voicework is a term used to cover singing, overtone chanting, improvisation, breathing techniques, body work, visualisation, ear training and other methods of exploring vocal sound in order to enable you to expand the expressive range of your voice, your Self.

Although thought to be a new therapy, voicework is actually an ancient form of therapeutic and creative endeavour. Perhaps its earliest use comes from Ancient Greece. The alternation of text and song in Greek Tragedy brings together conflicting experiences and holds them together in a way that allows for a new integration and harmony.



"I didn't know you sang from **there!**"

Freeing your voice demands much physical and mental effort to change the old muscle habits, touching the emotional pain held by those muscles in order to open up to new potentials. The rewards for this work can include a new sense of joy, a high level of vigour, a greater range and freedom of vocal expression and the discovery of new inner resources. In order to develop and use your full voice (several octaves), it is necessary to connect strongly with the lower part of your body. Much work is done from the waist down: the support for the highest tones comes from the depths. Although a facilitator may, through the use of guided imagery, or other means help you get in touch with the different muscles involved to produce a sound, the experience for the recipient seems to be of the 'ah-ha' variety. An oft-repeated refrain of clients is "I didn't know you sang from **there!**" Like the famous beer ad, singing reaches the parts other forms don't touch. You might find that your legs and ankles ache!

Often students of voicework find that, in the beginning, the more they move towards one direction, the more the opposite makes itself felt. So part of the mental and physical effort involved is to be able to acknowledge different competing elements in yourself while simultaneously creating your song.

After a while it is possible to feel that the song can happen of its own accord. When you are really singing, you do not experience the effect or distractions. You just feel you are soaring.

This feeling is well described by a participant of one of my workshops. He was a builder with no formal musical training but who was sensitive to the process of harmony.

"Without a doubt, the most remarkable and wonderful part of the whole day was when we were asked to sing the sound of joy. What I heard was the most wonderful, beautiful and heavenly sound, that transcended ordinary physical experience, and took me back in memory to a time of bliss for my soul. It was like remembering for me, with a deep inner intensity, the love and harmony and real music of a home of happiness that I had forgotten until I heard that beckoning call. In the silence that followed that extraordinary real sound in an unreal world, I felt and knew the proper dimension on which Humanity could and should be working.

While voicework can be immense fun, it can also be very challenging and demanding. It can connect you to your own core of madness very quickly. Therefore you might find that it is best to start when you feel relatively well. If you are in a crisis and you want to try this way of working, I would suggest that you do so gently. Voicework is subtle and powerful.

Suggestions for further reading

Ristad, E. *A soprano on the Head*. Utah, Real People Press, 1982.

Green, B. *The Inner Game of Music*. London Pan Books, 1987.

Stewart, R.J. *Music and the Elemental Psyche*. Wellingborough, Aquarian Press, 1987.

Linklater, K. *Freeing the Natural Voice*. ISBN-89676-071-5