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Singing and Participatory Spirituality

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The author describes and examines participatory knowing, participatory spirituality, and psycho-spiritual growth and transformation as experienced by a group of accomplished singers through their singing and the process of learning to sing. In so doing, his study brings rich contemporary research narrative as evidence of the key elements of the participatory revisioning of transpersonal theory. In this article the author reports parts of the results and conclusions of an intuitive inquiry that explored the peak experiences, plateau experiences, and consequent transpersonal growth of nine classically trained singers, including the researcher, and one advanced practitioner of sacred chant. All participants had had significant transpersonal experiences through singing, as they engaged in a participatory, connected, and often passionate knowing that involved not only the opening of the mind, but also of the body, heart, and soul in relationship with a community and connection with their environment.

Keywords: *singing peak experience, singing spirituality, singing transpersonal knowing, singing participatory spirituality, singing altered states of consciousness*

Music has long been used in humanity's quest for the sacred. This research (Freinkel, 2011) looked at the transpersonal implications of singing. One of the most ancient musicians is the singer, and one of the most ancient musical instruments is the human voice. The singer is different from other musicians, for the singer is both the musician and the instrument. The voice is an instrument that may potentially express the inner self—the Self—of the singer.

The great singing teachers seldom directly address the relationship of Self and voice. Nicola Oddy, a singer and music therapist, has noted that singers who are in training to develop and become “that special voice” need technical expertise, and the academic literature about the voice reflects this focus. The literature seldom addresses the singer's perception of spiritual and emotional qualities of singing with any depth, and when it does, it is often from the listener's perspective (Oddy, 2004, n.p.). The literature does however sometimes hint at this relationship or mention it in passing. For example, the book by prominent U.S. singing teacher Joseph Klein (1967) *Singing technique: How to avoid vocal trouble*, demonstrates a method that is deeply embodied and demonstrates profound understanding of the human condition, but the only overt reference to the relationship between singing and

Self is an isolated quote from the poet Longfellow on an unnumbered page following the table of contents: “The human voice is the organ of the Soul” (n.p.). In reviewing the literature, there was scant direct reference to psycho-spiritual aspects of singing in either the research literature or the autobiographical literature of great singers.

That being said, about two decades ago, voice teachers, singers, and therapists such as Moon Joyce (1993, 2003), Austin (1986, 1993, 2001, 2007), Newham (1998), Linklater (2003, 2006), Oddy (2001, 2004), Smithrim (2003), Schneider (2005), Coenen (1999), Patteson (1999), and Schnass (2004) began to formally explore the relationship of song, self, and psycho-spiritual growth. Austin (2001, 2007) formalized singing as a form of psychotherapy, and called her method vocal psychotherapy. Vocal psychotherapy, in her words, is “a psychotherapy that uses voice, improvisation, song, and dialogue within an analytic orientation to promote intrapsychic and interpersonal change” (Austin, 2007, p. 135).

Other researchers have researched the effect of singing on health and health outcomes. For example, Bungay, Clift, and Skingley (2010) extensively examined group singing as a health promotion initiative for the elderly, finding that group singing improved mental health and well-being, increased social interaction, and improved memory and recall.

More closely related to this research, Elliot (2010) examined the relationship between singing and mindfulness, and more recently, von Bannisseht (2014) developed a phenomenological description of the lived experience of singing amongst adults who regularly sing in a group. von Bannisseht found seven constituent structures of the lived experience of singing that included feeling of and gaining self-worth, healing through singing, expressing emotions, feeling of freedom, feeling of spirituality, connection and interaction with people, and joy of singing.

von Bannesseht (2014), similarly to Oddy (2004), commented on the paucity of research examining the psychological and spiritual effects of singing. These reports are congruent with the researcher's experience. More specifically, extensive research into the relationship between classical singing training, spiritual experience, and transpersonal development was missing, and no references were identified in the literature of the past 5 years pertinent to the transpersonal implications of singing by formally trained, classical vocalists. It was this gap that the current study sought to address.

Transpersonal Implications of Singing

Herman Coenen (1999), a singer, poet, and sociologist, described his experience when learning to sing:

It was during one of those singing lessons that I suddenly heard a voice coming out of me that I recognized from long ago. It was the voice I had as a boy. The voice came from a period when the weight of everything that had to do with the grownup world, its haste, its pressures, its burdens, were not yet lying on my shoulders. A voice so young and clear, it moved me deeply. And it brought back with it so much that had seemed to have vanished; lost and out of reach. (p. 1)

In so doing Coenen's singing catalyzed a growth and unfolding of his singing practice. He continued:

Now I sensed that something important was taking place in me. And the matter did not rest there. My voice has grown fuller, deeper and more powerful in the meantime. The process has continued; it does not stop. The sound, as well as the use and the awareness of my body are in constant change. With the sometimes overwhelming experience of what I hear singing in myself, it is I, as a whole, as a person, that changes. I enter a different consciousness: more

here and now, more earthy. At the same time, during precious moments, lighter, happier, with sparkles of a fire that I would call heavenly. I see how the new use of my voice has integrated into my work and helped directing it towards what I feel is my individual path. (Coenen, 1999, pp. 1-2)

My own psycho-spiritual experience of singing has inspired the topic of this research, for it was through singing that I began to understand and differentiate self-centered action from action that results through Being. Sometimes when singing I would experience an immanence of Soul; a profound expression of my being that would come through so long as I did not interfere with it. This immanence of Self or Soul I find to be deeply transforming. There is an embodied and powerful presence that enters my space sometimes when I sing in this way—a knowledge or an experience of something ineffable, transpersonal, part of me, yet far wider and inclusive: a voice soaring; sometimes wonderfully alone, sometimes in community; for others whether silently listening, or in song will in some way join in this most powerful singing. Singing has become a way for me to dip into my being, to contact an elementary authenticity and the simple, sometimes paradoxically painful, exhilaration of being alive.

This study will describe and examine participatory knowing, participatory spirituality, and psycho-spiritual growth and transformation as experienced by a group of 10 accomplished singers (the researcher included among them), through their singing and the process of learning to sing. A brief review of the history of singing and spirituality will introduce the topic, and the practice of singing will be situated in the context of participatory spirituality (Ferrer, 2002; 2011). It is suggested that the psycho-spiritual experience of singing may serve as a lens through which one may better understand key elements of the participatory revisioning of transpersonal theory.

Historical Background

Research into song and Self has been taking place in various guises since ancient times, and the mystical literature of diverse spiritual traditions is filled with references to the relationship between singing and the soul. This is seen daily with singing forming an integral part of many spiritual practices. Incidentally yet importantly, transpersonal psychology as a discipline nourishing my own research, is one that

is uniquely empowering to research this phenomenon, for it encourages the simultaneous exploration of ancient and modern thinking as well as exploration of personal experience.

Sufi Master Hazrat Inayat Khan (1991) taught that before its incarnation the soul (in his tradition's understanding of the word) is sound. The Kabbala, according to Glazerson (1988), taught that each voice — קול (kol) is unique and represents the highest part of the individual's soul (again, the word soul in this context needs to be understood from within the Kabbalistic framework). Chant has been used in the Roman Catholic community (and many other spiritual communities around the world) for centuries to induce emotion, reverie, and trance states conducive to contemplation and prayer (Pilch, 2006). The Hebrew prophets used singing techniques to open their awareness to an existent inner state of inner directed being and prophecy (Kaplan, 1998). Modern voice teacher Kristin Linklater (2003) wrote that "the voice is the instrument that guides us to the Larger self that lurks inside us" (p. 25).

One may certainly begin singing from a narcissistic place of over identification with one's voice and / or an excessive need to be heard or admired; but as one's psychic wounds heal and one evolves, the voice reflects the transformation. When one is finally able to sing with his or her authentic voice, freely and from the depths of the soul, singing becomes a spiritual experience and the singer can become a channel for divine transpersonal energy. (Austin, 1986, pp. 23-30)

In very practical terms, an aspiring singer creates a physical condition for the voice to sing. She (or he) does this by learning not to interfere with the coordination of the voice either mentally, or by using muscles of speech or swallowing. The singer must also develop the correct breathing support for the voice (Klein, 1967). The singer truly singing does not dualistically "play the voice," rather he or she simply sings; the singer, song, and instrument are all one.

As with many great art forms, truly beautiful singing happens with years of discipline, practice, patience, and surrender. Giovanni Battista Lamperti (1931), the last great master of the Italian Golden Age of Song, summed it up, "When your tone emerges from silence into sound without effort, focused, yet free, with sufficient energy to release, or restrain, you are one of the

greatest singers" (p. 28). This type of full bodied singing, I and many others, have found to be exhilarating, and "spiritual" and can be understood in the context of participatory spirituality.

Participatory Spirituality and Participatory Revisioning of Transpersonal Theory

An argument exists among contemporary transpersonal theorists as to the nature of spiritual experience and how it drives development. Traditionally, spiritual knowledge has been viewed through the paradigm of spiritual experience. This paradigm of spiritual knowing as experience has a subject experiencing the experience, that is, a subject in which the experience takes place. It further emphasizes two types of experience—peaks and plateaus. Peak experiences are temporary altered states in which a human being, while awake, can experience any part of the general spectrum of consciousness no matter what stage their development. (For an example of a peak experience in singing, see the first part of Coenen's description above.) Plateaus occur when peak experiences become permanent realizations in a person's makeup and transform the person (the second part of Coenen's description, quoted in the beginning of this article serves as an example to a plateau experience in singing). Peaks and plateaus drive development (Wilber, 2000, p. 14).

This model of spiritual knowing as spiritual experience works, yet, as with all good models, it has its limitations, and these becomes more evident with the evolution of subsequent paradigms. This view has been criticized for containing subtle empirical, intrasubjective reductionist, and self-centered qualities in the very term spiritual experience. Participatory theorists such as Jorge Ferrer, in their critique of the traditional paradigm, have preferred to shift the center of gravity from a person having a spiritual experience to suggest rather that spiritual knowing involves a knowing subject being a part of a greater spiritual event. This greater spiritual happening may bring about transpersonal experience and transformation in the individual and the world. Ferrer (2002) has called this shift participatory spiritual knowing. He emphasized that spiritual knowing is not seen as a "mere change in our individual experience of a pre-given world, but as the emergence of an ontological event in reality in which our consciousness creatively participates" (p. 118) in communion, cotransformation, and cotransfiguration with the world. This appears to takes place in singing, as will be seen.

Transpersonal Phenomena as Multilocal Participatory Events

Ferrer's (2002, 2008, 2011) participatory vision conceived transpersonal phenomena as:

(1) *events*, in contrast to intrasubjective experience that may elicit in the individual transpersonal experience; (2) *multilocal*, in that they arise in different loci, such as individuals, relationships, communities, or places; and (3) *participatory*, in that they can invite the generative power and dynamism of all dimensions of human nature to interact with a spiritual power in the co-creation of spiritual worlds. (Ferrer, 2002, p. 117)

Furthermore, Ferrer (2002) clarified three ways in which he uses the word participatory in the context of transpersonal events.

1. Transpersonal events engage human beings in a *participatory*, connected, and often passionate knowing that can involve not only the opening of the mind, but also of the body, heart, and soul. All dimensions of human nature can *participate* in the knowing.
2. Participatory refers to the role that individual consciousness plays during the transpersonal event. It is not one of appropriation, possession, or passive representation, but of communion and cocreation.
3. Whether consciously or unconsciously, human beings are always participating in the self-disclosure of Spirit by virtue of their very existence.

Simply, in Ferrer's (2002) thought, participation means:

1. All parts of the whole human being participate in the event;
2. The spiritual event is not located inside the individual consciousness, but rather the individual consciousness participates in the event in relationship with other participants, be they spiritual energies, human, animal, or place; and
3. The individual participates with Spirit in its Self-disclosure through the event.
4. Spiritual knowing is thus reframed as a multilocal, participatory happening.

Essential to the constructs explored in this study is the experience of *participatory knowing*. Ferrer (2002) described it thus:

Participatory knowing refers to a multidimensional access to reality that includes not only the intellectual knowing of the mind, but also the emotional and empathic knowing of the heart, the sensual and somatic knowing of the body, the visionary and intuitive knowing of the soul, as well as any other way of knowing available to human beings. (Ferrer, p. 121)

Ferrer (2002) further outlined three qualities of participatory knowing:

1. Participatory knowing is presential, or knowing by presence or identity.
2. Participatory knowing is enactive—that is, not a mental representation of pre-given, independent spiritual objects, but an enaction, a “bringing forth of a world or domain of distinctions co-created by the different elements involved in the participatory event” (p. 123).
3. Participatory knowing is transformative. Participation in a transpersonal event transforms self and the world. At the same time, transformation of self is normally required to participate in transpersonal knowing, and the knowing in turn draws the self through its own transformative processes in order to further facilitate participation.

It could be said that subject and object, knowing, being, epistemology, and ontology, are all brought together in the act of participatory knowing.

Ferrer's (2002) participatory turn in transpersonal psychology is a revisioning of transpersonal theory in that it questions the field's traditional framework interpreting transpersonal phenomena as replicable inner experiences which may be “ranked according to purportedly universal developmental or ontological schemes” (Ferrer, 2011, p. 1), and re-visions transpersonal phenomena as multilocal pluralistic participatory events. The epistemic value of these events lies in their emancipatory and transformative power on self, community, and the world, and not from any pre-established hierarchy of spiritual insights (Ferrer, 2011). To quote Ferrer (2002):

Spiritual knowing is a participatory event: It can involve the creative participation of not only our minds, but our hearts, bodies, souls, and most

vital essence. Furthermore, spiritual energies are not confined to our inner world, but flow out of relationships, communities, and even places. (p. 115)

Participatory thinking has been gaining increased influence in the transpersonal field as a disciplinary model, a theoretical orientation, and a paradigm as shown by Ferrer (2011) in his recently published 10 year retrospective of participatory spirituality.

That being said, it is possible to identify two shortcomings with the participatory literature: (1) the theoretical and philosophical language makes it difficult to understand and to grasp its import, and (2) the work has evolved through analysis of transpersonal, mystical, and religious writings, which has resulted in the discussion remaining largely theoretical. There is much research that could be interpreted using the paradigm, but there is scant contemporary transpersonal research situated in a way that specifically demonstrates the value of the participatory turn. It is hoped that the study presented here will serve to address this latter shortcoming in some small way. Examining participatory spirituality in the process of singing offers pragmatic examples that may simplify the understanding of participatory theory, and bring rich contemporary research narrative as evidence of the key elements of the participatory revisioning of transpersonal theory.

Methods

The doctoral research presented here (Freinkel, 2011) looked at the transpersonal implications of singing. The method, intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 1998, 2000, 2006, 2011), structured the exploration of transpersonal knowing and transpersonal development that came about in a cohort of nine classically trained singers including the researcher, and one advanced practitioner of sacred chant, all of whom had previous transpersonal experiences related to singing. Participants included six adult women and four adult men; of these, six were professional singers and four were well-trained amateurs; two were South African, three were Dutch, and five were U.S. citizens. Participants gave informed consent, and were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview in a neutral location of their choosing; they were asked to describe any significant psychological or spiritual experience they may have had while singing, or in the process of learning to sing. Interviews, which took place between January and March 2009, were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for thematic content. Names

were changed to maintain confidentiality, though in some cases participants requested that their first names be used in the research. The researcher's process was recorded through journaling and embodied writing (Anderson, 2001).

Singing as Multilocal Participatory Event or Happening

There is no question that an opera or a concert is an event—a happening. When done well, it is something sumptuous, gorgeous, and timeless. The singing is mostly thought of as a one-way performance, involving an active singer and a passive audience, and often this is the case. However, there are times when singing might be described as *enactive*, becoming an act of multilocal participatory spiritual knowing—a happening that seems to be *cocreated* in relationship with people, place, space, and Spirit. Such events may be experienced as *participatory and presential*, wholly involving the singer's presence, mind, soul, and body in its wholeness. Some participants may identify these experiences as spiritual and *transformative* in nature. A performer may feel shifts in identity, opening and deepening of self-awareness, as well as transformation. In such cases there is congruence with Ferrer's (2002, 2008) criteria for a transpersonal multilocal participatory event. I will now show how this is the case, and discuss how these multilocal participatory processes come together to effect transformation.

Participation of the Body, and the Body as a Locus of Spiritual Knowing

Human beings can be considered as incarnate beings, with lives centered in embodied experience (Anderson, 2008). The body's intelligence and intuitions may be portals to healing. In singing, it has been suggested that freedom—in the sense of a loosening of psychological defenses—and proper development of the vocal tract, correlates with spiritual openness (Schnass, 2004) and may lead to transpersonal development (Freinkel, 2011). Two participants, teachers of singing, described the body as a key participant to accessing the individual's voice and his/her uniqueness. Rebecca S described the "overt physicality" of the process. Heleen introduced the idea of *presential* knowing or knowing through being, which will be discussed further at a later point.

Rebecca S: I have students come in, and the main goal I have for them is for us to work towards their voice to be as close to their natural instrument, their

natural fingerprint—you know the true expression of their instrument as possible. ... The number one thing is not to listen to the voices that they sing, but to focus almost exclusively on the sensations of the voice, the body. It becomes a very overtly physical process.

Heleen: What I try to do, when I teach people, is to bring them in themselves and in their own voices. And when that happens it's always moving, it's always beautiful. It's always real; it's always in the moment.

Embodied participation in spiritual knowing gets deeper. In the Buddhist tradition, awareness of the fundamental consciousness pervading the body may be of value in processes of spiritual development (Blackstone, 2008), and in the Jewish mystical tradition, the un-interfered with expression of the voice, an organ of the body, in song may have the effect of awakening and expanding consciousness (Kaplan, 1998). Expansion of consciousness in song through the body's participation can be described as presential knowing (i.e., it involves knowing through being). The narratives below illustrate how the body, its voice, and innate embodied intelligence can be necessary and willing participants in, and potential loci of, participatory processes such as presential spiritual knowing and cocreation.

In the transcript excerpts below, Sandra (a professional singer) described her sensation of strength and elevation in embodiment, Heleen and Rachel described the body's innate knowing "taking over" while they sing, and Louise and Douglas described accessing deeper parts of themselves through their deeply embodied singing. Douglas additionally described a profound expansion of consciousness.

This is Sandra's description of the impact of embodiment:

Sandra: Presence ... Presence in your body, but, and in the meantime you're lifted up and you're stronger in your body. It's very curious.

The body may seem to be autonomous from the ego, as described by Heleen, Rachel, and Louise:

Heleen: I was very focused on my feet and on my legs to stand, really on the ground. And that made me quieter than I usually am. And just before I had to start, I felt my body taking a breath. And it wasn't at the moment that I consciously would have taken

that breath, so I, I something like, what's going on? It was much earlier than I would normally have taken that breath. And then at the same time I could let it go, and I sang that piece then very well. But my body took over. And I didn't do it anymore.

Rachel: I don't have to think about it. I don't have to think about ... my voice does it. And I'm back here. My ego itself is like, "How the hell are you doing that?" It already knows all the notes and it's just, and it's just doing. And I'm just watching. I know I'm involved somehow and participating, but it knows how to land.

What comes from the body may seem to reflect a deeper aspect of the person, as described by Louise and Douglas:

Louise: You need to have the correct technique ... you can't do it without that, but sometimes you have to, at some point you have to let go, and let the body speak, let the being speak actually.

Douglas: One day you know I was getting, just singing "awa," on at least two or three or four pitches. I was getting more and more inward and inner All the time you're feeling your instrument activated in different ways. And finally her idea is that everything that resonates is resonating and she has extended this to include every mucous membrane and the air passages in the sinuses and all the way up to the Eustachian tubes, the eardrums, everything resonates . . . and there's more of a brilliance coming off these bones, you know. And so the idea is also that bones resonate themselves and so the idea is to engage all that, but by natural instinctive reflex processes. But it also has this effect of accessing deeper and deeper levels of yourself in an inward way. ...

I had found that kind of freedom, and then all of a sudden the sound just got better and better and more focused and more there. And everything was vibrating and this is where you lose words for the experience. I have never quite found the right words because I don't think they exist, you know. Because these are not ordinary experiences and we don't have a good language for them, but everything kind of became one, the unity conscious thing maybe, and exterior- interior were no longer a differential to be made really.

Everything was the same, subject and object. I was making the sound, but somehow the sound was coming from me and was its own thing and I was the sound. It was all in this mix of being basically. And it got just more luminous in a sense and it was wonderful! It was a wonderful feeling and it didn't destroy itself. It was not like a manic high. I was very calm but very ecstatic, expansive, a luminous, and a state of being that seemed to totally justify itself.

It was sort of like . . . you know we talk about unconditional love, kind of a rare thing that sometimes people experience and this was kind of a feeling of unconditional being. We are ordinarily conditioned by everything. We are in bodies that condition us somehow, our self-image and our experience of ourselves, and so I think we tend to always think our existence is very or maybe totally conditioned and dependent upon the conditions. And this was a feeling of being that was just itself. And it needed no justification, no defensive posturing. I just was.

But I wasn't alone. It was not an isolated . . . I was not isolated you know. I was definitely in a very empathic relationship with her (his teacher) during this process. It wasn't like narcissistic and, "Oh isn't this great, I'm having this experience." It was not about a "me" thing and yet I felt more myself than I ever have and it made me extremely happy. I was very happy. I didn't know it's possible to feel that way. And I also had the feeling that to have this 30 minutes of feeling this way was worth everything I had gone through in my life if it indeed had set me up for this. Every misery, every problem you know, every challenge and every sorrow was sort of just given its reason by this experience.

The descriptions above speak to the participation of the body in this musical spiritual happening, and that freedom from psychological defense and alignment of the vocal tract may at times correlate with deepening spiritual openness. In so doing, such a process may illustrate the aptness of Ferrer's (2002) approach to participatory thought. Douglas's report also resonated with Ferrer's (2002) critique of intrasubjective reductionism and subtle self-centeredness that may be inherent in the term *spiritual experience* when used in conventional ways.

Douglas did not make himself the center of this happening. He emphasized that it was not narcissistic,

nor was he alone in this "experience." He was in a deep empathic relationship with his teacher, a cocreative participant and another locus in this multilocal, participatory, presential transpersonal knowing that took place while he was singing, and she, his teacher, was participating in the moment. Douglas and his teacher's *happening in relationship* illustrates another important point in the multilocal participatory event of singing—it happens in community.

Singing in Community—Participation of Others in the Spiritual Knowing

When I first started singing in public, I was disturbed by the idea of performing. I felt self-conscious and on display. My singing teacher, Ms. Hantie Prins, pointed out that I should forget about myself; I had a job to do. My job was to inspire the audience to sing, even if only in their heads. This subtle reframing of musical performance shifted me out of self-conscious vulnerability and into relationship. It also helped me understand the *enactive* nature of performance singing. The audience is not a passive recipient. There is an *enactive, presential, participatory* knowing that takes place with the members of the audience. I had the following experience while singing in the synagogue this year on Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year. What follows is an excerpt from my journal.

The second day I was mindful of suitable pitch, the melody lifted the voice and something happened. Nothing huge, but there was a transmission of something, I could see it in the silence of the congregation that actually stopped to listen, I could feel it in the gentle nostalgic smile of an elderly gentleman as he smiled up at me while I sang. But more than anything I felt a sense of belonging and the brief presence of an ancient lineage momentarily echoing its timelessness through the tribe.

While different in quality, participant Sandra also described a relational experience: her ability to hold her center and interact rapidly with multiple parties on multiple levels. Rachel describes this interaction on an emotional level.

Sandra: I can switch better. I mean with the audience but also without. You have the communication with yourself and with the band leader and the band, the group and the audience and out of the building, the universal, and you can, I can switch, I can communicate very fast while I'm singing.

Rachel: There's something I think in my voice in the vibration ... people will just start weeping. I mean, I did this little Mahler *lied* [a song composed to classical music], and I had men and women, my friends weeping up there in the kitchen. Just tears pouring out.

Performing singers sing in relationship and the individuals in the audience participate and form loci for the *cocreative emergence* of spiritual knowing that sometimes takes place. This participatory knowing is enactive in that it brings forth a world or domain of distinctions cocreated by the participant elements in the event (cf. Ferrer, 2002). Often the singer is not aware of this, as Louise described in the excerpt that follows, and sometimes he or she is aware, as Sandra and I both described. Nevertheless the knowing that takes place is enactive and involves the coparticipation of singer and audience, and, as in Sandra's description, something one might call Spirit.

Louise: It's a feeling, it's a feeling of ... ecstasy. Absolutely huge, free, with no boundaries It comes from so deep, that emotion, and if the voice works optimally at that point, then, you know it's like a snowball, you can't, once it starts, or an avalanche, once it starts, you can't stop it. So once that emotion starts coming if something doesn't happen to cut that thread, like suddenly, you forget the words, or you trip over the costume or whatever. It's like sex, once it starts happening, there's a point where it can't be stopped; except if your mother-in-law comes into the room.

If this happens, you usually, the audience, something happens with the audience as well. It's, there's that ... there is an atmosphere of suspension almost. And I think the audience also don't realize what is happening, but there is that [deep inhalation] almost holding of the breath type of atmosphere in the theatre.

And often at the end of it when it stops, you often have that moment of silence, where, you know what I have actually, now that I think of it. It's happened a few times, that I think, gosh, I wonder if the audience didn't like something or whatever, because they were so quiet, and you know, you almost feel, that they were unresponsive.

But I've talked to many people afterwards, and these were different performances, and they often said to me, but, you know, you don't actually want to break that magic feeling by applauding.

Spirit Participating

In a discussion between Herman and Sandra, Herman described Sandra singing in a theatre foyer with her band. They were the entertainment during intermission drinks, a pause number in between a large performance. I use the whole description because it describes a complete discrete event portrayed from both the perspective of the singer (Sandra), and the perspective of a compassionately observing, yet participating member of the audience (Herman). At the end of her description, Sandra very poignantly shows her sense of being an active participant in her sense of Spirit's unfolding in the world.

Herman: You started to sing with the group and play, and people were coming between out of the theatre. And they stood still and then gradually you could see that the attention was taking them. And then more and more people were coming. No one was going to the bar.

Sandra: No.

Herman: And they were so focused really. Also you say you're being lifted up. They were being lifted up also. Because, I just saw happiness in those faces. They were silent. They were so silent. They were shaking with the rhythm, so they were being taken into that atmosphere that you were giving.

Sandra: Ja absolutely. ... And now I have to ... to receive it back is for me a little bit a problem. You give to the audience, and then to receive it back, for me it's difficult. But now I know, now it's better because I give it back [to the atmosphere].

Herman: There ...

Sandra: So it comes from there [motions above], and they are applauding and I didn't know what to do. Oh ... Now I do this [motions from imaginary audience in front of her, giving it back upwards.] And I feel ... er ... (that it's being) received again, there.

Herman: That it's being ...

Sandra: ... received again, there.

Herman: Up in heaven . . .

Sandra: And that's a big present for me. That's a good feeling that what you're given, you can give back

You understand? [chuckles]. And that's new. That's also when I play alone and in my room. Then I feel that I've something with me, ja, I feel a presence, and I give that back. It's like a conversation.

Herman described how his singing and performing is an act of hospitality and community, how he opens his personal space for people to feel at home with him, and how he feels that he then becomes a channel for something more than him. This enables him to engage with the innerness (and perhaps vulnerability) of the people around him and sometimes inspire them.

Herman: Something happens and that is I feel the attention comes to me and step into it. I step into a sort of position or place where I feel now my personal space opens up to invite everyone. It's like you're welcome to come into my house. And it's good there. And then I feel also how can, like I'm doing it, I'm doing it in a very personal way and yet at the same time something comes through me.

. . . performing is also a sort of a conversation I like to have with people and with their inner freedom and with their inner power. And to help the fire in them burn.

As with Douglas, Herman, Sandra, and Louise's interpretations of the spiritual knowing are not self-centered or narcissistic. They show little or no egoic appropriation of the experience, but do not negate their co-creative participation in the event. This again evokes Ferrer's shift from intrasubjective reductionism to participation. Their descriptions are better served by a vision in which the spiritual knowing taking place while singing happens in community and is presential, enactive, multilocal, and participatory.

Herman's description of opening his personal space to others, and Louise's description of boundary-less space brings the discussion to another important node and relationship in the understanding of the participatory multilocal nature of the spiritual knowing that takes place while singing—the loci of space and place.

Place, Space, and Friendly Acoustics

Ferrer's (2002) definition of spiritual knowing implies an *event* that elicits transpersonal experience in the individual. This knowing is also multilocal in that it arises in different loci, such as individuals, relationships, communities or place; it is participatory by potentially involving the participants' whole being in cocreative,

generative communion with other participants, loci, and Spirit. If the spiritual knowing taking place while singing is a multilocal, participatory event, then since multilocality implies different locations, space and place at some time must play a role.

Space, place, and their acoustic properties are very important in singing. They affect what happens. They change the singer's sense of his or her personal space, and personal space may shift from a sense of separateness to continuity with the environment. This movement from a fragmented self-environment relationship to a sense of continuity and unity may itself be related to some types of spiritual process (Blackstone, 2008); such a movement may even bring about shifts in identity.

My journal entry (January 17, 2007) demonstrates my sense of participation in a multilocal acoustic game. I sing with stairwells, centrifuges, fridges and storm-water drains, in fact, to my poor wife's consternation, I will sing with anything that will make a noise or bounce sound.

I will sing with anything or anyone who will sing with me. During an obstetrics rotation while running tests on newly delivered mothers, I find myself singing major and minor arpeggios with the laboratory centrifuges. Sometimes when the call is late, I hum with the fridge in the blood bank.

Who can resist the joy of a resonant stairwell? They'll sing with you if you patiently probe them. You can tell a lot about the building by its resonance. Caves are my favorite, and I love the infinitely resonating bowels of man sized storm-water drains.

Louisa's description that follows adds the component of acoustic intentionality of a performance space to my happenstance multilocal acoustic inter-actions and sound bouncing. She pointed out the importance of interacting with acoustically friendly places. The reader will notice later, in particular in Heleen's narrative, that many events of spiritual knowing took place while singing in churches and music halls, places designed with acoustic intent. These point the way to the necessary observation that place, with the attendant acoustics, is one of the loci of this transpersonal happening.

Louisa: I find that space, the performance space is really important to me. ... This interacting with the space. And it does seem that some spaces are more friendly than others, more welcoming, and more supportive.

The following description offers an account of a shift in identity in which the whole singer (body, mind, and soul), acoustics, audience, and place come together in a multilocal, participatory moment of expanded self-realization. Note that the event taking place fulfills Ferrer's three qualities of participatory spiritual knowing mentioned above: The knowing is presential for the singer, Heleen, her audience; and her father; they know through their being. It is enactive and cocreated by the different elements involved in the participatory event—Heleen, her body, the music, the church, and its acoustics. It is also deeply transformative; Heleen deeply realized that she is a singer.

Heleen: The first occasion was when I have first, my first recital. It was in a very large church and there was very good acoustics And at the moment when the first moment came when I had to open my mouth and had to start to sing. It was as if something came over me. As if my body and everything knew what I had to do. Not with my brain, it was faster than that. And I opened my mouth and there came a sound that I was self ... er ... My God what is this?! It was much bigger and much larger and much more dramatic than I had ever sung 'til then. ... I sung the whole concert like that After that, my father, I still see him coming, walking through the aisle to me. And he was quite pale, and he looked at me as if he had never seen me before. And that was very ... ja. I think at that moment deep in myself I realized I am a singer. And it took me over by surprise.

Shifting Identity, Shifting Space

Here are two more of Heleen's descriptions of multilocal (church, orchestra, audience, singer, etc.), participatory (body, mind, soul, communion, cocreation, and participation in particularized disclosure of Spirit), presential, enactive, and transformative spiritual knowing that took place while she was singing. I emphasize that these narratives include all the elements of multilocal, participatory transpersonal knowing. They also demonstrate shifts in the singer's sense of space.

Heleen: The orchestra began (banged table with hand) and I had to think, "Now I'm going to do it." And it was as if I expanded. It wasn't a very large church, but I became as big as the church. I felt it that way. And time went slower. Much slower. The orchestra played and I started to sing. And I knew I filled the space.

Singing and Participatory Spirituality

That I was really there in that moment. And I felt that people in the church felt it also. ...

And I started to sing. And at that moment and I didn't know yet what was to come for me and him and what would end of it and not. It was the most profound and difficult things in my life. I didn't know that at that point, but I started to sing. And it happened the same thing with my voice as had happened in that little church, or in that first big church. That my voice expanded and became something I didn't know. And even the people I had sung all those years, 3 years, ... people next to me, said, "Where did that come from? We have never heard from you before like that." And I didn't know it either. But it was as if I felt all what was about to come. And that, lived that already in my voice. In who I was.

Even internally, the singer interacts with space. Voice and identity are intimately connected. Through habits of psychology, thought, and physiological motor activity, singers project parts of themselves onto the voice (Austin, 1986; Austin, 2007; Ling, 1989). They also identify with the sound produced (Schnass, 2004), and implicitly, with the organ making the sound—the vocal tract—a resonating *space*.

The voice organ, with which a singer identifies (see Figure 1), consists of a power supply (the lungs), pushing air through an oscillator (the vocal folds). The vocal folds oscillate and cause the air to vibrate. This forms a sound wave that passes through a variable resonator (the larynx, pharynx, and mouth).

The question is, where does the vocal tract end? Some would say at the lips and nostrils as in Figure 1A. I would argue that it does not. The acoustic environment is

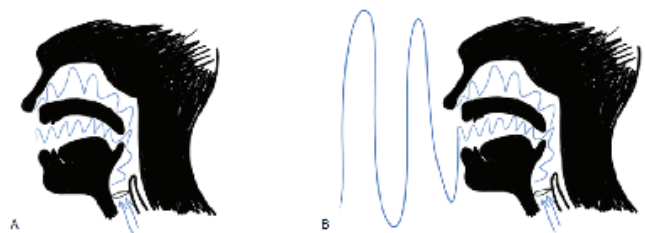


Figure 1. The sound wave as it is formed by the voice organ.

not discrete; it is continuous and interactive. The sound by the resonator of the inner *space* of the vocal tract continues to be shaped by the singer's acoustic environment (Figure 1B). The sound wave is continuous,

much as the air inside the singer's lungs is continuous, with the atmosphere. The singer's vocal tract as an isolated entity of self does not exist. When a place provides the right acoustic support, the singer's sense of identification with a discrete vocal tract shifts such that the sense of self expands with the voice to fill the entire acoustic space.

A similar acoustic communion and unity must take place when singing with others, instrument, or orchestra. The acoustics of the participating vocal tracts and instruments are not discretely limited, but cojoin in a unified, participatory, cocreated acoustic space. Similarly participating is the acoustic space of the ears and eardrums of the audience. The singer's formant or 5th acoustic wave peak in the trained classical voice (Sundberg, 1974, 1977, 2003) matches the natural resonant frequency (3000Hz) of the human external auditory canal (Wiener & Ross, 1946), so that the ear naturally amplifies the singer over other sounds in the acoustic environment.

If propitious, and the participants are sensitive, all these participating loci through sharing and cocreating an acoustic space, come together to shift identity. Thus the act of singing becomes a cocreated presential, enactive, and, in Heleen's case, for example, a transformative event of spiritual knowing.

Shifts in Awareness

What one also sees in this psycho-acoustic-spatial relationship is that singers relate to their voices spatially, and that the inner and outer acoustic space is a participating locus in the event of spiritual knowing that leads to a shift in consciousness. Rachel described her voice spatially as a "trajectory," a "rocket" on which she was able to ride out beyond her "personal, every day, egoic reality." She also described a sense of her voice riding out in front of her and her holding on "like a chariot." Her identification and awareness shifted in participatory event of spiritual knowing and she is describing her awareness of this fact.

This shift in awareness helps singers to develop a cool-headed awareness of themselves and their ego-defenses, which gives them a chance to work with them as part of their voice building (Schnass, 2004). Transformation is key to the epistemic validity of participatory knowing (Ferrer, 2011), and I show here what this means. Herman described it well.

Herman: It's a search of the deeper layers which are personal and nonpersonal at the same time. That mysterious soil of existence. You find blockades,

personal blockades that prevent you from digging. Then you first have to work it away. ...

There are moments when I suddenly realize, "Oh there is that old nasty point again." [chuckles] It's not nice! But sometimes I'm very moved, really, that I suddenly see it in a full light. And I know at that moment that I'm also already overcoming it. Partly. It will come back But now I see it and I know, "This is not me." It's a shield I'm holding before me. And it's not necessary. And these are really discoveries.

It is important to remember that singing freely is not the expression of an unrepressed Freudian *Id*. Maestro Lamperti, the legendary teacher of the Milan Conservatory, stated, "Beginners often make the mistake of 'letting themselves go' while singing because they believe it achieves good results; that is untrue" (Lamperti, 1931, p. 7). Singing could be considered a cultivated, embodied art of Self-awareness. This development of embodied awareness seems to be what Maestro Lamperti meant when he taught his students that, "the head must always be cool, only the heart should be warm" (1931, p. 7). An understanding of the development of awareness in singers may help to explicate how singing becomes both a tool for psychotherapy and an integral spiritual practice—an example and a tool of transformation.

Attention to Attention in Participatory Knowing

The head being cool and the heart being warm is not a reinforcement of a mind-body dualism. On the contrary, this way of singing reflects a cultivated, mind-body integration, both mind and body *cultivated* and *participating* naturally in the organic act of singing and Self-expression.

There is a phenomenon in singing which I have called *subject-object* singing (Freinkel, 2011). In subject-object singing, psychologically speaking, voice can be separated from experience; and neurologically speaking, voice can be driven cognitively and separated from emotion (Chapman & Davis, 1998). Subject-object singing often follows a traumatic dissociative split and constitutes a mind-body split (Patteson, 1999).

Fehmi (2003), based on his research on EEG biofeedback, proposed four ways in which human beings pay attention—objective with a narrow focus; objective with an open focus; unitive / immersed with a narrow focus; and unitive / immersed with an open focus. Fehmi showed that accomplished artists,

athletes, and meditators demonstrate flexible control over the dimensions of attention and their associated EEG parameters. They are immersed with an open focus and able to merge with many sensory experiences simultaneously. Being able to participate selflessly with full embodied awareness of multiple experiential loci may be a necessary prerequisite for participating with awareness in a multilocal, participatory event of spiritual knowing. Sandra's description of being able to "switch better" bears this out and merits rereading with Fehmi's open focus attention in mind.

Sandra: I can switch better. I mean with the audience but also without. You have the communication with yourself and with the band leader and the band, the group and the audience and out of the building, the universal, and you can, I can switch, I can communicate very fast while I'm singing. When talking not, but in singing, it goes very fast and in a very pure way and energy. And I can feel all the energies around and it doesn't hurt me.

In the words of Ferrer (2002), "It could be said that subject and object, knowing, and being, epistemology, and ontology, are all brought together in the act of participatory knowing" (p. 123). At the risk of redundancy, it may be worth repeating Douglas's text to understand this point:

Douglas: Everything was the same, subject and object. I was making the sound, but somehow the sound was coming from me and was its own thing and I was the sound. It was all in this mix of being basically.

And it got just more luminous in a sense and it was wonderful! It was a wonderful feeling and it didn't destroy itself. It was not like a manic high. I was very calm but very ecstatic, expansive, a luminous, and a state of being that seemed to totally justify itself.

It was sort of like ... you know we talk about unconditional love, kind of a rare thing that sometimes people experience and this was kind of a feeling of unconditional being. We are ordinarily conditioned by everything. We are in bodies that condition us somehow, our self-image and our experience of ourselves, and so I think we tend to always think our existence is very or maybe totally conditioned and dependent upon the conditions.

And this was a feeling of being that was just itself. And it needed no justification, no defensive posturing. I just was.

My own experience recorded in my journal corroborates:

There is a point of power where the mind stops and one simply engages differently. Where I feel as if a lava churning abyss has opened up in me so controlled, yet so powerful; at once me; and not me; and the voice is free, yet singing from a place that cannot be moved. Hooked anatomically. Grounded and raw; sacred and beautiful; here and now; there is no other heaven.

And this all happened as I sung, and yet it was not me singing. At least not the me I knew. It took all of me, yet it was all of me and everything else. Years of work, confusion, joy and pain. Effortless so long as I was working; and I was hanging on for dear life.

My hermeneutic analysis of the peak experiences as described by Sandra, Douglas and myself identified them as examples of multilocal, participatory events of spiritual knowing.

Conclusion

When I first began my intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 1998, 2000, 2006, 2011) into the transpersonal implications of singing, I listed the following preliminary lenses—existing knowledge, perceptions, and preconceived notions—on the subject of singing and psycho-spiritual development that I had summarized from my own experience and the available literature:

- A person's inner state is mirrored in the voice by the way they use the vocal tract.
- Psychological wounds or dissociative splitting inhibit our freedom to sing. Conversely, singing may heal and integrate these wounds.
- Music creates an inner beat, an inner organizing movement. We sing when we listen to the inner beat and resonate with it.
- The deeper and more attentively we are able to listen the deeper we are able to tap into the flow of life. The voice is an anatomical / physiological instrument that enables us to express that which we are tapping into.
- Proper vocal tract coordination requires we tap into this inner space but may also take us to this inner space. It is a "chicken or egg" situation.

- In this inner space, thought and awareness, and self are related “entities” in a different way from discursive thought, awareness, and little self. In my experience discursive thought and little-self interrupt both the ontological experience as well as the vocal tract coordination required to sing.
- Singing can lead to peak experiences as well as be transformative, leading to growth and transformation in the singer, and her relationship to others and the transcendent.

These lenses deepened through the research and at the end I came to the following:

- There is a “vocal consciousness,” an embodied consciousness parallel to egoic consciousness that knows how to sing.
- Uncovering this vocal consciousness requires vulnerability and exposing of the singer’s inner self. This vulnerability is initially frightening, but if the singer is able to be vulnerable and sing from a place of inner authenticity, the singer grows in strength, inner power, and deeper embodiment as his or her psychological defenses are released.
- The peak experience or participatory happening in singing involves an ontological shift to this vocal consciousness and opens awareness to a greater dimensionality of Self. Singing “shakes you up” causing shifts in self-identity.
- Singing opens the heart and facilitates mind-body awareness, heart-mind integration, and simultaneous experience of immanent and transcendent spirituality. Singing is a multilocal, participatory happening, which in turn is part of a greater participatory unfolding of individuating spirit, a journey of transpersonal development.

The hermeneutic process leading to the researcher’s transformation of the preliminary lenses is extensive, involving multiple ways of knowing. The most important shift in my understanding of the inner experience of singing was recognition of the participatory and developmental paradigms as central to this phenomenon. My research showed that classical singing is a finely tuned, whole person, deeply embodied, learned, and ultimately reflexive motor coordination that enables participation with others, place and space in events of spiritual knowing. This whole-person practice, to paraphrase Ferrer (2002), engaged my participants in

a participatory, connected, and often passionate knowing that involved not only the opening of the mind, but also of the body, heart, and soul. Multiple dimensions of human nature could participate in the event of spiritual knowing.

Furthermore, the singer’s consciousness during the transpersonal event did not appear to be one of appropriation, possession, or passive representation, but of communion and co-creation, and a means of participating in the self-disclosure of Spirit. The event of spiritual knowing also happened for these singers in community with others and involved in the physical environment. Classical singing, then, may be held as a possible example of participatory spirituality. Participatory spirituality holds potential to provide a useful interpretive framework for future research into singing, and more generally for research into creative expression.

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