

# MY VOICE

by Gabrielle Gad

*Gabrielle Gad runs the Augenblick Centre for Health and Therapy. She facilitates voice workshops, holds weekly singing classes and works with individual clients.*

I have been working with the voice for seven years. I treat people privately with Biodynamic Massage vocal expression, breathing techniques, bioenergetics and ring-muscle exercises, just to mention a few of the therapeutic options that can help to free the voice. And I do workshops for vocal expression.

## **The Workshop Begins**

Usually we begin by sitting in a circle and while massaging our feet with oil, we introduce ourselves to each other. The foot massage helps to ground people. Self- and partnermassage on feet, hands, head and back helps to loosen up and make the energy flow.

Next we usually have a deep breathing session. Sitting or lying we gently start using our mouths and do simple ringmuscle exercises such as opening the mouth as wide as possible and then closing it again - all in slow motion.

After that I usually suggest making a few sounds such as 'brr' or 'ba' or 'ma' or animal noises. Sometimes people want to be guided, at other times they feel safe enough to express themselves and let their voice take off without restriction or judgement.

## **Cushions and a cup of tea**

Once a certain barrier of "feeling stupid" and "what if somebody outside will hear me" is passed, people's intuition comes through and they can go on for a while making sounds and even include creative movement into the process. On one occasion we were in a circle, throwing cushions into the middle of the floor, accompanied by the most expressive noises and shouting. Once we've been through uninhibited shouting and throwing cushions we probably prefer to use the more gentle range of sound. Eventually people lay down, calm down, start listening to their inner sound and get in touch with silence.

After a break, a cup of tea and a group sharing, people go into other things such as singing each other's names, singing how they feel right now, teaching each other simple songs and chanting the vowels. Sometimes we massage each other and sing at the same time, or we use a small crystal on a thread and let it

move and spin across the body, accompanying it with our own song. Every voice-workshop is different - but usually it ends up with me playing the Blues on the guitar or piano and the others improvising, moving, clapping and dancing.

You can see the people's mouths looking different after they've been using them a bit more. A mouthmuscle in "tonus" gives a nice heartshape to the mouth. You can usually see on the tonus of the mouth if people have been singing. The mouth has a ring muscle as has the throat. Every muscle, like a rubber-band, can be either overtense, overrelaxed or just right in "tonus".

## **My Life**

When I was seven years old, children in my class were singing in a choir on the radio. Once they told me that the choir needed more voices. So I practised a lullaby with my mum accompanying me at the piano. But when it came to the audition, they didn't choose me. I was full of tears. For the first time in my life my voice had been criticised. I was not good enough.

But I didn't give up so easily.

I kept singing with my mother and sisters while we were washing up and two years later, when I was playing a Christmas Play with our Bavarian folk actress "Liesl Karlstadt" I was asked to sing a Christmas song on the radio. This time my mother cried, when she heard it. Later my sister bought herself a guitar. Quite easily I taught myself to play a few cords to accompany my singing.

I had only learnt those English songs by listening to them on the radio, I had learnt no English at school yet. But I practised some of them really well and sang them loudly to everybody who wanted to hear them, whilst I was violently scratching the guitar with my fingernails.

## **Squeaky Voice**

At the age of fifteen, when I was playing the piano in a jazz band they didn't really want me to sing, they thought that my voice was too high for that kind of music. To broaden the range of my voice, I started to have the most expensive singing lessons. I also began to write my own songs.

When I had my first singing lesson, I became very suspicious, when the teacher asked me to lie down on a couch. He put a few telephone books on my tummy and asked me to lift them up while breathing in, hold the breath for a while and then breathe out slowly with the sound "s". My voice was quite high and thin and I didn't breathe properly at all. My teacher taught me how to breathe into my lower back so that I would start feeling this area and also learn how to sing from there.

While I was studying psychology, I came in touch with Bioenergetics. Bioenergetic exercises help people to breathe more from the lower back and get the energy down.

Later I trained in Biodynamic Massage and Reichian Therapy in London. All these bodyorientated therapies helped me to sing and breathe more from the lower back and thus strengthen my voice.

Apart from that I was practising singing every day with the piano and with a tape-recorder to record my progress. My sons, Jens and Toby, 22 and 24 years old have adopted this method. They are taping their singing nearly every day and they just released their first rock album.

### **Singing with the Band**

Eventually I was "allowed" to sing with the band. We also had a lead singer from Panama. She sang two of my compositions for the band on television. Apart from playing the piano and singing with the jazz band, I regularly performed my German songs on various small stages around Munich. Then I played keyboards for two years together with a rock-band called "Voyage" and wrote and sang a couple of songs with them.

Before I went to England to train and work in a Biodynamic Clinic with Gerda Boyesen I was working with a clarinet player who was also a drummer in a duo, performing some of my German songs. We won a prize at the competition "Der Deutsche Song zum Nachdenken". In England I realised, that Reichian Therapy was working well together with vocal expression. I developed special exercises bringing the two together and included vocal expression in the therapy and vice versa.

From Mr Keller, my singing teacher in Munich I had learnt that breathing into the lower back and singing from there would help the voice to deepen, increase its volume and have a grounding and relaxing effect on the body. Gerda Boyesen taught us "deep draining" on the lumber area where you could touch the diaphragm quite deeply from the lower back. Working deeply all the way down, right and left from the spine from the neck to the coccyx has a relaxing effect on the breathing and it helps to bring the breathing and the voice lower down into the body.

Nowadays, speaking, singing and breathing have become more shallow. Quite often the breath only goes as far down as the neck. Usually the throat is blocked and so are the shoulder, chest and most of the other breathing muscles along the spine.

### **Connected ring muscles**

If we compare the body with a double bass and imagine that the sounds are quite high and thin if the cords are played on the top, and that they increase their volume the lower we go down, then we know, that the brightest sound comes from the F-hole, which means the lower back and kidney area. Rudolf Hauschka in his book *Heilmittellehre* explains that kidneys and bladder through urine are clearing our used oxygen. Thus they work like a hoover and we could even say, that we are breathing from the kidneys.

If you are really breathing in a connected way, you feel this delicate movement on your lower back like a butterfly opening and closing its wings. In the book *Orgasm* by Jack Lee Rosenberg I found various bioenergetic exercises described that help to improve the tone of the genital muscles. I then concluded, that the genital muscles and the mouth and throat muscle, which are all ring muscles, were somehow connected and that working on one could have an effect on the tonus of the others. Rudolf Steiner describes the body in ancient times with the genitals as a big mouth, the arms being the upper, the legs the lower jaw, a bit similar to an octopus.

Later, when I met Avi Bahat from Israel, who introduced me to the Garbuck method, I was delighted with the ring muscle exercises which he taught me. Paula Garbuck saw all the functional sphincters of the body working together like an orchestra and if you would strengthen one it could have an effect on all the others.

The Garbuck method is well known in Israel. They teach it in schools and hospitals. It activates the respiratory, gastrointestinal and urogenital system. By exercising the ring muscles of mouth and throat we can activate amongst others the ring muscles of the urogenital systems and vice versa, which can also be very helpful with sexual problems. I adopted some of these exercises into my teaching programme.

