An Existentialist Frame for Singing and Singing Teaching

A Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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Dedications

For Zoe, Clara and Seren

and for, Samuel, Simon and Christina Mebrahtu,

wishing them well for creating a better world.

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Abstract

An exploration of an existential frame for singing and singing teaching. The concept of a philosophical frame (as opposed to a theory) is described and defended, and an existential philosophical approach is explored in relation to other possible philosophies, and modified in the light of post-modern insights.

This is followed by a practice-based analysis of the implementation of this approach. This frame is used to examine the application of the Alexander Technique to singing, and its implementation in a conservatoire context and to the other groups of singers described in the thesis. This analysis is based on the experience of specific groups of singers in the UK.

The fundamental, underlying model of vocal use is that of bel canto singing (arising, of course, from a classical, opera-based context), but the point is made that this approach is also embraced by other genres besides that of opera singing.

This frame is then applied to different singing constituencies, of different ethnic and neurophysiological backgrounds with an emphasis on detailed accounts of personal experiences of respondents and members of groups, since it is this detail which forms the fabric of this enquiry.

The implementation of this approach is described and defended in relation to a singers' summer school in Italy, to a group of singers with an autistic spectrum "disorder", to a Jamaican jazz singer, and to another student of Gujarati origin from Kenya. It is also explored in relation to the present opera landscape, with particular focus on two contemporary opera groups, with an interview with the music director of one of them, and first-hand accounts of performances.

Contents

Introduction

Reframing our conceptions of singing and music is a task of peculiar urgency. There is very widespread agreement that we are entering a time when educational needs and possibilities will be revolutionised by the possibilities of the internet and new media (reflected, for instance, in 21 Lessons for the 21st Century, by Yuval Noah Harari (2018)). It is becoming increasingly clear that many traditional educational preoccupations will rapidly become obsolete or irrelevant, and that what is needed is a radically creative development of our ability to respond to new situations and to the unknown. In this landscape, the importance of a creative approach to the human voice can hardly be over-stated. Of equal importance, I suggest, is the clarity and precision of the language we use to express this. Although philosophy is often associated by non-specialists with pedantic and inaccessible language, it has a crucial function in making meaning and underlying assumptions precise and open to discussion and criticism. I have tried to keep the language here direct and non-technical to address this issue.

All of us have a voice (with a small number of medical exceptions) and have to make choices, considered or not, about how we use it. We can fill a 2000-seater opera house with the unaided human voice, and we can make visceral sounds in more extreme pop music, or avant-garde classical music, or scat creatively with other players and singers in a jazz context. Every time we speak or sing, we make decisions, often at a pre-conscious level, of course, about what we do with our larynx and the breathing and the resonating spaces which make up the human voice.

Given the urgency of this issue, to rely on a discourse beset with class-based assumptions about “good’ and “bad” music and voices is, at best, old-fashioned. We urgently need a philosophical and linguistic clarification and precision in the way we discuss these issues which acknowledges the fundamental importance of direct engagement with sounds in music for human beings: “as human creatures, we’re sort of excited and turned on by sounds , and the physicality of sound” (Richter, 2018).

For too long, the singing of children and adults in the west has been inhibited and judged by inadequate and ill-thought-out standards. This thesis is an attempt to address that issue.

In addition, the traditional distinction between “classical” music and other genres of sung music is changing very rapidly, as is clear from the discussion

between Tom Service and Max Richter referred to above. This being the case, I make no apology for including examples in this thesis from jazz and music theatre, for example.

There is a unity of concern here, possibly unexpected, between "community" singers and singers such as those with an autistic spectrum disorder (asd) and with singers from other cultures. To demonstrate this, I have included here a chapter on singing work with groups of people with an asd as well as studies of a Jamaican jazz singer and a singer of Gujarati origin from Kenya.

The same issues need clarification in a professional, opera singing context. For this reason, I have included case studies of a singers' summer school in (German speaking!) Italy and of the operation of two smaller opera companies in the UK.

Definitions

I have made a working assumption that concepts such as autism and the Alexander Technique (AT) need to be defined, since much of the confusion in discussion of these subjects may derive from unclear conceptions of the original meaning of these ideas. In order to refine this clarity further, I have also included Greek, Hebrew and Latin original meanings, where relevant. We can never be sure that our ideas, expressed in language, are the same as someone else's idea of the same verbal concept. But this approach will, I hope, reduce confusion to a minimum.

Thesis Plan

The factor which unifies all human beings, vocally and non-vocally, is embodiment. (This is a more potent common factor than language, I would suggest) For this reason, I have begun, after a clarification of conceptual issues, with a detailed examination of the AT, as it is applied to singing training in the UK. The AT, in spite of the limitations of its historical development, is a distinctive and systematic attempt to develop awareness of the psycho-physical self in relation to singing, and needs to be critically examined in this context.

I then move to a consideration of singers with an asd, for the reasons suggested above. If we understand more about the meaning of vocalisation for these singers, we will have an enhanced understanding of what is the basic human reality at stake here.

I then move (in Chapter 4) to a consideration of the place of opera singing in relation to these issues. This is partly because my area of professional

experience is primarily in opera singing and in training singers for opera, but also because the physicalisation of the voice and the text on the opera stage is an aspect of the embodiment of the voice. To relate this to a more general human experience, I have then moved to a detailed account of a summer school for singers in the Italian Alps, including a detailed account of their work with an AT teacher from Boston, Massachusetts.

In Chapter 6, in order to identify some of the cross-cultural aspects of this discussion, I have included studies, in their own words where possible, of a professional Jamaican jazz singer and a singing student of Gujarati origin from Kenya. I have included historical and social reflections as background to the vocal issues which have emerged from this material, drawing on my post-graduate study of social studies at the LSE.

The concluding chapter positions this material in a contemporary philosophical context, bearing in mind the post-modern refinements to existentialism.

Chapter 1

Singing: An Existential Approach

I begin with a personal manifesto, published this year in *Philosophy Now*. There were editorial stipulations that it should be direct and readable, and that academic references should be kept to a minimum. Because of this, it has emerged as a highly personal statement, which sets the stage for the rest of this thesis. This makes clear the context and some of the concerns of this thesis.

I will then defend the use of the term “frame”, rather than the use of a philosophical “theory,” in a paper given at the Singing Symposium, 2015 at Memorial University of Newfoundland and published in the proceedings of that event. This is important in making clear that the subject of this thesis is not a philosophical theory, but an approach based on the observable phenomena, and a way of making sense of this.

I will contextualise existential philosophy in the fraught space between analytical and continental philosophy. I will draw out the elements most relevant to this study of singing and voice work, including those relevant to Christian theology. This is part of my personal history (as a theology undergraduate student at Hull University in the 1960s) and also underlies the history of much vocal music in the current classical repertoire in the UK. But the main aim of this section is to make clear how this thesis is positioned between these two intellectual traditions.

I will examine, in some detail, two studies which apparently, at first sight, overlap with this thesis, Susan Boddie, and Tim Kjeldsen.

I will then give an overview of the approach used to present the original material, defending the very inclusive nature of its presentation, and the interdisciplinary nature of the analysis.

Singing in Choirs - An Existential View!

A description of a case study which leads to reflections on the need for philosophical clarity in singing performance, and suggests an existential, rather than a utilitarian or essentialist frame, in the context of community work and professional training for singers.

A few weeks ago, I had a call from a very sophisticated local psychotherapist. She had done some voluntary work for a local hospice, and thought she would join the choir there. After some weeks of singing in the choir, someone had taken her aside, and explained to her that some people can sing and some can't (and, by implication, she can't!) She was devastated, and very articulate about it, as one would expect. She explained to me very eloquently how much singing means to her, and how humiliated she felt by the whole experience. In fact, once we started to work, she can sing perfectly well, as most people can. She just had one or two habits that distorted the sound and which she can easily address. I have heard other similar stories, just as devastating, from would–be singers, and I do think that there is a very deep philosophical misconception about the nature of music-making, and singing in particular.

We have been singing since prehistoric times (see for example, Stephen Mithen's work on the evolutionary origins of music, the singing Neanderthals (2005))- it is not something we need to learn to do. What we do have to do is to put aside overlaid assumptions - cultural, psychological – but chiefly philosophical, which distort our ability to simply give voice. We assume that we have to make some special effort to do something which is, in fact, integral to our bodies! And we talk as though we sing for effect, or to make ourselves and others happy, implying a utilitarian frame, but that is, I suggest, simply carelessness in the way we express it, again highlighting a need for philosophical clarity on this subject. Most people have a very deep idea of the importance of their voice to their presence in the world.

Singing is an expression of who we are – of our authentic humanity. It is not an add-on for the sake of giving pleasure to ourselves or others, although it may do that as well, of course. This deeper significance is obvious in the context of music in a religious setting – one of the people referred to above, as having been treated with contempt by a choir he

wanted to join, had spent years singing as a monk, and powerfully explained to me the spiritual significance of singing for him. But even for those without a specific spiritual reference, it is clear that singing, for them, is of much deeper significance than a decorative or utilitarian understanding would imply.

If we start from the other end of the telescope, looking from a global concept to the specificity of singing, (rather than trying generalise about the act of singing, which is fundamentally person- and situation-specific) we could say that singing is an existential matter. That is to say, it is not an expression of musical rules or principles: it is not something we do to make ourselves or others feel better (although it may do that as well – very nice) and it is not something we do to show how clever or marvellous we are (again, very nice if it does that – but it actually doesn't matter). It is an expression of our humanity - a humanity which is shared with others, and therefore most powerful when expressed together with other people.

My singing experience has been mostly in opera houses (Bayreuth, Welsh National Opera, etc). But I am continually amazed at the way jazz singers, and in a more extreme way, pop singers, manage to incorporate this understanding of singing into their work. At its best, singing is, for them, a way of responding, often with great flexibility and subtlety, to the sound of other instruments and to their experience of the world. (Take Billie Holliday's God bless the child, for example – "Them that's got shall have / Them that's not shall lose / So the Bible said and it still is news".) Although classical music is strictly governed by the written score, the same simplicity of making sound with the body applies. There is no time or spare intellectual energy for anything else. All we can ask of the singer is that they be who they are for us in that moment in time. Anything else (being happy, public approval – even vocal science!) is a distraction. This is what distinguishes professional singers from recreational singers– not their adherence or otherwise to a particular way of singing.

Of course, we can improve the way our voice reflects who we are – mostly by clearing away the assumptions and hang-ups we have about ourselves and our position in the world. The bel canto tradition, with its insistence on breath-led sound, and reflected in the work of international

opera coach, Ingrid Surgenor, for example, but also an inspiration to jazzers such as Tony Bennett, is a wonderful tool for this. Most of the effective training for opera singers helps them to sing “on the breath” using their available space in their resonating cavities (mouth, pharynx etc) and using the breathing muscular structures effectively. In this way, the sound that is made has a very direct relationship with the self.

If what we breathe is what we sing, it is so fundamental to our physical and intellectual space that there is nothing else to say. And every breather, and the body in which the breath flows and the sound resonates, is different from any other. So, in this sense, there can be no absolute rules for singing. Even what notes we sing is a cultural variant - in Persian and Arabic music, scales include quarter tones; in more traditional western music, there is usually an arrangement of semi-tones and tones. All the rules and principles dreamed up by those whose identity (and maybe, livelihood), is bound up with such things are relative to this tonal landscape, and, sometimes, irrelevant.

When we sing to other people, in whatever venue or setting – whether a big auditorium or a small gathering, we are drawing them into our “lived experience” (to use the term used by Merleau Ponty without necessarily subscribing to all the psychological assumptions included in that term). Being there (Dasein) in that context is all that matters – anything else is a distraction. As Sartre made very clear, in the context of the French resistance in the second World War, this is a very demanding frame of action – or morality. If we allow ourselves to be diverted from it, we will fall short of what we can, and even should – be. In the present world, with moral categories and technical possibilities changing so fast we cannot be aware of them, let alone respond to them, perhaps all we can do is to give voice!

This gives an added urgency to the need for a more nuanced and sensitive atmosphere around choirs and singing groups. And there needs to be a much more thorough awareness of the personal significance of resonating the body to make sung sound. Organisations often talk about the benefits of singing for specific conditions such as dementia and focus on “the impact that taking part in the arts can have on health and wellbeing” in

the words of one “arts, health and wellbeing” website. This is fundamentally a utilitarian argument – reckoning up the total good for the greatest number and promoting it as a public good. But what if what we are talking about is a benefit of a different, and more kind – something more intrinsic to who we are? Something much more fundamental to our lives and communal existence than some of the other goods which we aspire to? This is the age-old argument against utilitarianism, of course, that we are often comparing one good with something else in a different category and of a different kind altogether.

The category of good often attributed to singing activity is that of “feeling” or emotion. But one person’s emotions are very often temporary reactions to outside stimuli, and irrelevant to everyone else. The rapidly increasing interest in meditation in the west is a way of acknowledging this – of distancing ourselves from our immediate, unconsidered reactions (anger etc) to the world and our surroundings, and taking a more considered and balanced approach. This was shown recently in the disciplined and very inspirational response of the family of MP Jo Cox to the conviction of her killer. Her husband , Brendan Cox told the Old Bailey that “an act driven by hatred -- has instead promoted an outpouring of love” (Cox, 2016) It would seem that there is a widely perceived need for a much more grounded understanding of human significance and our place in the world.

But there is often little understanding of the more radical personal significance of singing which I am discussing here. Stories of children being told to keep quiet when they are in groups taking part in singing events, in schools, for example, are still distressingly common. There needs to be an understanding that singing with freedom in the breathing and the use of resonance will, in any case, be much more compelling to listen to. There is nothing more boring than a big group of people singing “correctly” and self-consciously, with all the physical and personal inhibitions which that implies. They may have the satisfaction of thinking that they are correctly reproducing the notes on the page, but the composer will almost certainly have hoped for much greater personal commitment from them. In other words, they are not singing with their whole being, and whole-heartedly

“being there’ but rather going through the motions of what is considered “correct” singing.

This is partly a generational gap, of course. Audiences in concert halls and traditional classical music choirs are overwhelmingly populated by white people visibly over 65, and pop groups and rappers on the street are pushing out the tonal and vocal boundaries with no permission needed from you or me, thank you very much! But there is still an area of suffering on the boundaries of the traditional groups, represented by some of the people I have described above who bear the brunt of philosophical muddle about the existential nature of singing. As ever, philosophical clarity in this area would be a wonderful thing. It is very nice to think that you are flying the flag for “true art” and that everyone else is too lazy or too imprecise to get on board. But it doesn’t work, socially, psychologically – or philosophically. And it is a betrayal of our deepest –existential – need to give voice as part of our community and to affirm ourselves and our place on this planet, (Clethero, 2017)[1].

A Personal Contextualisation

I have been studying singing since 1980 and have studied with a variety of teachers, many of them inspiring and themselves inspired by teachers who are great names from the past (Hustler etc). From 2005-2014 I ran the voice department at the London College of Music, and had the opportunity to work with many outstanding teachers and styles of teaching. I was able to observe over the standard undergraduate course of three years how these approaches developed students and their voices, and also to observe different ethical styles and to observe how these affected students sometimes traumatically but often inspiringly. Most of the teachers were experienced and qualified in classical music, but students were encouraged to interact with the other departments (we had a lecture recital from Cleveland Watkiss, for example) and the very eminent sound recording experts in the department.

[1] There was an editorial stipulation that references were not used, and that the piece should be as accessible as possible –in non-technical language.

Over this period, I developed an approach of concentrating on the development of students, rather than on their achievements in the narrow and exclusive world of classical singing. They all had to survive in an increasingly difficult economic environment, particularly in London, and it was not for me to direct their course through this. We tried to get advice for them about working in classical music where appropriate, but I was there primarily to give them a set of skills – to communicate with their voice in music, in as many different styles and languages as were helpful for them and for their collective development as a student body. We brought in teachers and workshop leaders of the highest possible quality (world famous figures such as Yvonne Minton and Ingrid Surgenor, for example), and supported the students as far as humanly possible in their choices of what they wanted to do with those resources. These were, after all, young adults, preparing to lead their own independent lives in the wider world.

Over time, I came to understand that this approach was fundamentally an existential one: that is to say, the overriding priority was to give students an effective means of being present through the use of their voice. The medium we used was singing – mostly classical singing – but the aim, above all, was to foster a set of skills – in expressing themselves through their voice – in representing their own and other languages and cultures with confidence – which would launch them into the world as effective and confident human beings. Some did go on to post-graduate study and careers in singing, particularly later in this period. But it would have been quite wrong to take the attitude that anyone who was not going to earn their living from singing was somehow a failure. Some of them went on to facilitate education and other arts projects, or into careers like sales or law, In all of these options which they chose, confidence in the use of the voice is crucial.

I did find, however, that it was important to be very clear and explicit about what we were trying to do, both at the pre-entry stage, and throughout the course. There was little consistent managerial guidance after the first few years of this period: but it was important that hourly-paid staff knew what was being asked of them and what the priorities were.

Three years is a short time for students to learn such fundamental skills, and we needed to make sure that we were extremely consistent.

There is often an underlying assumption amongst voice teachers that there is some kind of unspoken consensus which makes what they do somehow self-validating. I found this to be a dangerous misconception, not least in dealing with students who are non-neurotypical, who may need even more clarity than the others, and who may not be able to pick up unspoken agendas in the same way as their peers. Of course, voice teachers may feel insecure that their skills are less obvious than those of, for instance a pianist (who either sounds the right notes at the right time or not, to put it crudely. Singers who are not currently working as singers may have less measurable achievements). There is also, unfortunately, scope for charlatanism and even giving a false impression of professional skills which do not exist, which may be very difficult for senior management to face up to.

But putting emphasis on the existential presence and the mature decision-making of the students and supporting them through decisions which worked and those which did not went a long way towards dealing with difficulties which did arise. This was in fact made easier by the increasing reliance by universities on student fees during this period. The fact that the university was forced to recognize that students were customers on whom we all depended for the financial viability of what we were doing helped to keep a healthy balance of power between inexperienced young people and the effortless assumption of superiority of some of the management and staff.

Searching for a Philosophical Frame – A Practical Way Through the Maze

There is a widespread understanding that music, and particularly singing, are important to us as human beings. Consider, for example, this review of Performing Rites by Simon Frith:

> We talk about music because we value music. And why do we value music? Because music – largely, though not exclusively through our talking about it – allows us to express who we think we are or want to be, while at the same time – since we know

> talk is finally inadequate to the music we try to talk about – it also leaves open those very same expressions of self and identity. We talk about music because such talk says who we are" (in Knight, 1998, pp 485-487 – my underlining).

But how, precisely, we formulate this importance and our experience of it is crucial to the debate. Without this precision, we leave the way open for inadequate and superficial descriptions of what we do.

So the aim of this analysis is to establish an urgently needed existentialist frame for discussion of voice education, and of voice generally.

I propose to examine the contemporary context of existential philosophy, which has changed considerably since the early 20th. Century and the time of Heidegger and Sartre. There is a greater flexibility and flow of ideas, at least in part resulting from the explosion of new media. This has made the age-old Analytic Philosophy/Continental Philosophy debate look very old-fashioned, for example, although there are differences of emphasis within that debate which are probably beneficial for everyone. Partly in order not to engage with this debate, I will talk about philosophical frame(s) rather than theories. The subject of this thesis is a frame for discussion rather than a theory of reality to be proved or disproved. I deal with some of the recent history of the idea of "frames" below.

However, I will then examine the current state of the Analytical/Continental philosophy debate, and identify a way through which helps illuminate the material of this thesis. It is also necessary to briefly contextualise this within current thinking about sacred music. This is obviously an important part of the tradition of vocal music and what some people describe as spirituality is an important component of the way many of us experience music, and to exclude it would be to reduce the multi-layered nature of this experience.

Although this approach may seem too generalized, I need to map out the whole field in order to select from within it the elements that I need for this analysis. This will therefore be a re-invention of existential philosophy within a modern context. I make no apology for not becoming embroiled in arguments from Sartre's 1940s war-torn France about good faith and authenticity, for example.

The historical particularity of any material and experience is fundamental to an existential approach (see definition below). The historical context of this study is the present day, with all our contemporary insecurities and possibilities, refracted through the process of singing and learning to sing.

But our understanding and experience of music is all too easily couched in terms which make it vulnerable to exploitation or misunderstanding – or both! That is to say, if we are not clear about our ideological and linguistic "frame" we leave our musical heritage open to appropriation by the thoughtless and the opportunists! Or, at the very least, we end up in a huge muddle!

A Frame for Discussion

Lakoff and Johnson make an urgent and compelling case for understanding and taking control of the way we frame our activities – particularly, in their case, political ideas and activities. In *Don't Think of an Elephant*, Lakoff (2004, pp.11-12) gives striking examples of the way in which republicans in US politics use the frames of the left and control the dialogue in this way.

Lakoff talks about the use of the child metaphor in US politics and contrasts the "strict parent" frame of the US republicans (George W Bush, for example) with the "nurturant parent" language of the left. This reflects the view expressed in an earlier book that – "human morality is ultimately based on some form of the family and family morality" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p.317).

This may not be a view which other cultures, with a different family structure, share, of course. And any of us might hold the view that the point of families is for children to grow up and make independent moral decisions of their own! For Lakoff and Johnson, this is part of the nurturant parent pattern.

I would suggest that the independence of a human being belongs to that person alone and, while enabled of course by nurturing care, is essentially independent of that. And this, in my terms, is an existentialist phenomenon. (Whatever arguments one may have about the psycho-social/economic conditions in which such independence may be formed)

That is to say, that any person is responsible in the present for their presence in the world and its meaning (or lack of meaning). In terms of the present discussion, this presence is their vocal presence – the impact and statement of who they are conveyed by their singing voice.

Nevertheless, Lakoff's analysis of the way our frames or the metaphors we use crucially affect our philosophical point of view, and the way we are heard by the rest of the world, is crucial. And even more important is his exposition of the way in which this can be distorted if it is manipulated in the service of other ideologies. His watchword (and the subtitle of his book) is: "Know your values and frame the debate".

He ends with these guidelines:

> Show respect
> Respond by reframing
> Think and talk at the level of values
> Say what you believe (Lakoff, 2012, p.119).

I want to suggest that taking control of the frame of the dialogue in this way is crucial for our ongoing integrity as a singing community, and that we can very easily find ourselves being re-defined in terms of other agendas unless we are aware of this, (Clethero, 2015).

Further Reflections on "Framing" the Argument

Interestingly, the use of the term 'frame" rather than "philosophy" in this context received support from Prof Andrew Bowie, of Royal Holloway, University of London (2016b)[2], (the author of *Music, Philosophy and Modernity* Pub CUP 2008,) who has been influential in repositioning music in the philosophical landscape. For instance he discusses Hegel's view on:

- How the mind frees itself from the objective world. Hegel is interested in self-determination.
- Art is to make sense of world. Then romantic art can be made out of everything
- So John Cage becomes music because it makes you ask questions, (Bowie, 2016a).

[2] Bowie:"Although I don't use that terminology".

"Framing" is a concept also used in the context of sociology, in the work of Erving Goffman, for example, thirty years before the publication of Lakoff and Johnson's work. This is the description of his use of the word in the foreword to his Frame Analysis in the 1986 republication:

> The Frame in frame analysis refers to the inevitably relational dimension of meaning. A frame, in this sense, is only a particularly tangible metaphor for what other sociologists have tried to invoke by words like "background" "setting" "context" or a phrase like "in terms of". These all attempt to convey that what goes on in interaction is governed by usually unstated rules or principles more or less implicitly set by the rules of some larger, though perhaps invisible entity "within which" the entity occurs, (Berger, 1986, p. xiii).

This is relevant to the present enquiry, in that what is suggested here is a "relational dimension of meaning", and not an absolute conceptual context. But the use of the term frame which I am using here is that of describing a philosophical approach.

I want to relate to this point of view in positioning singing as an act of self-determination, and a way of making sense of the world.

It is very clear then that there is a desperate need for clarity in the discipline of voice and singing and of music generally. Of course, in the context of this thesis, this statement applies particularly to classical and opera singing, since that is the area in which most of my experience lies. But it also impacts upon spoken voice (in academia, for example) and other genres of singing (see case study of jazz singer, below)

This issue is very stark in two respects:

First, that we must have a frame for discussion which does justice to some of the extraordinary recent work in music and opera. Muddled statements about feelings and impact simply do not do justice to some of the extraordinary commitment which we have the privilege to witness. Consider, for example, the passage below from Edward Dusinberre's account of the work of the Takács Quartet:

> When we return to a Beethoven quartet, continuing to argue over such basic questions of tempo and character, we can seem like a group discovering this music for the first time. ... But even when we engage in a nerve-wracking re-examination on the day of a concert, I relish a process that helps to maintain a sense of

> immediacy in music we have been performing for many years. A concert may benefit from many hours of preparation but the most exciting communication occurs when both audience and performers can suspend disbelief and discover the music afresh, (Dusinberre, 2016, p.4, my underlining).

If we are to do justice to musical commitment and inspiration of this kind, we need a frame for describing it which does not distort it. It is my submission that the underlined passages are best understood in the context of an existentialist frame.

The second respect in which this is an issue is the need to do justice to the profoundly mathematical aspect of music and music composition, which might, at first sight, suggest an analytical philosophical frame. I remember attending a National Orchestra of Wales concert with the eminent group theorist, Prof Jim Wiegold, and the way in which the musicians were grouped around him after the concert, with an avid desire to hear what he had to say, and presumably, to relate it to their own experience of the music they play.

Catherine Pickstock in 'God and Meaning in Music: Messiaen, Deleuze and the Musico-theological Critique of Modernism and Post-modernism' (2007, p. 40) states this connection clearly and eloquently:

> ... music presents a mystery: how is it that mathematically organised patterns of sound are capable of inspiring such great emotion, and also, as Hungarian education has tended to prove, of stimulating intellectual enquiry? We are still confronted with the Pythagorean truth that music seems to link soul and body, reason and passions, the individual with society and the cosmos. Moreover, any given musical tradition contains implicitly certain views about time, space and eternity, or the emotional and the rational, and the individual and the general ... it is itself an organised language capable of a degree of translation into other aesthetic idioms and other discourses.

She is talking here about music composition, as opposed to singing, but her insights into the universal significance and many-layered human relevance of music can and should be applied to singing - with the added issue of sung text, of course.

The Continental Philosophy/Analytical Philosophy Conflict

This is one definition of existential philosophy:

> A philosophical theory or approach which emphasizes the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining their own development through acts of the will, (Oxford English Dictionary online).

It is clear, that the standardisation and generalisation associated with scientific and medical enquiry is going to be inadequate to this approach. The "acts of the will" of a "free and responsible agent" are obviously not, insofar as they are free, (freedom of this kind is always the subject of ongoing debate, of course) going to be usefully explained as phenomena arising from a given physical or psychological situation, or usefully viewed as an outcome of those circumstances. Of course, we are children of the Enlightenment, and our world view is built upon its insights. But a critical distance is also (and has possibly always been) necessary from its more fundamentalist assertions.

Existential philosophy is usually regarded as belonging to the group of philosophies known as "continental philosophy" (although it has been suggested that the very fact of contrasting a method (analytical) with an area of origin (continental) is in itself odd – like comparing the French language with German sausages!)

But these two philosophical traditions have, through much of the 20th Century, been opposed to each other. To begin with differences in methodology:

> The heart of the analytic/Continental opposition is most evident in methodology, that is, in a focus on analysis or on synthesis. Analytic philosophers typically try to solve fairly delineated philosophical problems by reducing them to their parts and to the relations in which these parts stand. Continental philosophers typically address large questions in a synthetic or integrative way, and consider particular issues to be 'parts of the larger unities' and as properly understood and dealt with only when fitted into those unities, (Prado, 2003, p. 10).

Clearly, a consideration of singing teaching must address large questions in a synthetic or integrative way. It would be wrong, as well as ineffective, to treat the singer and the voice in a fragmented and divisive

way. That is not to say that the singer is not challenged philosophically as well as musically by the process. It will be clear from the case studies below that singers at all levels described in this study engage at every level with this. But this can only be done with the singer as a whole person, including their history and particular skills.

There are further differences between the two philosophical traditions in their intellectual scope. Kile Jones (2009) describes the characterization of analytic philosophy as a "problem-solving activity," and continental philosophy as closer "to the humanistic traditions and to literature and art… it tends to be more 'politically engaged." And elsewhere Michael Dummet characterizes the divide as follows:

> Because Continental philosophers typically tend to be politically engaged, they are more interested in the political stakes and conditions of knowledge, and thus in laying bare the non-rational factors that condition knowledge. This feature of CP (i.e. Continental philosophy – SJC) is one with which many analytic philosophers are especially impatient, since they see in it a confusion of the context of discovery with the context of justification, or a commission of the genetic fallacy (my underlining :SJC)

As pointed out elsewhere, scientific methods depend on generalization:

> Scientific method: a method of investigation in which a problem is first identified and observations, experiments, or other relevant data are then used to construct or test hypotheses that purport to solve it, (Dictionary.com, 'scientific method')

And so:

> Continental thinkers have often objected to the hegemony of science in modern culture, insisting that it represents neither the only kind of knowledge nor even the most basic kind. Instead, they have tended to hold that scientific knowledge is secondary or derivative: derived, that is, from our more primordial existence in the Lebenswelt.
>
> AP turned toward a systematic explanation of language, which is conducive to a scientific approach, whereas CP turned instead toward a conception of language that cannot be made systematic, since it holds that language exists only as embodied in linguistic practices, (Levy, 2003, p. 288).

> What distinguishes analytical philosophy, in its diverse manifestations, from other schools is the belief, first, that a philosophical account of thought can be attained through a

> philosophical account of language, and, secondly, that a comprehensive account can only be so attained, (Dummet, 1993, p. 5).

Again, singing teaching is clearly part of the “humanistic traditions” and “literature and art”. The issue here, is what resonances there may be between this (artistic) activity and what relation this may bear to the more “systematic” and language –based intellectual emphasis of analytical philosophy.

Clearly, it is important that the existentialist approach suggested here does not reduce the art form(s) or oversimplify them. It would be wise to bear in mind Catherine Pickstock’s further observation that “... Messiaens’s statement that music provides a more rather than less exacting means of saying things than the words of language,” (op. cit. p. 8).

Existentialism in Relation to “Systematic” Philosophy – Concrete vs Abstract Thought

The following passage describes Kierkegaard’s position in relation to “speculative systematic philosophy:”

> With this emphasis on the individual, on choice, on self-commitment, Kierkegaard’s philosophical thought tends to become a clarification of issues and an appeal to choose, an attempt to get men to see their existential situation and the great alternatives with which they are faced. It is <u>certainly not an attempt to master all reality by thought and to exhibit it as a necessary system of concepts</u>. This idea was quite foreign and repugnant to his mind. In his view speculative systematic philosophy, the greatest example of which was for him absolute idealism, radically misrepresented human existence. The really important problems, that is, the problems which are of real importance for man as the existing individual, are not solved by thought, by adopting the absolute standpoint of the speculative philosopher, but <u>by the act of choice, on the level of existence</u> rather than that of detached, objective reflection. (Copplestone, 1963, p. 336, my underlining).

It is the suggestion of this thesis that singing is just such an act of choice.

There is a significant difficulty in placing existentialism within the context of academic thought, in that its essentially concrete, directly

situational nature makes it inimical to any system of abstraction, as described above. So, any theory which relies on non-specific, speculative thinking about the nature of humanity and our place in the world is very difficult to compare with existentialism. It simply works on a completely different level; there is no comparison possible, for example, between the concrete expression of physical being in the Alexander Technique (described below) and metaphysically –based ethical systems based on some idea of absolute good.

That is not to say that existentialism does not have a strong presence in religious thought. It can be strongly argued that existential thought is at the heart of the earliest roots of Christian thought, for example. But, nevertheless, its origin in human activity and the actuality of human experience is likely to put it in continual tension with abstract, systematised philosophy.

But a salutary reminder of the dangers of dismissing traditional,abstract philosophical procedures is expressed by Slavoj Žižek in the following passage which is part of a conversation with Christopher Hanlon in 2010 (2011, p.9).

> My idea is the old Marxist idea that the immediate reference to experience, practice, struggle etcetera, usually relies on the most abstract and pure theory, and as an old philosopher I would say, as you said before, that we cannot simply escape theory. I fanatically oppose this turn which has taken place in social theory, this idea that there is no longer time for great theoretical projects, that all we can do is to narrativise the experience of our suffering, - - - -. I think this is a catastrophe. I think it fits perfectly the existing capitalist order, that there is nothing subversive in it. I think that this fits perfectly today's ideology of victimisation, where, in order to legitimise, to gain power politically, you must present yourself, somehow, as the victim (my underlining).

I am suggesting here that singing is precisely a site of resistance to this victimisation.

Voice Studies in the Present Day

Before giving two examples, of a thesis and a book chapter, on the subject of singing and existentialism, I want to examine some contemporary philosophical reflections on the area of voice and voice studies.

The major figure in this landscape is Adriana Cavarero, especially as represented in her book *For More Than One Voice: Towards a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (2005). This is an account which refers at length to feminist and political agendas, and which uses a poetic, rather than an "objective" mode of describing the material. Chapter headings include, for example, "When thinking was done with the lungs"(1.7) and "Sing to me, O Muse"(2.1) She grounds her reworking of our ideas of voice in the ancient Jewish tradition of privileging the voice as the vehicle for divine truth. (The standard prophetic formula for prefacing the words of יְהוָה (Yahweh) is "Thus saith the Lord" for example. This culminates in this description:

> In the uniqueness that makes itself heard as voice, there is an embodied existent, or rather, a "being-there" (esserci) in its radical finitude, here and now, (op. cit. p. 173).

This is a clear and very eloquent invocation of existentialism, but fascinatingly, it is not described as such. It may be that Cavarero regards existentialism as being part of the philosophical underpinning of a culture based on λόγος[3] (logos) rather than φωνή[4] (phone) (see above). There is the added factor that the philosophies which use the term "existentialism" tend to be north European (German, French or Scandinavian – Heidegger, Sartre and Kirkegaard, for example) whereas Cavarero's whole frame of reference is Italian, Greek and southern European. She contrasts

> A vocal ontology of uniqueness ..with fictitious entities ... like "man," "subject" and "individual". For what these universal categories share is the neglect of the "uniqueness" of those human beings (or, to use the metaphysical lexicon, their "particularity" and their "finitude"), (op. cit. p.173).

But, of course, we cannot live our lives in strict "particularity". We have to understand categories of thought and behaviour – and voice – as well as the particular and the specific. This is the ongoing difficulty of existentialist thinking, and Cavarero's re-interpretation of the issue does not free us from dealing with it.

[3] A word, speech, divine utterance, analogy' (Biblehub, 2016a).
[4] A sound, noise, voice' (Biblehub, 2016b)

The point should be made that voice studies is still a relatively young discipline - the Routledge series which is a fundamental part of its genesis in the UK was recently published (in 2015).

Research Methods

This work is a reflection on singing and singing teaching practice, and the methodologies of, for example, asking students and singers to fill in questionnaires are far too limited to deal with the richness and the many layered-ness of the material presented here. (See, especially, the reservations in the chapter on autism on trying to subject their experience to any kind of standardising research procedures – but this is just an extreme case – these reservations apply to all students, since each person is unique and has their own approach to sung sound) Since the aim is to explore the human experience reflected in the act of singing, and its significance for singer and auditor, the method used has to be one that can do justice to this – sometimes messy – reality! This is quite different to a quasi-scientific exploration which sets out to prove a pre-conceived theory.

Norman Denzin characterises the controversy about research methods in this way:

> Qualitative researchers are caught in the middle of a global conversation concerning the evidence-based research movement, and emerging standards and guidelines for conducting and evaluating qualitative inquiry - - -This conversation turns on issues surrounding the politics and ethics of evidence, and the value of qualitative work in addressing matters of equity and social justice - -. In some senses this is like old wine in old bottles, 1980s battles in a new century.
>
> Like an elephant in the living room, the evidence-based model is an intruder whose presence can no longer be ignored. Within the global audit culture - - proposals concerning the use of - - - - criteria, - - experimental methodologies, randomized control trials, quantitative metrics, citation analyses, shared data bases, journal impact factors, rigid notions of accountability, data transparency, warrantablity, rigorous peer-review evaluation scales, and fixed formats for scientific articles now compete, fighting to gain ascendancy in the evidence-quality-standards discourse (Denzin, 2009, p.139).

The approach adopted here has some common ground with grounded theory, a sociological method proposed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 and subsequently used very widely, in various forms which sometimes provoked controversy and even sometimes subject to arguments about what is “real” grounded theory. A research training description for Manchester University suggests that “there is, in fact, no *one* original and

unambiguous version of the methodology that alone is entitled to the label ‘grounded theory,” (Willig, 2013, p. 76). Barney Glaser describes it as a “no preconception concept generator of conceptual theory methodology,” (2016). However, its stress on “generating novel theories as opposed to verification of existing ones” and the exhortation to “go into the field to gather data without a ready-made theoretical framework” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p.43) lend support to the approach adopted here, in which I have tried to present “raw” data and to explore its implications.

In the words of Barney Glaser the aim of grounded theory was to “attempt to write a method that closed the gap between theory and method.” And, as part of the “no preconceptions” method. “... We let the participants tell us what to research with fit and relevance. ... GT only researches the patterns which emerge as going on,” (Glaser, 2016).

Here, my main aim here is to represent the richness of these landscapes of singers and singing communities and the human experience and commitment which it represents. For this reason I have included many verbatim reports of conversations with relevant artists and students, including, sometimes, hesitations and fumblings for the right words. This is (of course) not to embarrass those who have so generously supported me in this project by talking to me in this way, but to faithfully represent their views, even – or especially, when these are less clear-cut. The ambiguities and uncertainties may be more important than artificially tidied certainties in representing the truth of the matter. Tia DeNora embraces this approach in relation to a sociological analysis of music experiences in groups. She says, in an interview with Nune Nikoghosayan:

> slow sociology (involves) attention to detail and sustained involvement with what happens locally and in real time. ... It’s different from the “quick” methods of finding out about things, (2016).

The subject of this study is not, of course, sociological but an attempt to uncover an eloquent philosophical frame to clarify the fundamental issues in singing and singing teaching. Nevertheless, I would suggest that these methodological observations also apply to this study and the data presented here.

So, for example, some of the eminent teachers in the description of the singing summer school (Chapter 5) felt that their approach was diametrically opposite to that of others teaching on the same course. And yet the students experienced it as a seamless whole. When the material is presented in its original form – through direct transcription of what is said, there is a philosophical unity of approach and personal commitment which over-rides technical differences of emphasis, as described below. To quote DeNora again:

> In other words, does what we think we think we have "found" as social researchers match up with people's actual experience and how can we know? ... It's complexity that we want to tease out in our study of social life," (2016).

So, what I am presenting here is the "actual experience" of singers and singing students, and to explore how they learn and progress from (crucially) their point of view as far as possible, and not from some external point of view, structured to fit in with academic preconceptions. I am seeking to preserve the "complexity" of their experience and to develop a philosophical frame which does justice to their experience.

In order to give as wide a picture as possible, and to reflect the diversity of the human experience involved , I have included descriptions of singers of Jamaican and Kenyan Gujarati origin as well as groups of singers with an "autistic spectrum disorder", to give some feel of how these experiences might be refracted through the experience of those who are not "neuro-typical"! Nevertheless, the material is clearly limited by my professional area of competence which is classical vocal music, especially opera, and the application of the associated skills (for example, bel canto voice production) to other genres of music, such as pop music and music theatre. But these examples act as a useful test of the theoretical frame being suggested here.

In the case of the Jamaican singer, the experience of singing is much more integrated into his life and everyday experience as a child and a young adult in Kingston. For example he sang as a young man while doing physical work on the railway. In the case of the Gujarati singer, the experience of singing resonated very strongly with his childhood, and

devotional life, and also with his childhood relationship with his father. For those in the groups of people with autism, the experience is an ongoing discovery of the possibilities of expression of the self and in community with others.

So, all these groups reflect back to us and highlight different aspects of what it is to be human in the context of giving voice and resonating our bodies in the world and in our communities.

Other Existential Approaches to Singing

For clarity, I propose to define this approach over against two other writers who have written on Sartre's philosophy of existentialism and its relation to singing education, Susan Boddie and Tim Kjeldsen. Both are known to me over a period of several years, Susan Boddie since the Singing Symposium in Newfoundland in 2009, where I was a presenter, and Tim Kjeldsen as an Alexander Technique teacher and a colleague of long standing in singing training in Cardiff, and a presenter at the Thinking and Singing Conferences which I ran in 2012 and 2014. These are interesting in that they appear to deal with the same approach but are, in fact fundamentally different. Defining this difference will help to define the issues I want to underline. I will then outline an approach to existential philosophy which fits the model which I am using.

To start with Susan Boddie: there is a certain amount of common ground: she advocates, in the context of "vocal instruction":

> A holistic approach to education is one that aims to develop the emotional, spiritual, moral and psychological elements of the student, - - - -. In my daily teaching practice, I aid students in discovering their individual sound, breath support, and tension-free singing striving to foster artistic performances by freeing students of the restrictions they often feel when unable to sing consistently. I attempt to instill responsibility and accountability in my students and expect them to take an active role in building technique and ownership of their voices.

And further,

> An existentialist framework [...] considers the notion of fostering responsibility and freedom in vocal instruction, [...]. Each voice student will develop a different essence as a singer, bringing with her a different tone and emotional experience; therefore, drawing

> upon existentialist thought and addressing the student as an individual may offer a way to help the student find her essence as a singer. In understanding the role of the teacher and student in existentialism, it is important to understand how responsibility and freedom inform this relationship, and how this may have particular relevance for vocal instructors in higher education. (Boddie, 2013, p. 34).

To this point, the point being made seems fairly un-controversial, in spite of the debateable use of the term "her essence as a singer." But we soon get into difficulties:

> This individualized, flexible pedagogical approach may help facilitate consistency and emotional engagement in singing, and be a way for both student and teacher to discover what they can become. [...] In considering a humanistic relationship in the voice studio, the student-teacher relationship is one in which the instructor is quite important. A voice instructor viewing a humanistic environment with an existentialist framework may reflect and discover that she wishes to obtain teaching tools to facilitate aspects of vocal instruction in an effective manner.

In this passage, the existential language of teacher and student "discovering what they can become" is mixed with judgements about inconsistent and unengaged singing" which are simply subjective value judgements which, unfortunately, betray the misconception referred to above about an "unspoken consensus" about such matters. Even if such a consensus exists, it cannot form the basis of a genuinely exploratory relationship between teacher and student. It may be that we have to accept a much more radical idea – that we cannot pre-judge what sound a student will make, or pass judgements on it. (this is a relevant consideration in some of the case studies below) Of course, we may respond to different vocal sounds in different ways, and this may (or may not) be something that the student needs to take on board. But the visceral sound which belongs to that individual may not fit into our preconceptions of how sung sound should be. Self-evidently, more unusual voice effects,or "extended vocal techniques" (Kavasch, 1980)[5] on which modern music may depend will not

[5] A vocal sonic vocabulary is developing in Western art music which includes and extends beyond traditional Western art music phonation, the basic voice production associated with opera and recital singing. Contemporary vocal writing includes sounds which previously were seldom or never heard in musical

develop from limited and rigidly applied ideas of what “good singing” is, as an extreme example of this.

Even in the case of standard operatic Italianate technique, I would argue that what the listeners respond to is the authentic self-expression of another human being (who is acting as a mouthpiece for the composer, who can only communicate through the singer).

It will be evident from the case studies below (particularly that of the young Welsh tenor in chapter 4) that I have found that the only possible approach is to accept and honour all sounds made by the student as expressions of who they are and what they are going through at that stage in their life.

It would be easy, of course, to confuse this process with “therapy” and indeed, it may have therapeutic effects. But there is a fundamental difference between eliciting sounds which express the person who is singing and attempts to make them “better” in some sense. There is no escaping, unfortunately, the implied judgement in the latter, although some music therapists may, of course, be very skilled at negotiating this. This is an ongoing problem with music therapy for people with an autistic spectrum disorder (see Ch 3 below) and an unrecognised gap between trying to make people better (the therapeutic approach) and their right to self-expression (what I would describe as the existential approach).

There is another difficulty with Boddie’s thesis, which is her assertion that singing teaching is a purely individual matter:

> [O]ne can conclude that a voice instructor offering individualised vocal instruction specific to each students’ needs may offer a way to promote more consistency in singing. [...] The student-teacher relationship in the voice studio is a humanistic relationship. It is very much centred on the individual, and her experience, discovery, and emotions. (op. cit. p. 71).

In fact, the student exists, and usually sings, in a collective, social context, and the uses of the voice gains much of its significance from this. I will discuss this further in examination of group work with singing students, below (in Chapter 5). In pursuance of this, I will not limit the definition of

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contexts. Some of these sounds or techniques occur in other musical cultures while others have arisen through the research and experimentation undertaken by certain contemporary vocalists.

existentialism here to the existence of the singer as an individual, but also as a social, familial being, and as a citizen of a homeland and of the world. Ever since I was introduced to existentialism as an 18 year-old theology student, I have been unable to understand the logic of treating the expression of existential authenticity as a purely individual matter. We all lead individual lives which are inescapably intertwined with our social existence and our relationship with the world (and its other creatures). It seems to me that many of the criticisms of existentialism (of Sartre, for example) hinge upon this unnecessary individualism. The matter of our bodies, minds and spirit are intertwined, interdependent and even interchangeable with that of the rest of the world and the universe. It is understandable that, historically, attempts have been made to limit such far-reaching connections, to create a much-needed sense of security and so that we don't go mad contemplating them.(the emphasis of some existentialist thinkers on living with a radical homelessness is referred to below) But if we aspire to some kind of truth, we have to try to grasp the ungraspable.

In singing teaching in groups, I have found that being part of a singing collective, of varied ages and musical, social, racial and economic backgrounds, is an absolutely necessary adjunct to individual lessons. This is one of the great richnesses of working in a conservatoire environment, when it is managed to take advantage of this, as well as of running community groups. (from which conservatoire students may emerge, or within which they may find temporary refuge, of course)

To summarise this far, I will define an existentialist approach to singing in a radically personal way, which precludes passing judgement on any sound which the student intentionally makes. I will also consider singing as an essentially collective experience, of these radically individual expressions of the self, in which the individual journey is most usefully also reflected in some kind of group experience. The community groups which I run have usefully provided this experience for several opera singers before they were at a stage where they could fully participate as professional singers in an opera company.

Tim Kjeldsen's chapter (2015a) is much more philosophically nuanced. He writes explicitly as an Alexander Technique (AT) teacher (the existential implications of AT are dealt with here in a separate chapter). And he focuses on Sartre's idea of "internal negation." "An internal negation is one the terms of which are in some way logically or conceptually dependent on one another," (op. cit. p. 39). And he identifies a conflict of this kind in the use of the voice: "... vocal control and vocal freedom are interdependent ... and are, in some sense, contradictory: freedom is escape from control, and control limits freedom," (op. cit. p. 38).

This is clearly a very live issue for the AT community, where the philosophical frame is much more intuitive than explicit, and which, at worst, is an incoherent muddle – not helped by FM Alexander's abjuration of all things philosophical. This would, of course, have been relevant to his own time and philosophical context and probably need not detain us here.

Kjeldsen then migrates, more usefully, to Merleau Ponty's <u>developmental</u> dialectic to the effect that:

> Whatever freedom we are able to exercise can enable us to transcend our present facticity, even if only to a small degree, but if we can reproduce the new experiences so created, we create a new facticity that may become a platform for future change.

And he notes:

> Merleau-Ponty replaces Sartre's opposition of consciousness and being with a relation of reciprocity between them. This is a rejection of the primacy Sartre gave to internal negation, but I think it relativises rather than rejects the phenomenon itself, (op. cit. p. 47).

Clearly, a developmental dialectic is going to be more useful than a static one in the present context. A more detailed examination of Merleau Ponty's ideas will be dealt with below. Kjeldsen then applies this dialectic between control and freedom to the use of the AT in singing, where:

> The freedom in question is the internal negation of the existing control it transcends ... a person develops new levels of general competence in which her control of activity is perpetually open to its own self-transcendence, (op. cit. p. 44)

so that

> A performer acquiring and cultivating her skills in this way is not limited to repeating a mechanically acquired pattern in performance, but can transcend her current level of control in the performance itself, allowing something new and uniquely appropriate to the occasion to occur.

He then goes on to describe the vocal mechanism in some detail, and concludes:

> In singing, more perhaps than in any other activity, the dialectic between control and freedom is perpetually renewing itself, and this in part is what makes it so challenging and deeply rewarding, (op. cit. p. 46).

No doubt the physical specifics of singing are important in some contexts, but an approach of radical artistic freedom cannot be based on this alone. There is also the issue of professional specialisation. A medical examination of these issues would have a scientific critical edge with which we as non-medical professionals cannot engage. The subject of this thesis, on the contrary, is to deal with the whole person as singer, in their social, familial and even global and universal context. I will then give an overview of the approach used to present the original material, defending the very inclusive nature of its presentation, and the interdisciplinary nature of the analysis.

Overall approach

To summarise, I will present case studies of a very varied group of singers, to support the position that an existential ‘frame” is the most effective way of conceptualising their contribution to our vocal landscape.

I will also argue that, since all of us are on a spectrum, for example, of systematising and empathising ways of structuring the world and our place in it (and so have elements of our thinking which are non “neurotypical”), it is enriching, liberating and profoundly inclusive for all of us to structure vocal activities in this way.

Chapter 2

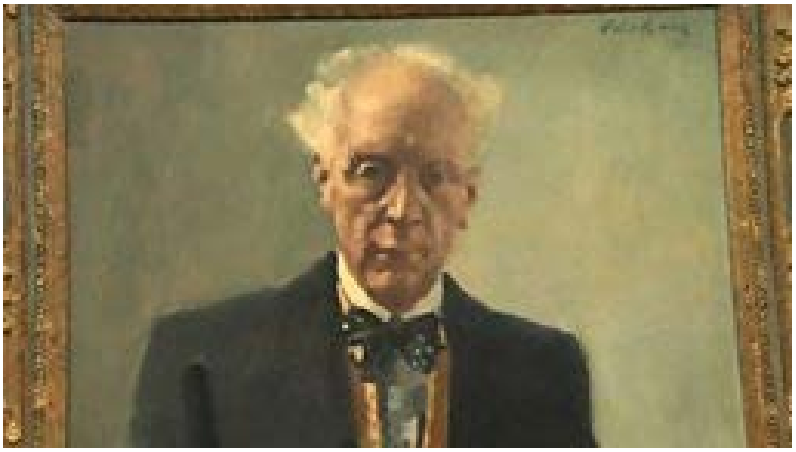
Alexander Technique: the grain of the voice

The embodiment of the voice is a crucial factor in voice and singing training. If we are to do justice to this, we need an approach to voice which is meticulous in working with the physical aspects of the voice in their interaction with the human totality of the singer (as described in Chapter 3 for example) The Alexander Technique (AT), with all its imperfections, is the only serious and comprehensive attempt which has been made to address this and to integrate it into the lived experience of the singer.

Alexander Technique – Definition and Literature

This is a refreshingly eccentric view of the founder of Alexander Technique from the BBC:

> Alexander's parents were sent to Australia ... as convicts as a result of an agricultural uprising. He was the eldest of nine children and was privately tutored.



> He became a Shakespearian actor and suffered with recurring sore throats. He could get rid of these by looking in a mirror with his head held forward and up. He decided to put his particular technique for posture into practice and moved to England.
>
> Alexander died in 1955, (BBC website, Portrait by Colahan).

Here is another, authoritative description of the AT by Richard Brennan:

> The Alexander Technique is not so much something you learn as something you unlearn. It is a method of releasing unwanted muscular tension throughout your body which has accumulated over many years of stressful living . . . . .
>
> The Alexander Technique can help us to become aware of balance, posture and co-ordination while performing everyday actions ... what Frederick Matthias Alexander, the originator of the Technique, discovered when trying to get to the bottom of his own voice-related problem. (2017).

The fundamental idea of the AT is that the way a person balances their head on the top of the spine affects their functioning throughout the body and in other aspects of functioning: the standard instruction is “let your head go forward and up, and your back lengthen and widen”. It is fundamental to the AT that this can only be achieved by means of the elusive technique of ”inhibition” of our usual pattern of use. But, as Brennan hints above, and as is clear in the summer school described in Chapter 4, in promoting physical poise and economy of activity, the AT also appears to release intellectual, and even spiritual resources, which have a profound effect on the act of singing and its meaning.

Rachel Zahn offers a more precise (and nuanced!) description of the process of the AT:

> **A**. Awareness: a conscious attention engaged in an ongoing relationship between self and the environment.
> **B**. Inhibition: the withholding of conscious consent to respond to any stimulus to act or to do a movement. It neutralizes habitual reactions and opens the field of awareness to conscious choice.
> **C**. Direction: a consciously practiced shift of attention to include an external spatial concept of forward and up (while continuing inhibition) which stimulates spontaneous kinesthetic reorganization through primary control (organic righting response to gravitational force).
> **D**. Giving consent: a permission to allow movement to occur while maintaining the integrity between inhibition and direction.
> **A**, **B**, **C**, and **D** create a loop, feeding one into the other, permitting conscious awareness of new choices at any moment. (Zahn, 2005, p. 23)

Zahn’s account places the AT in the context of philosophical thought and historical development of the understanding of embodiment and is referred to in detail later in this chapter.

On a more general level, there is an extraordinarily comprehensive list of literature in a US-based list of references by Harer and Munden (2009, chapter 2), (with some omissions of material and organizations which originate in the UK) and a review of literature (books and articles) and other resources on the use of the AT. Strangely, it includes hostile articles on the use of AT in singing, considering that it is an established resource in voice training in the UK for example.

This is a fairly mainstream review of the relevance of the AT to singing teaching:

> Through the exploration of awareness and change that AT has provided, I find that I communicate pedagogical ideas in a much more direct, simple way. But the most consequential change has been in my response to my students' psychophysical development in the complex art of singing (Hensel, 2013, p3.)

It does not, however, deal in any detail with the philosophical issues addressed in this thesis.

The UK-based AT organisations often publish their own "manifestos": For example, Donald Weed's organisation, ITM, has published his account of the AT, *Reach Your Dreams* (2012) and Brian Door, founder of PAAT described below, has published *Towards Perfect Posture* (a title which in itself demonstrates the gulf between Mr Door and most of the AT community, who would not consider "posture" to be a central concern) (2003). Each of these versions of the Technique is dealt with in detail below.

Books by F.M. Alexander himself, for example *The Use of the Self* (1985 [1932]) are copiously referred to by all these writers (and, in the case of Weed, highlighted excerpts given to his trainee teachers to learn by heart). However, it is very unlikely that we can uncritically apply a text written in 1932 in the circumstances of the present day without careful and drastic recontextualisation, however ground-breaking it was at the time.(see also p 39 below on this issue). These issues are dealt with in more detail in a discussion of Rachel Zahn's work below.

Clearly one of the fundamental issues here is of psycho-physical unity. Tim Kjeldsen gives a particularly thorough exposition of this aspect of

the AT, as a fundament aspect of the technique[6] and quotes from *The Use of the Self*, for example:

> … when I began my investigation, I, in common with most people, conceived of "body" and "mind" as separate parts of the same organism, and consequently believed that human ills, difficulties and shortcomings could be classified as either "mental" or "physical" and dealt with on specifically "mental" or specifically "physical" lines. My practical experiences, however, led me to abandon this point of view and readers of my books will be aware that the technique described in them is based on the opposite conception, namely, that it is impossible to separate "mental" and "physical" processes in any form of human activity,' (FM Alexander, 1985).

Kjeldsen concludes:

> Alexander's principle of psycho-physical unity emerges from a deconstruction of the mind/body dichotomy and reveals the dichotomy to conflate a number of distinctions that, in fact, articulate phases, levels or dimensions of an essentially unified process of action. This is a completely different way of overcoming classical dualism than generally holds sway at present. The mind/body dichotomy leads either to reductionism or to neo-dualism, as described above, and it does so because it maintains the personal/impersonal dichotomy that underlies classical dualism.
>
> There are practical consequences to this rather abstract analysis, most notably that if one's conceptual framework makes it hard to see the relevant phenomena, then one cannot study them scientifically. Although the ostensible scientific study of human behaviour is over a century and a half old, it is arguable that the science of persons qua persons has not yet adequately defined its proper subject matter, and won't do until the last vestiges of the Cartesian dichotomy have been rooted out. Alexander's investigations and the theoretical framework developed from them may be taken as a paradigm of what such a science might look like, (Kjeldsen, 2015b, p. 179, my underlining).

This is a pretty drastic criticism of the thinking underlying much of the material available on the AT from within the AT community, and may also a be problem in the general, public conception of the AT.

[6] See Kjeldsen (2015b) 'Connected Perspectives (HITE) on "Psychophysical Unity"' in Voice Studies: Critical Approaches to Process, Performance and Experience, which is substantially about the AT in relation to vocal training.

Another writer who addresses this issue, though from a psychotherapeutic point of view, is Richard Casebow. In his article entitled 'The Interpersonal and the Act of Living' (2014, pp. 35-47) he takes a critical stance towards FM Alexander's "social project" and suggests:

> Finding unity in the act rather than in the organism is also possible and overarches what is written here. The self is taken to be incarnate in the world, constituted in action, from an irreducible core that is psycho-physical in its ecological and interpersonal relationships.

He concludes:

> Basic to this is Keats' idea of "negative capability." Negative capability involves the capacity to be in "uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. It can be cultivated inter-personally through inhibition where the focus of attention is on another with the intention of understanding them and their world. Alexander Technique teachers are often very good at this when it comes to "reasoning from the known into the unknown," (Alexander, 1985, p. 85). What they lack training for is working inter-personally with the earlier habits which have evolved before sitting and standing become achievements. These habits involve psycho-physical attitudes in relationship with others which evolve face-to face as well as alongside others and are central to our development as people in relationship. And, in this way, we are able to see and receive others, in their understandings of the world including ourselves.

Casebow suggests what I take to be an existentialist solution to this problem:[7]

> Alexander's personal constructions elevate his theory of parts and wholes, centred as it is on maintaining the unity of the organism, to the one absolute value. Finding unity in the act rather than the organism is also possible and overarches what is written here. The self is taken to be incarnate in the world, constituted in action, from an irreducible core that is psycho-physical, in its ecological and inter-personal relationships, (op. cit., para 7).

[7] For a recent elaboration of finding unity in the act, see Berthoz, A. & Petit, J, (2006) *The Physiology and Phenomenology of Action,* Oxford: Oxford University Press (Casebow's reference).

AT teachers tend to refer back to F.M. Alexander's writings to support various interpretations of the technique, as above. Although it may be comforting to appeal to over-arching authority for such drastically disruptive thoughts, it may not, in the end be helpful. The works of F.M. Alexander, like the New Testament, which is often treated in the same way by fundamentalist Christians, were written in a very different intellectual and social climate from our own, and it is unlikely that their contents can simply be transferred wholesale to another age. We need to deal with the urgent issues raised above, which are contemporary to our time. Although, in the passage quoted above, Alexander states that 'it is impossible to separate "mental" and "physical" processes in any form of human activity,' (Alexander, 1985), the problems of dualism originate from the social and intellectual milieu in which he was writing. However, that is not our problem. If we are to realize the potential of the AT, we must take our courage in both hands and think afresh about these problems as they affect us now. Only a courageous, existential approach will help to illuminate these matters.

It seems that the problem of dualism is deep-seated and a very widespread misconception of the technique. I want to suggest here that a conceptual re-orientation is needed to address this and that an existential approach could provide at least part of this re-positioning, as Casebow implies above. Only by working with a radically unified idea of the person, in their context in the world, in their personal relationships, and in relation with their own body can we begin to understand our place in the world and in the universe. But we should also take on board the 'capacity to be in "uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason"' (quoted by Casebow above).

The existential reality is one of homelessness and uncertainty and we must learn to embrace this if we are to live meaningful lives. Specifically, the Alexander technique can potentially help us to sing in the existential reality of the present moment, which is the only "authentic" way to make music.

So, to summarise to this point, the role of the AT in the context of singing teaching is to encourage the physical groundedness and

authenticity of the performer as a psychophysical whole. That is to say, the role of the teacher is to affirm the whole person and to discover the voice which represents that person. This is an essential pre-condition for the skill and subtlety of physical use required of singers in the opera house, and sometimes, elsewhere. The Jamaican jazz singer who is the subject of Chapter 5 has very "good use" (to borrow an AT phrase) when singing, for example, and, presumably as a result of this, can sing for four or five hours at a time without any signs of vocal tiredness. This effective physicalisation of his voice is very much part of who he is.

The AT is an established part of conservatoire musical education in the UK, and less established but extensively used in the US, the rest of Europe and Japan, for example. It is, however, extraordinarily difficult to find an adequate definition. This seems to reflect partly the outsider status of "alternative therapies" in the UK, creating a mindset which tends to coalesce and generalise any techniques for health and well being which do not come under the auspices of conventional medicine. This can be accompanied by a conflation of ideas which may, at a deeper level, be incompatible – between a passive narrative of subjects who need to be "cured" and a system of taking profound responsibility for the self. I would argue (along with many other members of the AT community) that the AT belongs to the latter group. Moreover, it has suffered from being bracketed in the popular imagination with somewhat eccentric ideas of a quasi-religious, probably superstitious nature.

This puts it in the position of being dismissed by philosophers such as Slavoj Žižek, who is very dismissive of "New Age Monstrosities, which do not deserve the honour of being called philosophy," (Badiou & Žižek, 2009, p. 56).

There is also an issue in relation to the field of ethics. Below is a quotation from the CNHC (Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council) guidance for practitioners on ethics and performance. Its vagueness is, perhaps, an indication of the confusion which exists in this area. CNHC has, of course, to cover many very diverse practices and points of view of the practitioners it deals with, and it probably does succeed in providing some protection from the more obvious forms of abuse (unwanted sexual

approaches and financial dishonesty, for example). But it may be ineffectual in}protecting clients from power-hungry and skilled exploiters, who can charge them large amounts of money for workshops, classes, and all the associated paraphernalia of books, CDs and equipment which they didn't know they needed until they came under the influence of a charismatic speaker or teacher with a gift for persuasion.

The following guidance gives scant protection against such skilled manipulation:

> The basis for the Standard of Performance is the principle that every registrant must at all times follow the current, sound practice of a reasonable practitioner. There is no legal definition of 'a reasonable practitioner'. However, the concept is used when a complaint is being considered by the CNHC Investigating Committee or a CNHC Professional Conduct or Health Panel. If you achieve the requirements set out in this section of the Code you will deliver a standard of care that will promote client health and wellbeing and protect clients from harm, (CNHC, 2014, p. 31).

The implications of the Alexander Technique for an Existential Frame for Singing Teaching – A Personal Overview.

I first came across the AT while training as a singer at Birmingham Conservatoire. Ray Evans, a quietly spoken STAT teacher (see below), of formidable reputation, made a huge difference to me and to many other students, in, significantly, a great variety of ways.. One student among those who worked with him went on to work with John Elliott Gardiner, one became a world famous singing teacher, and I got work as a singer at the Bayreuth Festival.

I then worked, much later, with an ITM (see below) teacher, who was very good at connecting with those he taught, especially those with a condition such as an ASD (autistic Spectrum Disorder). I briefly attended a course run by PAAT (see below), but the organisation which I found most open and effective was ATI, the Boston, Mass-based organisation run by

Tommy Thompson, a student of Frank Pierce Jones. I have included below a brief comparison of these organisations. Strangely enough, I have not seen such a comparison attempted elsewhere. I will describe my immediate experience of each organisation in connection with singing teaching.

Towards an existential understanding of the Alexander Technique

The heart of the relationship of the AT to singing and voice is embodiment. Realising the subtle possibilities of the voice in the body is an issue which, in many respects, goes far beyond the conventional music educational categories. But, in the case of singing or voice, it is the *sine qua non*. This means that the resources usually associated with music education may well not be sufficient for singers.

The engagement with the AT of various conservatoires in the UK is detailed below: it is a very mixed scenario, and its effectiveness is of crucial importance, as described above.

One framing of the heart of this enterprise is represented in a statement by David Mills: "... the *act* of comprehending is an embodied act, and as such is as subject to the conditions of the coordination of the whole person as is any other act," (1996, p. 18; my underlining). So, co-ordination in the embodied act of singing (and also of comprehending – of having a conceptual grasp of singing and music) is of crucial importance, and the contribution of the AT to this process is indispensable. And again:

> psycho-physical unity does not refer merely to a unity, but to an intricate, coordinated unity. ... It is the interrelatedness of the levels of organization expressed by that functioning within some context of action–and thus is also always to do with meaning, (op. cit. p. 68).

Unpicking some of the implications of this "intricate, co-ordinated unity" in relation to the contribution of the AT is eloquently described by Rachel Zahn, below.

It is the suggestion here that singing is one form of functioning, one "context of action" where this "intricate, co-ordinated unity" is fundamental and indispensable. We could argue that the use of the voice is one of the

most deep-seated and profound expressions of this unity. In this context, any pedagogy of the voice which treats the body and mind as consisting of separate parts (larynx, resonance, breathing etc on the one hand and "thinking" on the other) is likely to miss the point.

This means that any singing teaching must start, implicitly or explicitly, with the poise of the body and a consideration of how this unity can be expressed in sound. This is a more obvious starting point than the assumption that there is some sort of "singing orthodoxy" to which we should all subscribe. Ways of giving voice are as varied as the people who are the source of the voice (see, for example chapter 3 on autism groups). When an individual or a group arrives in a room to sing, they must "let go" of the previous physical stresses and strains of the day and some of the assumptions underlying them and make themselves available for the music. Otherwise they are simply going to have to try harder to overcome the fundamental tensions, adding one layer of (unnecessary) tension to another. This approach is based on the assumption that the body will organize itself to sing, if it is allowed to do so. It is a question of allowing the body (and the whole person) to be present, and effective, in the moment in which the singer gives voice.

It is, perhaps, clear from the above that we need to be aware of layers of meaning around this issue; there may not be one definitive statement or philosophical position which fits all the information available.

The decision of embodiment which is crucial for the psycho-physical effectiveness of the performer is the moment of "inhibition" – when they decide not to react to the immediate stimulus to action, but to disassociate from this and to, in effect, take a step back – as in the process in Buddhist meditation of not reacting to immediate stimuli like anger or anxiety. The student of AT, at its best, is taught to observe their own reaction, but not to go with it – to allow the body and mind to react at a deeper, more considered level. This is the elusive heart of the AT.

Rachel Zahn, in reference to "inhibition" quoted below (2005, p. 7) makes a valiant attempt to make conceptual space for this approach, and Tim Kjeldsen, refers to "internal negation" – "viewing control and freedom in activity as internal negations of one another," – leading to a "clash of

intuitions," (Kjeldsen, 2015a, p. 46) – i.e. "cultivating the capacity to let go of existing forms of control and open oneself to the possibilities that subsequently emerge," (op. cit.).

Both of these approaches echo Buddhist techniques of detachment, and Rachel Zahn makes specific reference to this.

One philosophical account, which embraces some of the uncertainties and ambiguities in this field, but which still has a clear and radiant celebration of the possibilities of human vocal expression, is that of Roland Barthes (1972 p185), in *The Grain of the Voice.*

Barthes was writing more than forty years ago, and some of his preoccupations, with the position of French melodies vis-à-vis German Lieder, are no longer such an urgent issue for the rest of us. But his exposure

> of a consumer mentality that leads us to haplessly confuse our gastronomic, religious, and intellectual experiences of other cultures, and the reminder that (Roth, 2012,)

are still very much of our time.

Barthes's work is the most eloquent I have come across for conceptualizing the effects of the AT. He describes it in this way:

> the grain of the voice is not- or is not merely – its timbre; the significance it opens cannot be better defined than by the very friction between the voice and - - the particular language (and nowise the message). (Barthes, op. cit., p. 185)

This statement centres on a concern with the place of language in our thinking. But it is also crucial to an understanding of singing, insofar as the singer embodies language, along with a particular melodic and rhythmic physicalization of the words in that moment in time. When the singer becomes more him/herself through using the AT or another similar discipline, this "friction between the voice and the particular language" is liberated and becomes very clear, especially in opera, (see chapter 4 on The voice in Opera): the sound of the voice and its significance is not at all bounded by the meaning of the words, which is why preoccupations with issues of translation often so much miss the point. What is necessary in opera is to receive the sound of the voice, not necessarily to understand the

precise meaning; this is a separate issue, addressed by the singer as part of their discipline, and absorbed by the hearers over time, but not an issue to be prioritized over the reception of the grain of the voice.

> The “grain” is the body in the voice as it sings - if I perceive the “grain” in a piece of music and accord this “grain” a theoretical value (the emergence of text in a work) I inevitably set up a new scheme of evaluation which will certainly be individual – I am determined to listen to my relation with the body of the man or woman singing or playing and that relation is erotic – but in no way “subjective,” (Barthes 1997 p188).

This is explained by Glen Cruz:

> In short, the ‘grain’ is the body in the voice, but the human body, as we shall see shortly, can never be apprehended in an elemental or primordial state. It is always mediated by discourse and, increasingly, by various technologies, (D’Cruz, n.d.).

This contextualises the need for conservatoires to help singing students adjust to different technological landscapes. The orchestral setting (which is the usual “technological landscape” for traditional opera, of course) is one such, but, as is shown in the interview with Michael Rafferty below, it is increasingly necessary for singers to engage with other soundscapes, and an ever more sophisticated sound engineering discipline. Cruz continues:

> However, for Barthes, the ‘grain’ primarily refers to the phenomenological perception of the materiality of language and speech in the singing voice with no reference to how the body’s materiality might be mediated by discourse. In other words, his essay assumes, what Judith Butler calls, an ‘unconstructed body,’ (op. cit.).

Clearly, the discourse which mediates the materiality of the singing voice is, at its best, closely linked to the functional model of the AT - the specificity of the physicality of the voice which is released by the AT is at the heart of making available the “grain’ of the voice.

The value attached to what is heard “will be made outside of any law, outplaying not only the law of culture but equally that of anticulture ... I shall extend my choice across all the genres of vocal music, including popular music” (Barthes, op. cit., p. 188). Because the function of the AT for singers is precisely to set free ‘the body in the voice as it sings.’ It is the “grain of the voice” which is liberated by the AT. The elusive and slippery

language which Barthes uses to describe this use of the voice and its effects, is symptomatic of the difficulty of expressing this clearly. Yet it is the only explanation I have found which adequately describes the effects of the AT when it is effectively used in singing training (in the Singers Summer school described in Chapter 5, for example). The exposition of the relationship of the AT to cognitive science developed by Rachel Zahn, below is valuable and courageous, but only underlines the impossibility – the very inconvenient impossibility, for those of us who need or even demand certainty in these things – of neatly folding the AT into a set of scientific and philosophical ideas.

Barthes' account of the effects of the human voice above points up the impossibility of describing sung sound/text in words. He seems to be arguing for a sort of visceral – but inexpressible - thrill in the listener, but is not this what we all need from a singer? Discussions of the technical merits of sung performances are at best relative, and, often, of no interest to anyone but the speaker/writer. Barthes ends this exposition with a coup de grâce in favour of twentieth century modernity in music:

> Were we to succeed in refining a certain 'aesthetics' of musical pleasure, then doubtless we would attach less importance to the formidable break in tonality accomplished by modernity, (op. cit. p. 189).

This simple receiving of the sound of the body as it is, side-stepping technical and aesthetic judgements, is crucial to the integrity of both performer and listener, and needs to be safe-guarded with a conceptual and philosophical clarity, if only to avoid some of the cruder "well being" arguments which give a misleading and partial view of what is actually going on. Ben Macpherson describes this as "the musicality of the voice, in the voice. – it is about timbre and texture ,,, there is a tactility – a visceral quality to voice.
Multi-sensory, embodied and intensely present ..." (2015, p. 204).

The AT is a detailed and meticulous method of being "intensely present"– of what is actually there in that moment - which is why rules and control imposed from outside are irrelevant. Only through an indirect and

less prescriptive description such as that of Barthes can we even approach the “truth.” For this reason the connection with mindfulness made by David Mills above is very relevant, as is the approach of Rachel Zahn - more science-based but also inclusive of Buddhist practice. The AT is a detailed physicalization of mindfulness, with all the historical and cultural nuances which that implies. And if I am practicing meditation or any form of mindfulness, I will only be effective in this in so far as I am present in the detail of my physical presence: in breathing, but also in the other detail of how I am, physically, in that moment. The AT, at its best, is an ideal tool for this meticulously focussed attention and the associated openness to all the possibilities of the human.

I detail below a bewildering variety of approaches to the AT, and evidence its manifestation in conservatoires, the most obvious arena of its application to singing training. However, I will begin with a personal account of what I understand the AT to be.

Introduction of AT to a Singing Group

We begin with giving people the space and opportunity to “let go” of all the tensions which belong to the rest of their lives , (using the process of inhibition described by Rachel Zahn.) We all have insecurities and fears which prevent us from being as physically, intellectually and – crucially in this context - as vocally available as we would like to be. I talk through a procedure of softening the feet and knees and back and allowing the body to find its own balance. We discuss the fact that every part of the body is interrelated and that letting go of the knees may have an important role to play in freeing the voice. We stress that this is not a question of “standing up straight” (which simply substitutes one kind of physical stress for another), but of trusting the body, and particularly the head- neck relationship at the top of the spine, to find its own built-in poise. I make it clear that I am not, and have no wish to be, an accredited AT teacher, but that the insights I have gained into the AT are built on decades of experience and world-wide interaction with AT organizations.

We talk about any recent experiences which the students in the group have had of the AT, and any “blocks” or difficulties which they are

having with it. For example, someone with a diagnosis of ASD may say that they feel no different when they let go and re-orientate their head/neck relationship. In this case, the group context is crucial, because the rest of the group can observe them from outside and tell them the difference that they see. The group context is important in other ways as well, not least in making clear that the transformations are not controlled by one person, the teacher, but can be clearly seen and owned by the whole group. This is a useful antidote to the dysfunctional power relationship which can exist in some AT contexts.

We talk about the relevance of this physical relationship to ourselves in the context of making sound. We talk about the resonances in the body and the physical stability needed to make a consistent sound and then we go straight to trying this out, sometimes making quite primitive sounds like roaring and screaming (not forced!) and sometimes going straight to more conventional musical patterns of scales and arpeggios.

There is an explicit sub-narrative here, which is to make sure that it is understood that everyone has the right to be heard, and that everyone's voice needs to be allowed to resonate and be released. This is very clearly understood by the whole group, and this is the basis of the extraordinary level of common understanding and purpose at the Kaltern Summer school in 2016 (Chapter 5 below), for example.

Sometimes we have a visit from an accredited AT teacher. Some teachers will use "hands –on" teaching techniques, where the hands of the teacher monitoring the pupil's head-neck relationship gives direct sensory feedback which can be very effective in the case of a teacher who is sensitive to this, very delicate and direct relationship. This provides a focus for discussion of related aspects of singing technique and understanding of each other when there is no AT teacher present. But the stress is on the responsibility of each person to realize their own vocal possibilities, in whatever circumstances they find themselves.

The Self-descriptions of the AT Professional Organizations in the U.K.

STAT

> The Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique was founded in the UK in 1958 by teachers trained by FM Alexander. [Important to the self-identity of STAT, as explained below. SJC] We aim to provide the highest standards of teacher training and professional practice.
>
> Our teaching members are registered (MSTAT) to teach the Technique after completing an approved three-year training course, or having reached a standard approved by STAT
>
> - are required to adhere to the Society's published Code of Professional Conduct and Competence
> - are CRB checked
> - are covered by professional indemnity insurance
>
> We also aim to promote public awareness and understanding of the Alexander Technique, and to encourage research. (Alexander Technique, 2016).

By using this approach, STAT has attempted, with considerable success, to position itself as the main, and most authentic, AT authorizing organization with the result that many organizations (such as performing arts institutions) advertising for AT teachers specify a STAT qualification as a requirement, possibly without realizing what other options there are from other organisations. It is noticeable, in the self-description reproduced above from the STAT website, how many features (such as the code of conduct, the CRB checks, and the reference to research) are clearly meant to reassure managers of other organizations, who may think of the AT as just one more "alternative therapy", and need to be able to justify the AT in quasi-medical terms. STAT also give the impression that they are the main sponsors of research into the AT although the more ground-breaking research that I have come across in the AT, is much more likely to be promoted by more porous organizations such as ATI. Most of the research quoted in this chapter has come through sources connected with ATI.

This intention to reassure is further reinforced by the advertising of its membership of CNHC: 'set up with government support to protect the public,' (PSA).

The ability of CNHC to promote professional standards, and to listen to ethical concerns has recently been enhanced by a radical re-organisation.

So the whole tendency here is to offer security and reassurance, rather than to challenge! The fundamental problem here, I would suggest, is a philosophical one. The STAT material quoted above and by other organisations below treats the student of AT as a subject who has to be protected and made better. In fact, as I hope will become clear from this chapter, the outcome of the AT, at its best, is a meticulously detailed physical freedom of the self. This is clear, for example, in relation to *Neurodynamics* by Theodore Dimon, in which he:

> develops and expands on Alexander's teachings and gives practical explanations that form the basis not just for a method but for a truly educational theory of how the mind and body work in action, (2015).

The research quoted by STAT, however, is consistent with the approach described above of appealing to the historical authority of FM Alexander and claiming to be more orthodox in this respect. In this case, the security and reassurance offered is that of the scientific method. For example: “The Alexander Technique and Musicians: A Systematic Review of Controlled Trials [which] concludes that:

> Effects on music performance, respiratory function and posture yet remain inconclusive. Future trials with well-established study designs are warranted to further and more reliably explore the potential of AT in the interest of musicians, (Klein et al, 2014).

One of the striking features of this last example, of course, is its exclusive concentration on the physical effects of the AT, which, as described above, is a very limited viewpoint. At AT world-wide conferences which I have attended, the generally accepted view is that the simply physical aspects of the AT are only part, albeit a crucial part, of a much more complex picture. There is an atmosphere of frustration at a general lack of public awareness that the potential implications of the AT are much more far-reaching (see Summer School chapter).

A much more subtle view, and one which gives a more objective view of the strengths and weaknesses of FM Alexander, is gained from David Mills, on the ATI (Alexander Technique International) website. He says of FM Alexander:

> His years of patient self-observation opened up what he saw as a "new field of enquiry" about the "psycho-physical" functioning of the human individual as a whole.

> It is often assumed that because the pupil begins in a state of unreliable sensory appreciation there is practically no hope of escape from their habitual mode without that external expert guidance, and Alexander himself wrote of the need for the teacher to take responsibility for the pupil's movement in order to free the pupil from the inevitable effects of their attempts to "get it right." This is in spite of the fact that it was precisely such an escape that Alexander himself made.

Mills later gets to the heart of the problem as follows when he advocates an attitude:

> not so interested in what it is–to which I would add an implied, and how do we do it well–but rather in what it might become. ... Alexander's followers seem collectively to have taken the other view, which may account for the fact that aside from historical articles and the physiological research noted earlier there is almost no literature whatever concerning the underlying nature of the work, why it works as it does, etc. (Mills, op. cit., p. 35).

It is this gap which I am attempting to address in this thesis. This model of the AT is also very relevant to the approach of Robert Lada, described in the Chapter 5 on the Summer School (below).

The Integrated Teaching Method (ITM)

"A revolutionary approach to the Alexander Technique"

The ITM was founded by American Donald Weed who, true to the pattern described above, appeals to Marjory Barstow as his source and claim to be close to the thinking of FM Alexander.

His fundamental premise appears to be:

> If the major cause of students' difficulties is how they are thinking" I wondered, "what part of our teaching should be directed toward retraining their thinking?"

And he promotes his intention to set up:

> a system that appealed to a student's reasoning and latent powers of originality rather then requiring them to learn set patterns based on arguable premises. (Alexander Technique, 2016b).

The obvious next step from this insight would appear to be some sort of philosophical clarity. But the whole tone of what he says and writes is in anti-intellectual American informal language, with no reference to academic thinkers. On the other hand, his treatment of his students is extraordinarily controlling of the minutiae of their language. All of his teachers (my organization has worked with roughly 5 ITM teachers on summer schools and other training sessions) use exactly the same words (complete with slang, even if they are not American!) to introduce their sessions and to initiate and continue sessions with each student. This is quite disconcerting when many of the teachers using this approach are sophisticated practitioners in other related fields, who presumably have their own way of expressing things!

The ITM teacher training process is much more accessible than that of STAT, for example, since it takes place at weekends, and, controversially, consists of many fewer hours than STAT training. A large part of the training is learning by heart text (partly from FM Alexander) blocked in yellow and then passing an examination on this text. (I have seen some of these documents).

The strength of the ITM is in its format of training in groups. Students watch each other's lessons, and experience the feedback from other members of the group during their own experience of direct feedback from the teacher. This makes a much more many-sided experience than simply talking to one person – the teacher, and is also educational for the rest of the group – and more financially sustainable for all concerned (a factor which was, perhaps, of less concern to the upper class Londoners who were FM Alexander's original constituency, and the soil on which STAT was founded)

Certainly, the psycho-physical element is crucial in this approach, as is pointed out in Theodore Dimon's publication above. But to insist on compressing all of this subtlety into simplistic, limited language, as Weed does, seems to work against its acceptance by any critical thinker.

Professional Association of Alexander Teachers (PAAT)

This is the self-definition of the PAAT:

> The Alexander Technique is a practical method by which an individual can bring about personal change. Our aim is to teach the Technique as set out by F.M. Alexander in his four books while providing our teaching within a modern context. ... Members of PAAT have trained [to] ... a very high standard of competence. Research and scholarship is very important to us. The Alexander Technique must continue to develop while staying true to the principles which are central to the Technique to ensure their value is not eroded, (PAAT, 2017).

The description below was my experience of the PAAT in April 2012, from a journal kept at the time, at a public class at the Midlands Arts Centre (MAC) in Birmingham (full text in Appendix 1):

> I had asked the PAAT office about the teacher of the class and about the statement on the PAAT website that they encourage research. The person in the enquiry office could not answer this question.
>
> When I arrived for the class, it was being run by two women (not the named teacher for the class) whom I knew nothing about, and who gave only their first names. They were both pretty nervous and tense. They seemed to have some sort of prescribed procedure. Now and again they would read from a sheet some sort of explanation about the Alexander Technique. When asked for this as a hand-out, they refused in a very definite manner, explaining that we would listen better if we didn't have the material written down! There was no indication given of the authorship of this material.
>
> The tone of the whole class was very detailed instruction from them about how to sit and even place one's feet and where to look. Standing up was a matter of putting one's head in the required place, determined by them beforehand. When it was my turn to try this manoeuvre, I was disturbed to find that one of the teachers was gripping my head so tightly that I could not keep my neck free, which is what I have learnt to do in the other (very extensive and varied) work I have done with the Alexander Technique. This I found extremely disturbing. When I looked around at other members of the group, many of them were performing the tasks set them by pulling their head down and back, which is identified by FM Alexander as one of the root causes of unhelpful use. Members of the group took quite an infantile role, asking how they should move different bits of their bodies and "confessing" that they were "rubbish" at different tasks.
>
> At a group for men with an ASD, one of the service users remarked without prompting that he had been to a "taster" session at the MAC (with PAAT teachers) and had felt that he was being criticised, which was not his previous experience of

the Alexander Technique in work we had done in the group with teachers from other AT disciplines.

On Mon 7th May, the PAAT teachers tried to exclude me from this (public) class, on the grounds that I was “too advanced for the class” The Midlands Arts Centre management agreed that I had a right to attend.

Mon 18th June (I had to take some weeks off because of an Alexander Technique International course in Boston, and because of my father’s illness and death, see below).
I was very late because I had been away. I was pretty shocked that only two members of the course were there. - - - - -- one of the most sad things (was) – the absence of any sense of authentic personal presence either in the case of the two instructors/teachers, or what they elicited from their students.

Mon 25th June
I asked again about the authorship of the texts which they read out. It is against all my instincts academically to be expected to listen to text not attributed to any author, and for which no one takes any responsibility. “Michelle” said it was PAAT text and copyright to PAAT!

Mon 9th July
There was a moment of truth when I asked, in relation to the sitting down “aren’t we supposed to be inhibiting” (i.e. Should we not stop and think before going into a habitual pattern of response, and is this not fundamental to the Alexander Technique as understood by the overwhelming majority of its practitioners?) “Jane” kindly explained that inhibition was stopping the bad use and letting the good use operate, but suggested that in this case it was better not to bother.

There is very little input from the students. When I spoke to the other students after the class and told them about my father’s funeral, I felt as though I was meeting them for the first time.

The inadequacy of the emphasis on “posture training” in “Towards Perfect Posture” by Brian Door, the founder of PAAT, has been noted informally by various AT teachers, and they rightly find this approach to be inadequate. From the experience described above, however, the problems with the PAAT approach go much deeper than this.

Alexander Technique International (ATI)

The ATI, based in Boston Mass, but also active in the UK, and headed by Tommy Thompson, whose inspiration was Frank Pierce Jones, is a very different – and fearless – organization. In contrast to the excluding and fearful attitude of organizations like ITM and STAT (see above) they are inclusive and extraordinarily open in their policy and attitude. They have also been connected with some high-level attempts at research collaboration with scientists from other disciplines, such as this ground-breaking contribution from Rachel Zahn, dealing with the

> problem of integrating language (the main intellectual tool we use for organizing our thinking experience) and our ongoing practice of the Alexander Technique.
>
> I will show the relationship between the Alexander Technique and modern theories of consciousness. I hope that you will find, as I do, that (there is here) ... something very similar to the climate in which philosophers and scientists attempted to validate Alexander' s work during the first half of the twentieth century, (2005).

In addition, the ATI website references research which reflects this multi-facetted approach. This includes the work by David Mills referred to above.

As a practitioner from another discipline, I have been included and encouraged by them at their annual conferences all over the world, and their practitioners have proved uncannily effective in dealing with the very varied (intellectually, racially and culturally) singing students in Opera Mint, on summer schools and in workshops. The key to this seems to be an ability to embrace every aspect of the physical – even in the case of the embodiment of childhood abuse trauma, for example, (which I have seen Tommy Thompson address at the AT world conference in Lugano in August 2011) This initially gave me cause for concern, because of the safe-guarding issues, but it had clear and obvious benefits in this and the case of other histories of trauma. The ATI approach was also of huge benefit to the students at the Opera Mint Summer School described below.

Rachel Zahn says of the difficulties of the AT in asserting professional standards:

> If we look closely at the requirements for membership into the professional arena, we will find the language of either dualistic

> reductionism (lowest common denominators) or the sanctions of an already discredited behaviourist model (which rejects consciousness), (op. cit. p. 25).

And further:

> in order to be validated as a member of an existing profession, you must misrepresent what you do ... and if you honestly present your professional skills, you will surely be rejected for claiming to be that which has no valid existence, (op. cit. p. 25).

The AT in Conservatoire Training

Birmingham Conservatoire employs a PAAT teacher, Roy Thompson, as well as another STAT trained teacher.

The Royal Northern College of Music has a partnership with:

> The Manchester Alexander Technique Training School (MATTS) which offers a thorough three-year teacher training course following the principles outlined in Alexander's books and leading to Certification by the Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique (STAT) and also by CNHC.

The Royal Academy of Music has a very nuanced statement of the benefits of the AT for musicians:

> We have been teaching the Alexander Technique at the Royal Academy of Music since 1984. Every student at the Academy has the opportunity to have individual lessons in the Alexander Technique for one year.
>
> Although FM Alexander was not a musician, it is musicians possibly more than any other profession who have recognised the benefits of his Technique.
>
> Many performers believe the Alexander Technique to be an indispensable foundation for such a demanding and competitive profession. The Technique helps us to allow the release of unnecessary tensions, the changing of habits acquired through years of physical misuse, and the prevention of interference with delicate mechanisms of balance, (Royal Academy of Music, 2016).

And, significantly, an eloquent tribute (and financial support) from Sir Colin Davis and his family:

> Alexander Technique at the Academy is partly financed by a fund established by Lady Colin Davis ... and the late Sir Colin Davis, and therefore we offer individual lessons to our students free of charge.

And this is Sir Colin Davis' own statement of his experience of the AT:

> Early in my professional career the celebrated conductor Sir Adrian Boult, who had himself had Alexander lessons, sent me for lessons in the Technique. 'My boy,' he said, 'you'll end up crippled if you go on like that.' I have been a pupil of the Technique now for over forty years, the benefits to me have been immeasurable ...

Rachel Zahn - A Philosophical and Scientific Contextualization of the Alexander Technique

The history of Buddhist mindfulness is also embraced by Rachel Zahn in her extraordinary and ground-breaking Oxford participatory lecture (2004) (Zahn, 2005), in which she suggests a way of finding a way to integrate intellectual concepts into an easily liveable experience, which is an adaptation of :

> Husserl's concept of 'epochè' (stopping the flow of habitual thoughts and belief structures long enough to perceive the phenomena of the present moment.) to provide a three-step formula for becoming consciously aware: <u>suspension, redirection, and letting go</u>, (my underlining SJC).

The connection here is that *suspension, redirection and letting go* are the fundamental procedures of the AT and also of Buddhist meditation practice. Husserl is, of course, one of the founder thinkers of 20th Century existentialism.

Rachel Zahn gives a history of philosophical and scientific thought . Significantly she embraces the effect of western thought of the trauma and upheaval of two world wars and positions FM Alexander in this landscape:

> After each of the two wars, the entire Western world gave only lip-service to reviewing what <u>was wrong that caused these wars to happen. Alexander was determined to address the question, and his apparent negativity in doing so must be understood by the modern reader in terms of the after-shock of war</u>. He was, as always, focused on use and prevention and how they affect functioning and dysfunction, (op. cit. p. 10).

That is to say, he was focussed on the realities and issues of the lived experience of those who had recently been through this trauma.

Rachel Zahn explicitly says:

> It is essential to place F. M. Alexander in the context of his lived experience, including two World Wars, from 1869 to 1955. The language with which he expressed his discoveries and philosophy is the vocabulary of a period that begins with Western civilization's sense of supremacy and paternal responsibility for the supposedly lesser developed of the human species ... (op. cit. p. 17).

This preoccupation is, of course, particularly relevant now, in 2017, when we face many social and political conditions very similar to those which gave rise to the devastating destruction and breakdown of accepted morality of the early 20th Century. But it is also a crucial –and usually neglected - background to the thought of the period – including many philosophers such as Heidegger and Jean Paul Sartre.

So, Zahn offers a further historical perspective that:

> Many new disciplines were created and the questions about 'how we think we think' were possible to consider. Certainty and mysteries of conscious experience could be challenged. Innovation was possible.
>
> It was into this atmosphere that the Alexander Technique was developed through empirical, first-person trial-and-error experimentation, (op. cit. p. 17),

And further:

> Darwin's theory of evolution, which was either ridiculed or celebrated, required all intelligent men and women to reconsider the reassuring notion of human supremacy, and in particular their relationship with the body, (op. cit. p. 17).

And this culminates in:

> In 1944 a conference sponsored by the J. P. Macy Foundation made it possible to formulate a new interdisciplinary science, which we now recognize as cognitive science.
>
> ... it had become clear to all that there was a substantial common basis of ideas between the workers in the different fields, that people in each group could already use notions which had been better developed by the others, and that some attempt should be made to achieve a common vocabulary, (op. cit. p. 18).

But she identifies the "hard problems" which remain:

> The hard problems are those challenging questions which still face the leading edge of each major discipline in cognitive

> science: Why does consciousness exist? What does it do? How could it develop from neuronal activities in the brain? What is the self? What is the mind? What is consciously lived experience, (op. cit. p. 20).

Zahn embraces the problem of defining and working with consciousness – "Consciousness has so many meanings, in so many different contexts. The word 'conscious' has multiple meanings," (op. cit. p. 10). And she embraces the confusion over what is meant by "subconscious" in relation to the thought of FM Alexander:

> Alexander himself defines 'subconscious' to mean instinct and/or habitual behaviour. Since the 1940s, the old usage of 'subconscious' is no longer acceptable, (op. cit. p. 10).

Although she brushes against the whole psychotherapeutic movement in this way, with all its ambiguities and agenda of control, she does adhere, for the most part, to the strictly phenomenological aspects of AT[8] – based on physical and precise observation.

Along with this goes a repeated attack on the behaviourist movement – which is reasonable if it approached as an over-arching philosophy or a complete system, which would indeed be difficult to defend. However, as a limited intervention for a particular purpose, it may have some usefulness, and even be a useful existential tool in certain very limited circumstances!

> Behaviourism forced psychophysical research into a regressive stance which rejected any professional interest in the field of consciousness studies, and with it all innovative experiential research models such as the Alexander Technique. When you try to specify and define the technique, you may often find that your words seem empty or that your listener has taken on a 'prove-it-to-me' attitude with a disdain for esoteric fluff. It is essential that we take into consideration this cultural prejudice rather than thinking the Technique cannot be rationally explained, (op. cit. p. 11).

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[8] Phenomenology is the **study of experience** and **how we experience**. It **studies structures of conscious experience** as experienced from a **subjective** or **first-person** point of view, along with its "**intentionality**" (the way an experience is **directed** toward a certain object in the world). It then leads to analyses of conditions of the **possibility of intentionality**, conditions involving **motor skills** and **habits**, background **social practices** and, often, **language**.
Experience, in a phenomenological sense, includes not only the relatively **passive** experiences of **sensory perception**, but also **imagination, thought, emotion, desire, volition** and **action**.

Perhaps this issue is not so simple as Zahn implies. The antidote to "esoteric fluff" might be existential specificity in every aspect of human consciousness, thus leaving to one side the question of what consciousness is or is not and dealing with what is evident in the moment. On the issue of explaining the AT to the outside world, this is not helped by the atmosphere of being part of an enlightened cult promoted by some of its practitioners. Moreover, the AT has always had a great problem in explaining itself to non-initiates, and some of its participants, as described above, are not at all rigorous in their formulation and presentation of what they offer. This creates a confusion which can only impede the clarity which she seeks.

To contextualise Zahn's very emphatic opposition to behaviourist psychology, my own experience of behaviourism, in the context of social science education at the LSE and dealing with offenders in the 1970s, was that it was a less intrusive way of dealing with offenders than the "Daddy knows best" approach of many of the local advocates of psychoanalysis/psychotherapy in Birmingham at the time. If someone had disobeyed the law, that should be addressed, but that did not give me or other employees of the courts the right to deal with their inner personal, thoughts and feelings! That is to say, I would defend behaviourism as a limited and very specific intervention, to make the social contract viable, but I have not had direct experience of its being promoted as an over-arching philosophical or psychological explanation to which Zahn seems to refer. Clearly, there are circumstances also affecting offenders (such as personality disorders, for example) where this limited intervention will not be effective.

Nevertheless, Rachel Zahn's intervention is timely and extraordinarily wide-reaching – both historically and in terms of its interdisciplinary approach. She traces the developments of thinking through

> [John] Dewey [who] had been greatly affected by James' The Principles of Psychology. He was also a devoted pragmatist, fascinated by how we use ideas and what we can do with them. In 1894 he created the 'Chicago School' of interdisciplinary research in psychology, education, sociology, and philosophy. There was a great debate at that time over student- centred vs. information-centred education.

Zahn further suggests that Dewey:

> offered the chance for education to evolve into a social, psychophysically congruent instrument. Dewey studied with Alexander and considered his Technique essential to the resolution of the mind–body problem.

Perhaps the problem here is that the question –"the resolution of the mind-body problem" is posed in terms of early 20th Century dualism. Asking how we give voice and resonate our voice in the world may give us a richer answer!

Pragmatism is, of course, one aspect of existentialism – the aspect of engaging with and dealing with the experienced world. It is therefore fascinating that this development is placed at the centre of a movement as influential and transformative as the interdisciplinary movement of the Chicago School. Student-centred education is the focus of much of this thesis, of course, except that I am proposing that a richer description is possible – a more layered – and probably a more poetic version of this argument (such as that suggested by Roland Barthes, (above) which does justice to the many layers of human experience.

Relation of Alexander Technique to Buddhist Practice

Zahn makes a passing reference to Varela's examination of "a form of non-doing observation which he learned from Tibetan Buddhism," (op. cit. p. 20), but is fairly dismissive of this line of enquiry. It may be, however, that this connection is more important, at a time when "mindfulness" is a major modern preoccupation, in enhancing public understanding of what the AT is precisely about.

She describes FM Alexander's own attitude to Buddhism thus:

> there were students who made comparisons of the similarities between Alexander's inhibition / non-doing and Buddhist 'emptiness'. Alexander made it quite clear that the Alexander Technique had to remain grounded in Western rationalism or risk accusations of elitist, esoteric quackery, (op. cit. p. 20)

But, in the words of Don Cupitt, taking a multi-cultural approach, we might consider that the Buddhist path demanding "a very high degree of inner

detachment and freedom" – "clinging to the void and practising compassion ' and clinging to the void and being "deliberately silent about many issue in classical issues in dogmatic metaphysics' (Cupitt, 1984, p. 254) is another way of dealing with the issues which Zahn herself is addressing. Since the emphasis on "Mindfulness" (or 'Sati" in transliterated Pali) is fundamental to Buddhist meditational practice, and is a form of being present very similar to western existentialism, this tends to support the present argument that the Alexander Technique is a detailed way of applying existential practice to detailed psycho-physical activity – in this case, singing.

It is, therefore, the case being made here that the Alexander Technique is a highly effective way of training singers to be present in what they sing and in 'the body in the voice as it sings,' (Barthes, 1972, p. 188). If we are to avoid liberal generalizations and promote a radical affirmation of personhood in the singing voice, we must embrace this profoundly specific way of working with singers at all levels. This point will be reinforced by the account of the meditational approach of Bob Lada's AT class in the summer school chapter (p. 166 below).

Chapter 3
Autism and Authenticity

Background Literature

The issue of medical and non-medical definitions is also very relevant in the case study below of adults in residential care with an asd (autistic spectrum disorder). In order to contextualise this, I will give a brief overview of the medical history of definitions of autism.

The term autistic (from Greek αὐτός self (emphatic)(Biblehub)) was used by Bleuler in 1911 in relation to what we now call schizophrenia, but autism as a separate condition was first identified by Kanner and Hans Asperger independently, in 1943 and 1944 respectively. The information is reviewed in Uta Frith's seminal book in 1989 and she defines autism as:

> an inability to integrate pieces of information into coherent wholes, an inability particularly to make sense of the minds own activities, thoughts, beliefs and feelings, (Frith, 1989, back cover).

In her text, she is concerned with medical descriptions of "autistic aloneness" and "repetitiveness, rigidity, single-mindedness, pedantry, and inability to judge the significance of subtle differences," (op. cit. p. 11).

It should be noted that these are all pejorative or negative terms, as is the description in the 1987 WHO document listing diagnostic criteria to which she refers, in which I have underlined these negative descriptions (World Health Organisation, 1987):

> *Autism F84.0*
> ... <u>poor</u> flexibility in language expression and a relative <u>lack of</u> creativity and fantasy in thought processes; lack of emotional response to other people's verbal and nonverbal overtures; <u>impaired</u> use of variations in cadence or emphasis to reflect communicative modulation; and a similar <u>lack of</u> accompanying gesture to provide emphasis or aid meaning in spoken communication.
> The condition is also characterized by <u>restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped</u> patterns of behaviour, interests, and activities. These take the form of a tendency to <u>impose rigidity and routine</u> on a wide range of aspects of day-to day functioning, (my underlining, SJC).
>
> *Asperger's syndrome F84.5*

> A disorder of uncertain nosological validity, characterized by the same kind of qualitative abnormalities of reciprocal social interaction that typify autism, together with a restricted, stereotyped, repetitive repertoire of interests and activities. The disorder differs from autism primarily in that there is no general delay or retardation in language or in cognitive development. (my underlining SJC)

However the introductory comment By Norman Sartorius, the director of the Division of Mental Health of the WHO should also be noted:

> A classification is a way of seeing the world at a point in time. There is no doubt that scientific progress and experience with the use of these guidelines will ultimately require their revision and updating. (my underlining)

The inclusion in the same document of transsexualism as a "gender identity disorder" (something which would be regarded as unacceptable today) perhaps helps to put the urgency of this proviso in context! It is also interesting to note that Sartorius' introductory comment is phrased in language which could be regarded as existentialist! That is to say that we can only understand phenomena such as autism in the light of our own, limited, perspective.

Since then, there has been a huge explosion of literature on the subject of autism, much of it in a UK context published by a specialised publishing house, Jessica Kingsley, and fuelled, no doubt, by the presence in academia of many who exhibit autistic traits![9]

It is worth noting that Simon Baron Cohen, a seminal contributor to discussion of autism, as noted in the chapter below, and Anthony Attwood, a prominent contributor to Jessica Kingsley, were PhD students with Uta Frith, and that Beate Hermelin, another prominent writer on the subject, was her collaborator. This may give urgency to a very different, philosophical perspective on the subject.

It is, however, worth noting that another contributor, Steve Silberman, published a book (in a more journalistic style) in 2015 which celebrates autism and its variations in much more positive language: "The kids formerly ridiculed as nerds and brainiacs have grown up to become the

[9] Noted, for example, in Cowen, 2009.

architects of our future," (Silberman, 2015, p. 3). In relation to the possible connections between autistic styles of thinking and some areas of academia, referred to above, he comments that "there was a disproportionately high demand for autism services in the cradle of the technology industry" (op. cit. p. 9) in Silicon Valley.

This thesis attempts to identify the contributions of some of those with an asd in the arena of music, and especially singing, where their particular contribution is perhaps less immediately obvious.

Music and Autism

There is surprisingly little material in the literature on music and autism, especially given Uta Frith's comment that autism is associated with being "unusually responsive to sounds," (op. cit. p. 3).

Most of the material listed refers to music therapy, which is, of course, a different utlilitarian focus. For example, (Simpson & Keen, 2011), a review of the literature in 2011 concludes that:

> There was somewhat limited evidence to support the use of music interventions under certain conditions to facilitate social, communicative and behavioural skills in young children with autism.

Jessica Kingsley Publishers, the main UK publishers on the subject of autistic spectrum disorders, appear to deal predominantly with music therapy and music for other purposes, such as "how music can become a scaffold for language," (Jessica Kingsley Publishers' website). Both these concerns are outside the main direction of this thesis, which is how singing in these groups affirms the human presence of those with an asd.

Slightly more relevantly, an article published in 2001 by Scottish philosopher Gordon Graham, which also draws heavily on work by Oliver Sacks and Temple Grandin challenges the "personal" nature of music (and also of mathematics - a common analytical philosophy point of view) but maintains that the efficacy of music therapy remains in spite of this.

All this leaves the question of the personal significance of singing for people with an asd, surprisingly, very open.

The Context for this study

I have had continuous contact with some of the groups described below since November 1992. There are attached to this section two articles published in the journal, Good Autism Practice, describing the development of this work (Clethero, 2000, pp.2-7; Clethero, 2001, pp. 45-51(a two-part article over two editions) and then again in October 2013 (Clethero et al, pp.69-75)[10]. These accounts are the record of a process of development, and do not necessarily refer to the same individuals or organisations.

This material, taken together, shows a growth of theoretical (philosophical) understanding of the work, and, in my submission, a consequent increase in its effectiveness – that is to say, in its connectedness with the particular situation of the service users and the rest of the group, and in its attempt to address some of the issues implicit in this. I am not claiming that these are measurable differences in "well-being", though this may be the case. This work is concerned with the expression of the self by these service users, at the deepest level. This may not be in terms which we can understand, and certainly we may not be able to quantify them. It is a qualitative, "rich" aspect of their situation, which we need to try to understand, even though it may not fit comfortably into our pre-conceived categories, or those normally used to conceptualise these issues.

This being the case, we have to find a way of letting this expression of the self speak for itself. This is, in the terms of this thesis, an existential matter - a question of the "being-in-the-world" of people whose inner lives we can only understand very imperfectly and of finding a "frame" to express this.

With particular reference to the case studies below, it could be argued that, in some respects, the extraction of quantitative data is contrary to the nature of an autistic spectrum disorder(asd) in a very fundamental sense, because a person with an asd lives in an experiential world which is distinct from, and cannot communicate in the usual manner with, that of those around him/her. That is to say that such a person inhabits a world

[10] Simon Baron-Cohen, winner of the Society's President's Award, outlines a career at the forefront of thinking over autism and Asperger's syndrome (2008 pp. 112-116).

which is sui generis, in which commonalities with other human beings are of much less importance. So generalisations in this context are even more difficult than in the case of other (unique and individual!) human beings.

It is in the nature of an asd that it insulates the person from emotional and cognitive empathy with other people, making their inner world distinct and of its own kind even more than with those who are "neuro-typical". As argued above, therefore, to try to standardise this material is contrary to the nature of the condition itself. The particularity of mental orientation referred to above is something which fits very well within existential philosophical approaches, however, since the existential reality experienced by any human being is unique to them.

History of Groups for Service Users with an asd

This chapter deals with 25 years of teaching groups of people with an asd in various venues, and develops an existential frame for this activity. As well as the articles referred to above which have been quoted here at length, providing a long-term view of the way this work has developed over this period, I will also refer to a paper given at the conference of the Royal Musical Association on 6th January 2014, which gives a useful outline of the issues involved. In this paper, I draw a distinction between the medicalised approach to an asd, treating autism as a disease which needs to be treated, and an approach based on curiosity about a non- neurotypical ways of functioning, typified by Simon Baron Cohen and by Oliver Sacks, in *Autistic Twins* for example.

The first, medicalised approach is typified in this article from New Scientist, for example, under the heading: '(Magnetic) Brain Stimulation Brings Social Side to Autism'. This article explains that:

> a region of the brain called the dorsomedial prefrontal cortex (dmPFC) is underactive in people with autism. - It's also the part of the brain linked with understanding others' thoughts, beliefs and intentions, (Ananthaswamy, 2013, p. 15).

Another example of this approach is the Son-Rise Project in Massachusetts which claims to make people with autism more social. The

publicity for this project, interestingly, draws a comparison between applied behaviour analysis, which

> sees Autism as a behavioral disorder, with behaviors to be either extinguished or reinforced. The Child needs structure and must learn to sit appropriately, follow a schedule, and comply with requests (Autism Treatment Center, 2016a).

So, the writers of the above appear to disapprove of this very prescriptive approach - and they contrast the Son-rise programme which:

> Sees Autism as a social interactivity disorder, where the central deficit is relating to other people. Helping the child to be flexible and spontaneous enables him/her to handle change and enjoy human interaction (op. cit.).

Nevertheless, they announce themselves as

> a powerful and effective <u>treatment</u> for children and adults challenged by Autism (my underlining) (Autism Treatment Center, 2016b),

and their description is dominated by the words “disorder” and “deficit.”

<u>An Approach of Exploration</u> - rather than prescription:

Simon Baron Cohen describes a systematising/empathising continuum in which:

> Empathizing is the drive to identify another person’s emotions and thoughts, and to respond to these with an appropriate emotion. The empathizer intuitively figures out how people are feeling, and how to treat people with care and sensitivity. Systemizing is the drive to analyse and explore a system, to extract underlying rules that govern the behaviour of a system; and the drive to construct systems. The systemizer intuitively figures out how things work, or what the underlying rules are controlling a system.

And its application to asd:

> It may help us understand the childhood neurological conditions of autism and Asperger Syndrome, which appear to be an extreme of the male (*systematising* SJC) brain. Such individuals may have impairments in empathizing alongside normal or even talented systemizing (2012).

I have found this original schema endlessly useful in positioning singing students on the empathising /systematising spectrum. This is not to make judgements or categorisations, but simply as an aid to understanding what mode of functioning that person finds easiest to relate to, and to avoid making demands which are inappropriate to their neuro-physical orientation. The alternative is to make moral judgements about someone being “rude” or “insensitive” which may be quite inappropriate to their emotional and intellectual resources.

For example, I had to deal with a student who appeared to have an asd (undiagnosed and therefore not subject to any help or support from student services) and who had to organise a singing event. It was essential to give her credit for the areas in which she was very talented (creative imagination, for example) and to make allowances for her complete lack of skills in organising other people, which could otherwise have meant that she failed her examination.

This understanding is essentially provisional, and it could be falsified at any time by the establishing of new evidence (which would also be provisional, of course). But if it aids human collaboration and understanding, it may be, in practical terms, more relevant to our functioning than absolute truth.

The icon of the exploratory approach to, and a sense of wonder at neurological difference is, of course Oliver Sacks. The following is a contextualisation of his account of autistic twins, from an unpublished fragment which I wrote in 2014.

I will then describe the history of some of the groups for people with an asd who live in residential care. There is a clear progression in the vitality of the self-determination of the groups, which is evident in the tone and content of the articles. This also, as will be evident, reflects my development as a facilitator, and access to a burgeoning area of research relating to these issues.

Singing and the Process of Becoming: A Study of the Use of Alexander Technique in Voice Classes for People with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder

The projects described here involve work both with people with an autistic spectrum disorder (asd) in residential care and in mixed groups in the community. In each case, there is an uncovering of layers of assumptions, both those held by other people and those internalized by the person with an asd themselves. In this way, those involved encounter the authentic person, not the condition, or the restrictions placed on him/her by the condition, but a more fundamentally and universally human view of who this person is.

This is a process, that is, an ongoing uncovering of what we see, and a dynamic rather than a static view of the person. That is to say, it is concerned with a process of becoming – a subtle interaction between the individual and others and their environment, always incomplete and unexpected.

It is very easy to indulge in pious generalities about people with any kind of inbuilt difference which makes them stand out. People with an asd are often spoken of in a kindly manner as people less fortunate who deserve special kindness. It is startling, in my experience, how often they are referred to as “kids” - even those who are adults of 40 or 50 years old! But the only true basis for respect and genuine humanity is to encounter the other person as a person in their own right, and on their own terms. They might, or they might not, use speech to communicate, and if they do, they might, or not, use words in the same way as other people do. But a multifaceted understanding of the other is crucial to a truly universalist understanding of their humanity. This understanding depends on observing and putting together the specifics – the precise mode of functioning used, and its content.

An arresting, and ultimately devastating, example of this is given in Oliver Sacks’ Chapter “The twins” In his collection of essays “The Man who mistook his wife for a hat”. He tells the story of twins in residential care who played a game of speaking numbers to each other, their only form of

communication. Sacks reproduced this sequence of numbers and found they involved a sophisticated mathematical game of prime numbers. He comments:

> They do not approach numbers lightly, as most calculators do. They are not interested in, have no capacity for, cannot comprehend, calculations: they are, rather, serene contemplators of number- and approach numbers with a sense of reverence and awe, (1986, p. 197).
>
> The twins seem to employ a direct cognition- like angels. They see, directly, a universe and heaven of numbers, (op. cit. p. 199).

And further:

- I observed them in countless other sorts of number games or number communion, the nature of which I could not ascertain or even guess at.
- But it seems likely, or certain, that they are dealing with 'real' properties or qualities – for the arbitrary, such as random numbers, gives them no pleasure, - - it is clear that they must have a "sense" in their numbers – in the same way, perhaps, as a musician must have harmony.

And he quotes Leibnitz "Music is nothing but unconscious arithmetic."

Sacks relates that the two men were subsequently separated and unable to exercise this extraordinary ability.

There are two crucial points embedded in this story. The first is that Sacks found out what was going on through dogged and indefatigable exploration of the specifics. No doubt this was natural to his discipline of neurology. But those of us who practice non-scientific disciplines have a similar obligation to describe, and work with, exactly what we see, and to draw conclusions limited to this material.

The second point is the obvious one that we are not entitled to make assumptions about the intellectual functioning of a person based on their deficit in another area of expertise. In relation to autism, the frequently occurring deficit in the area of verbal expression does not entitle us to assume that that person has deficits in other, unrelated areas. For example there are many indications that Albert Einstein may have had an asd (Muir,

2003,)[11], although it would have been unlikely to be identified at the time, when diagnosis of the condition was in its infancy. The human project would clearly be much impeded if he, and others like him, were disregarded because of their functioning in some other area.

The crucial point, of course, is the sense of wonder at the possibilities of a human being. If we do not understand that someone may have untold possibilities and richness, independently of a diagnosis of asd, we have not even begun on the journey.

In this study, the first point, the exploration of the specifics, is explored through the specific nature of the Alexander Technique, which is based on exact observation by the teacher of the student's physical poise and interrogation of the ideas represented by it and their physical manifestation. This precision embodies the freedom of the student to embody other ways of being which he/she may find more liberating and more representative of who they are.

On the second point, being open to unexpected aspects of the singer, the nature of sung sound is that, in the right circumstances, it can show us aspects of the performer which we would otherwise not have seen. The singer uses the resonances in his/her own body, amplified by the flow of the breath, to produce sound. This makes it much more personal and revealing of the self than an external instrument. Appreciating this does assume, however, a willingness to hear the individuality of the singer, with minimal presuppositions about what constitutes "good" singing. In the case of those in residential care with autism, of course, this is a very specific negotiation with care users and care staff.

As it is put in a 2001 article by philosopher Gordon Graham:

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[11] Baron-Cohen ... and mathematician Ioan James ... assessed the personality traits of Newton and Einstein to see if they exhibited three key symptoms of Asperger syndrome: obsessive interests, difficulty in social relationships, and problems communicating.

Newton seems like a classic case. He hardly spoke, was so engrossed in his work that he often forgot to eat, and was lukewarm or bad-tempered with the few friends he had. If no one turned up to his lectures, he gave them anyway, talking to an empty room. He had a nervous breakdown at 50, brought on by depression and paranoia.

As a child, Einstein was also a loner, and repeated sentences obsessively until he was seven years old. He became a notoriously confusing lecturer. And despite the fact that he made intimate friends, had numerous affairs and was outspoken on political issues, Baron-Cohen suspects that he too showed signs of Asperger syndrome.

> Can music in and of itself tell us anything about the mind of the person who composes or performs it? This question ... takes on more than philosophical significance in contexts where there is reason to think that music may be the only significant point of contact between one human being and another. ... I shall concentrate on – that of the autistic (sic)

And he talks about the idea that “Music can succeed where other media fail” in bridging this divide as “one of the animating ideas” in the use of music therapy for people with an asd (Graham, 2001, pp. 39-47). However, as explained below, this thesis is concerned not with therapy, but with empowerment through music , and specifically through singing. However Graham persists in a characterization of non-high-achieving people with autism as intellectually “impaired” - description which relies on an assumption that human being can all be measured against some universal measurement of mental functioning which I do not share.

Retrospective of the History of the Groups

The following article was published in Good Autism Practice journal in 2000. I want to acknowledge the extraordinary foresight and support of the late Katherine Thomson, who had the imagination to start these groups, and the support of Huw Morgan, the then manager of the house and subsequently manager of autism west midlands, who supported the group against all the odds in the early, vulnerable stages, and who suggested I write this article, at a time when nothing was further from my mind.

Clearly this narrative is a record of my development as a teacher as well. I have now accessed a much wider range of relevant literature (and there is more available) than when I wrote the first article in 2000. One of the most exciting aspects, in fact, is the way we have developed and changed as a community over the 25+ years we have been running this project.

An Exploration into Creativity (1)

(Published work by Sara Clethero)

An account of the development of music and drama groups in three residential services for adults with an autistic spectrum disorder

Editorial comment

Published literature describing the value of music and drama to adults with asd is scarce. Sara Clethero's paper is particularly welcome because it is based upon practice which has taken place over a 10 year period. As the instigator of this practice, Sara has been in a prime position to describe the changes she has observed in the participants over this period of time. Her style of writing deliberately shies away from more formal academic presentation in order to provide qualitative description and insight into this fascinating area of highly specialised work. The paper will be split into 2 parts, with the second appearing in the May 2001 issue of GAP.

Introduction

This is the story of the growth of an idea, to teach music and drama to a group of people with an asd and to put on performances with them. We did not start with a clear programme or aim in view, but were free to build on opportunities and strengths and avoid difficulties as they arose. This being the case, I make no apology for the narrative form of this account. The encouragement of the use of scientific, formulaic language by those dealing with asd who are neither scientists nor academics seems to me to be counter-productive, promoting as it does a feeling of distance between the language and the human reality on the ground. This can be extremely dangerous, leading to procedures governed by formulae rather than a thorough understanding of the people and issues involved. In the present case such an approach would be. downright dishonest, since we took an essentially pragmatic approach, and developed ideas in a practical setting rather than testing out an already formulated hypothesis.

The three groups (started at different times during the last 10 years) consist of young men, mostly in their mid-20's, living in communities run for

adults with an asd. The third and most recent group also includes three women. There would usually be about eight residents present at a group session, It seemed to me then that therapy implied an expectation that people would be changed to fit in with some preconceived ideal and I felt it would be more appropriate to take a more exploratory and less prescriptive approach. I wanted to persuade people to share more of their inner life with us rather than telling them how they should be. In any case, music therapy is, of course, an intense one-to-one relationship demanding considerable resources of time and money. We were aiming to develop something that would benefit the adults with an asd more widely and also build a sense of community.

At the time we could find very little documentation of the experience of others in this kind of work, particularly work dealing specifically with autism. In the second year of the project we wrote to autistic societies around the country to try to set up some kind of forum for the exchange of experiences and views, but we met with very little response. I have been involved in general projects for disabled people, particularly in the area of dance, but I have not been able to find any evidence of a worked-out philosophy or a systematic approach. I was unable to find any literature dealing specifically with this subject. The literature on autism at the time dealt quite properly with symptoms and medically definable characteristics. This project was set up to explore creativity and spontaneity: in other words, it starts where the medical definitions finish. It would be quite wrong to try to squeeze the events which I describe here into the framework set out in the traditional descriptions of autism.

In trying to formulate these events, I have had recourse to writings on autism and talks by Donna Williams and Ros Blackburn about the experiences of those with autism. I have also had long conversations with biologists, theatre practitioners, music therapists and parents about the nature of what we are dealing with and how it can be formulated. These conversations and reading have fed into the process of developing the groups to the point where they are today.

Since this is an ongoing process it would not be appropriate to give a blueprint here for running a similar group in another setting although some

detail is given which may help to give pointers for similar projects. However, it is important to stress that I have relied heavily on professional, technical music skills. In my case, these skills have been those used and honed for singing training over many years. When I have involved other musicians, they have been professional musicians who also have the qualities necessary to relate to the people in the group. A project which does not have access to comparable skills will be a different kind of exercise altogether. The idea that anyone can 'have a go' with a bit of musical back-ground is, I'm afraid, patronising towards members of the group and inappropriate to the task.

The project could have been run by a musician from another discipline, of course. I have often wished that I was a composer and could blend the elements which come up in improvisation sessions into a coherent unity. If I had been a keyboard player with improvisation skills I could also have developed the musical material further. However, singing is one of the best places to start because the use of the voice relates to. so many other human activities (through speech) and also because it is so profoundly self-affirming.

Beginnings: Alexis

In the late 1980's, Alexis (not his real name), an adult with a formal diagnosis of asd, was brought to me by his grandmother for singing lessons. I little thought that I was embarking on a course that would absorb my mind and imagination for many years to come. He sang with gusto but little finesse. Like many people with autism, he had developed a way of getting through life by means of a series of automatic responses and routines and certain songs were, and still are, part of that routine. We had to confront the question of whether it was possible, within these obsessional patterns, for him to find a means of truly expressing himself- of finding a channel for real creativity.

Those who do not believe that people with autism can be truly creative will often point out that their artistic activity is derivative, another formulation of already existing material or an obsessive repetition of it. But all art probably derives from something. For the purposes of this paper I

shall take as a working definition of creative activity, that which throws some new light upon the world, which makes us look again at our surroundings and at other people and see them differently. This is, of course, a subjective definition, but probably many people would agree that the assessment of art is an essentially subjective process. If we take this definition, then, and ask the question whether the work being done by these groups is truly creative, the answer, in my opinion and that of others who work with the group and take part in artistic activity in other spheres, would have to be in the affirmative. At its best, there is a freshness to what they do and an innocence which exists precisely because their disability isolates them from all the normal social influences and pretences.

With any student, creative expression is dependent on technical mastery of the means of expression. So began a long process of vocal and breathing exercises and training in musical literacy and precision. We set up a routine of exercises (mostly exercises done by all students of singing) to free up muscles in the face and neck and those connected with the ribs and abdomen. This helps to promote clear co-ordination of the breath-flow with the vocal folds. We also do exercises constructed to help the clarity of the vowels and consistent resonance. Running scales and other passages encourage clear and fluent passage from one pitch to another.

Alexis was helped by a very good memory and a facility for languages and he also has a rich emotional life. He was hampered by a lack of physical self-awareness and severe anxiety which made his attention span very short. However, the fact that much vocal exercise is repetitive and that progress is made through minor adjustments to the same basic pattern made it easier for him, giving him the support of a repetitive routine which made him feel more secure.

Some aspects of his progress have been slower than others. For many years, Alexis did not clearly differentiate between breathing in and breathing out (not the only student I have had with this difficulty!). His breathing was characteristically stiff and jerky. Even more than with other students, it was particularly important to avoid putting him in a situation where he felt criticised or that he was a failure - he had had quite enough of that already and it made him very anxious. I found that making

suggestions based on images which I knew were emotionally significant to him worked best. That is to say, 'Don't wake the baby up' might be more effective than 'Sing softly' and 'This bit should sound as if you're drunk' might be more effective than 'Sing rhythmically'. Instructions have, of course, to be specific rather than general. But overall it is striking how fluent and sensitive his singing can now be at times. His response to the music is by no means automatic and learned by rote, and he is often able to bring out this sensitivity on appropriate occasions, such as examinations and performances - it is not simply random.

He recently took his Grade 5 singing examination (and passed very comfortably in extremely difficult circumstances.) This is the latest in a series of exams which he has taken and succeeded in, a process which pleases him in its logical progression from one grade to another and also gives him the opportunity to perform, which he enjoys, although he gets nervous about it. One of the examiner's comments was 'clearly an emotional connection with the songs' .The accuracy of his diagnosis of autism is in no doubt, and yet this comment flies in the face of the traditional descriptions of autism. It has frequently been my experience that students with autism show 'an emotional connection' with the music. One often has to detect it by an indirect route, such as an obvious pleasure in singing and a willingness to make a huge effort of concentration. Evidence of emotional commitment to phrasing and tone colour is often patchy and use of words often lacks flexibility, but they are by no means absent, as some practitioners would have us believe. Can it be that our definitions of both autism and creativity are over-limited and that the two coincide at a deeper level than that at which we are used to considering the matter?

First Group

After Alexis had been coming for lessons for some months, his grandmother asked if I would run a six-week project at the residential home where he lived. We prepared a staged version of the Christmas story, singing carols and using lights and costumes. It was a great success in terms of the enjoyment of participants and audience, and many who were watching found it very moving that these people, so full of anxiety and fear

and unresolved tensions, could do something generous and really quite highly organised. From the perspective of someone living in institutional care, whose life is dominated by other people's decisions, that is quite an event.

The manager of the service had sat in the front row during the performance 'expecting trouble' as he put it. But both of us were surprised and impressed by the potential which had come to light in the performance and now decided to continue with the group. We made a joint approach to the City Council for funds. They have given sympathetic support ever since and continued to fund special projects.

In those early days the group was fairly unselected. That is to say it consisted of those residents who someone on the staff thought might be 'musical'. It took place in an over-heated sitting room, with very little room to move around. The carers had no idea what was expected of them, and were consequently quite anxious. Members of the group were quite unused to concentrating on anything for a protracted time and there was no expectation that they would do so. Members of staff would sometimes carry on other activities or conversations in the room while the group was going on. And yet, amid all this chaos, there were moments of extraordinary beauty. There was a palpable sense of a group of people growing together, doing something that most of them would never have dreamed of doing in other circumstances. The group gave several public performances - one, choreographed to a popularised classical track on a CD, used painted hands in a hand dance. Even the less co-ordinated members of the group could do this and it was a way of enabling them to take part in expressive• movement which was also an effective performance. On another occasion we hired a small _ local theatre and performed a specially devised piece entitled, 'Looking for the Light', with music specially written by a visiting musician. Other performances included a dramatisation of a modern Greek folk story for a conference of visiting academics from all over the world[12], specifically to make the point that naivete can sometimes make a profound point about the human condition more effectively than sophistication can.

[12] Organised by Prof Meg Alexiou at Birmingham University.

The group also took part in performances given by a local opera training company, taking part in regular Christmas concerts and full-scale operas such as The Magic Flute (as slaves with some speaking parts) and The Marriage of Figaro (as peasants celebrating the wedding of Susanna and Figaro).

After some years, four of the participants went to live in a nearby house, but wanted to continue in the group. We began to meet in an upstairs room in a nearby pub. This was much more spacious and more peaceful than the previous arrangement and there were almost no problems with challenging behaviour. The circumstances then existed in which people could try out new ideas away from the normal stresses and expectations of community life and had the space to withdraw from the group for a while if they felt the need. Much of the recent success of this group has probably been due to this change in physical surroundings.

There were now eight adults with asd in the group and it became much happier and more stable. There were, of course, other changes in people's lives - changes in family circumstances and staffing and in their personal care plans. But whether from the operation of the group or these other factors, we saw a marked increase in confidence and skills amongst many participants. They started to take part in performances run by other groups, and I found that they could cope with more rigorous musical training.

Typical Session

A typical session starts with gentle, whole body warm-ups, with members of staff accompanying anyone who finds it difficult, often by physical rather than verbal prompting because this seems to raise fewer anxieties. We might then concentrate on a particular aspect of movement such as fast and slow, or a particular rhythm such as 3/4 (waltz time). This helps to physicalise musical concepts and make them more accessible to •people with a language impairment. We might ask one member of the group to lead on the drum, or we might go round the group asking each member to contribute a movement idea, which is then imitated by the whole group. This is a way of affirming their ownership of the group and the right of each

member to contribute to it and exercise a choice in the material to he used. The role of the leader is to devise a suitable task and to ensure that each member is allowed a voice, although some members of the group have now become quite good at monitoring themselves for fairness!

We will then move on to some simple voice warm-up exercises and learning or rehearsing whatever music needs to he done (for performances, exams, etc.). These days, we have a period in most sessions when we do ear training based on major and minor and pentatonic scales and chromatic and whole tone scales. The whole group does this, not just the more able members. If there is stage rehearsal to he done, it will he done during this time. There will he a break for coffee which allows those members who wish, to have time to themselves, and it gives me time to catch up with how the carers are and any ideas they have for the group.

We may also have some time for free improvisation and as part of this they have recently started spontaneously experimenting with extended vocal techniques (e.g. non-singing sounds made in the mouth and throat, used by composers such as Stockhausen) producing extraordinarily virtuosic sounds in some cases. They also produce some very sophisticated drumming rhythms, too complex for me to follow in detail.

All this speaks of powerful, creative impulses. To go back to our earlier working definition of creative activity, the clarity and energy of their work in these sessions does indeed throw new light upon the world and upon their personalities. But the creative spark in this setting (as opposed to the exam or performance setting) tends to he random and not easily accessible. A video project might he one way of recording and encouraging it hut even this tends to make people self- conscious and dampen down' the original flair and buzz.

One of the issues the group has had to deal with has been whether or not to perform (either publicly, or in a protected setting, for family and friends). Although it was originally taken for granted that the group would perform, the issue is always an ongoing one amongst members of the groups. In some cases, members of the group have found the performing situation overwhelming and have either withdrawn or shown other signs of

uncontrollable anxiety. But for others, who are the majority, it is obvious that they enjoy it and find it a welcome affirmation of their ability and flair.

Moreover, the notion of responsibility as well as rights is perhaps one that can also he embraced by adults with an asd. By performing, they make a contribution to the public understanding of asd and, even more importantly, allow their private, untouched world to he glimpsed by those who have the patience and perception to see it. In this way, they assert for themselves the dignity of making a meaningful contribution to the community - a dignity which is often not available to them otherwise.

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An Exploration into Creativity (2) (published work)

Introduction

When the first group had been meeting for a while, the new manager of the service asked me if I would run a group for those residents whose asd limits them more severely, particularly in a group setting. Many of this group speak very little and in general their autism intrudes more upon their everyday life. I agreed with some trepidation. Until this point I had run the first group as I would have done had the participants not been affected by autism. For the second group, it meant watching for special abilities which could he brought out to compensate for limitations and being very patient while participants sorted out their own private issues at the same time as they were trying to learn to do music and drama. (All this also applies to working in mainstream music and drama settings). The severity of the symptoms also imposed other limitations in the methods that could he used. For instance, members of the first group welcomed the opportunity to lie down for a while to go through a relaxation sequence if they were feeling stressed and this naturally increased their responsiveness to what was going on. But for this second group, this was perceived as too disruptive and so was not possible.

Setting the Boundaries

I was forced to confront the issue of people who were probably not going to achieve much at all in terms of conventional musical skills. The first thing I learned was not to get anxious when nothing much appeared to be happening. Small gains in concentration or group participation became more significant. It was clear from the outset that members of the group, like most people, enjoyed repetition. Since music is built upon repetitive patterns, this seemed to be worth exploring.

I began by trying establishing a simple musical figure with keyboard and percussion which could then be expanded and elaborated by means of improvisation. In order to give a feeling of shared responsibility and empowerment; we began to pass the leadership of the group from one person to another (as done with the first group), but with the second group, this part of the session ran for longer and was the main body of the work. So the leader would play something and the rest of us would try to pick it up and develop it. This has become an established way of settling down at the beginning of a session. It is something that everyone can do at their own level of skill and involvement and because it is repetitive and predictable, it makes people feel safe. Sometimes these sessions really take off, with very exciting harmonies and cross-rhythms. Sometimes it remains fairly basic, but it still serves the same function of giving people a safe place in which to explore together.

It was clear to me that all of the participants in the groups had vast untapped reserves of talent and creative energy. Although these may for the most part never be recognised, it is, of course, important for them to have the best possible chance of realizing their possibilities. Sometimes it may be a question of encouraging someone to try a new skill such as playing the keyboard. Sometimes it's simply a question of giving them sympathetic support so that they can relax and do more.

Often there may be fleeting signs of creativity or participation that it is easy to miss. Then we are dependent on the skill of the staff to notice these and find a way of incorporating them into the group (something which would, of course, be much helped by effective training -see below).

Sometimes this may even be something that appears to be disruptive like a cry or snatches of another song. But the pitch may be part of.a chord we are singing, so it can be incorporated into the group.

Developing the Second Group

Depending how the group is progressing and how settled people are, we will sing some songs (usually folk-songs or even music-hall, and occasionally music theatre pieces) and maybe learn something new. Choosing the right repertoire can be difficult. Residents left to themselves will often want to sing nursery rhymes or Christmas carols. The task is to find music which they can relate to and which also stretches them to learn new skills or extend the existing ones. The music used also has to be not too distant from the experience of the carers, who may have had very limited cultural opportunities. Songs by Flanders and Swan have been useful in nudging people into trying something new, if only for the delicious feeling of singing some of the words. Ballads are often good: anything involving different characters, (e.g. Widdecombe Fair) or repeated lists (such as 'Doh, a Deer from The Sound of Music) can also be useful.

Ideally, it would be good to have more written for the specific needs of the group. When this has been done it has been very successful, and at the time of writing, a project is in progress to involve an established and working composer in writing music with the group for use in a drama written by a member of the group. The important qualities in such a piece are that it should have enough interest in its subject matter and musical structure to be interesting to all members of the group and that it should have some built-in repetition that, eventually, all members of the group will be able to learn.

Because few members of this group can read, learning new songs will require quite a lot of work on exploring and memorising text separately from the music, which has to be very slow and painstaking in the case of those who do not speak fluently. This group, which meets in the living room of the service which is hot and stuffy and not associated with high levels of concentration, is much more full of tensions than the first, and there are very occasional outbursts of violence. But most of the sessions are happy

and cheerful and with an ever increasing level of concentration and participation. The decision was recently taken to reduce the number of participants, with marked benefits to the ethos of the group.

New Service, New Group

Two years ago the manager of a new service asked me to consider running a group there. They were building up gradually to fourteen people living in two bungalows. I was working there almost from the start and was given carte blanche to run the group as I wished, with the brief of giving the residents the chance to grow and develop their skills as the other two groups had. This was an opportunity to see whether we could design a better model for running the group and avoid some of the mistakes of the first two groups. At the beginning, there were the same problems as before of very mixed levels of participation and concentration. In addition, there was a fair amount of what I can only call adolescent playing-up, much of it sexual, and much of it mainly aimed at provoking a response! Although in theory I could run it as I wished, as the staff were struggling to participate, I had to do it in a way that made it easier for them. Here, as in the first case, there had been no initial staff training in music and drama and so there was a limited base of skills on which to build and no framework to help them to make sense of what was going on in the sessions. I now try to explain in the group what is happening to some extent as we go along, but this is by no means satisfactory.

There was a particularly acute problem in this group that certain very able people were not being stretched sufficiently and disruption by other members restricted their opportunities even more. We circumvented this problem to a certain extent by arranging for private lessons for one service-user. She has since gone from strength to strength very quickly in this setting, and I am able to draw on the skills she has learned in her individual lessons to help with the smooth running of the group (eg by asking- her to sing through a new song to help the others to learn it). Another person has fifteen minutes of individual keyboard tuition at the end of the session and she, too, is making rapid progress. But I still worry that others have possibilities that may never be uncovered.

In the last two years, the two service-users mentioned above have taken part in the Opera Mint Beginners Summer School accredited by the University of Birmingham, which I run at a preparatory school in Buckinghamshire. In this setting, they can relax and learn much faster, both by direct participation and by listening to other people. Their simplicity and directness also makes a valuable contribution to the dynamic of the group as a whole. The credits they are awarded are, of course, subject to the same conditions as those of the other students.

We have managed to telescope .the development of this group somewhat so that we have passed from one stage of development to another more quickly than the first time. This is partly because of my previous experience and partly because of the calibre of the carers, which is excellent. But we have still had to go through all the stages of trying to keep everyone in the same room and paying .attention as long as possible. Persuading the staff that there are real possibilities of development here, that we are not just passing the time until it is time for them to go home, and that they have a significant contribution to make, in drawing out individual talent and finding an outlet for it is crucial. We are just starting on plans for performances (in house) so things have not been done in quite the same order as before. We have halved the time taken to get to this point in the development of the group the first time round: We certainly now have a happy place every Friday where people can explore ideas and feel affirmed and significant, even if they- have some way to go in making the best use of it.

The Way Forward: General Issues

<u>Ways of Designing the Group: Criteria</u>

- A peaceful and positive work environment, with the minimum of distraction.
- A structure which gives both security for all and freedom to experiment.
- Opportunities to recognise and develop the individual talents of both service-users and carers.

- A feeling of 'ownership' of the group and responsibility for its future on the part of all members.

Ways of Assessing the Progress of the Group

- Direct observation by the leader and the staff.
- Verbal discussion with members (limited by members' linguistic skills).
- Reactions of visitors, especially those with experience of other, similar groups.
- Reactions of audiences.

For suitable criteria for assessment to be established, there needs, of course, to be a consensus about the aims of the group and some sort of shared criteria between those making the assessment.

Vision for the Future

As a result of the experience of the last ten years, I would hope to establish:

- Regular discussion/training sessions for carers involved in the group, where they can air their own insecurities about music and understand the contribution that they can make to the group.
- A pool of trained musicians with professional qualifications and exceptionally open attitudes and flexible skills. This would provide variety (of instrument and of approach) for the group and make sure personal agendas did not take undue prominence. It would also act as a training ground for students. However, rigorous consultation procedures would have to be in place to ensure a consistent approach and standards and co-operation over performances, which would always play an important role for some members of the group. An extended research project exploring all available literature touching on the subject and comparing provision and possibilities for similar work in other countries.

- A project to explore the possible role of volunteers in the group a way of enriching the input into the group, providing more help for members of the group, and raising public awareness of asd.

Throughout these projects, I have acted in the belief that there are talents and abilities there to be discovered if we can only find out how. So often group members have astounded even those who know them well with their sophisticated ability and willingness to learn. I have found over and over again that it is the low expectations of what they can do which in fact are themselves limiting. This is a particular danger where they are being cared for by people whose own opportunities for participation and artistic expression have themselves been restricted. The kind of attitude that works best is a cheerful openness, to all kinds of cultural experience and a willingness to try something new without being embarrassed and self-conscious. It is extremely important to keep an open mind about what everyone can achieve and not to set false limits.

The route by which they do this must, of course, as is the case with all students, be one suited to their particular needs. Fortunately, music bypasses the normal linguistic difficulties and many people with autism can make their wishes and preferences felt in this arena more effectively than in the rest of their lives. But it is important that we listen to what they are telling us. This also demands a continual openness of mind and flexibility of approach. What is important above all is accurate and minute observation.

Training

There is a desperate need for musicians and volunteers to be trained specifically to work in this area. This work, if well done, could immeasurably enrich the lives of people with autism whose lives are already quite restricted enough by their condition and also broaden the perspectives of the students. I have had discussions on this subject with conservatoires and those running training programmes for musicians. On one occasion, several years ago, the entire first group came to Cardiff to show a group of community musicians in training how they work. This kind of 'hands on

experience' was invaluable for the students and was a great confidence-booster for the members of the group.

But, in general, I have found a reluctance among musicians to get involved in this kind of work. This is partly due, I am afraid, to plain old-fashioned snobbery amongst those who still manage to evade the tidal wave of opinion I favour; of arts provision for people with disabilities. But it is also a matter of limited education. Music colleges desperate to produce 'big name performers' (even where this is unrealistic, given the material they are dealing with), can easily overlook an opportunity such as this to enhance the horizons and employment prospects of a much larger proportion of their students. Those training to teach singing or instruments could be helped enormously by doing this work because it necessitates breaking down the learning process into tiny units and checking that each step is well-established before moving on to the next - a very valuable exercise in clarity for the teacher and one which would be very useful to young people starting out as teachers.

There is also a need for training of care staff taking part in music sessions 'as a matter of course'. Their contribution could be much enhanced if this were done and perhaps it might also increase their work satisfaction and effectiveness in other areas as well. In all the time I have been running these groups, I have had only one opportunity for a 45 minute session with care staff who work in the music sessions. This consisted of discussion of the workings of the group, what I was trying to achieve and what input I needed from the carers in the group. It made a huge difference to the quality of input from the staff at that session, but unfortunately seems to be seen as non-essential and therefore subject to the inertia of the permanently harassed and over-worked care managers!

The Future

There have been plans for a class run by the University of Birmingham to act as a pilot project for the study of music at undergraduate level. This is a new door opening that could lead to some of the residents of the community studying to degree level, which would have enormous symbolic importance for the project as a whole. As mentioned above, some members of the

community have attended a summer school accredited at Level 1 by Birmingham University and passed very well. Their presence on the course was enriching for them, their carers and for other participants on the course, many of whom had had some misgivings about the viability of the situation before the course. In the concert at the end of the course (which was being assessed for university accreditation) one of them stood up to sing and sang an eighteenth century Italian song in Italian (having refused to sing in anything but English up to that time during the course). He sang with poise and assurance which made a profound impression on everyone in the room and was a complete revelation to those of us who thought we knew him well and he earned himself a very high mark. It is events such as this that show the gains that can be made.

Four members of the groups have now started working their way through grade examinations in singing and are doing very well. (At the last session, one person took Grade 5 and passed comfortably and two others were close to a distinction mark at Grade 1). There are also plans for a video project (grant applications permitting) to give more anxious members an opportunity to perform for their family and friends without having to cope with a public performance and also to make their work more widely available. Staff at one house have recently bought equipment for enhancing sensory awareness (mirror tiles, moving light projectors and gauze canopies) which we hope to use in performance.

To summarise, this is a project which has thrown up unlooked-for and sometimes surprising musical and vocal abilities amongst adults living in traditional service provision. These abilities have shown themselves consistently over many years and in many cases have been authenticated by formal qualifications and public performances. Our experience is sometimes at odds with traditional descriptions of autism, in that it appears to show evidence of genuine creative activity. There is much that could be done to maximise the benefit to people with autism of this experience, particularly in the field of staff training and recruiting and training new musicians to work in this area.

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And finally, there was a subsequent article in the GAP journal in 2013:

The Story of a Journey: 20 Years of Self-Discovery in the Performing Arts: (published work by Sara Clethero)

Introduction

This is the story of an extraordinary group of people. They have been working together for 20 years, and this is also the story of their journey of discovery and self-discovery – of what they can do that no-one thought possible, and their capacity for self-transformation and growth. They have been accompanied on this journey by people who are employed as carers, by volunteers, and by families and friends who come to their performances and take an active interest in what they are doing. Any tribute from me to these people is inadequate, but in spite of that it should be attempted. Time after time people have turned up at a group session to find that they are expected to sing/act/take part in self-development work! That they have done so with fun and good humour as well as bringing all their individual life experience and skills which have made the project what it is today is something that I admire and am grateful for more than I can say. It is, finally, an exercise in love – in the sense of outgoing love, self affirming and affirming of the other. (agape, to give it it's more precise Greek name).

A Recent Performance

If most people were asked where they would find Dr Who's Tardis, a Victorian Tenor and Baritone duet, Blue Suede Shoes, a Greek-speaking Irish leprechaun singing Cockles and Mussels, Higgs' Bosun and a man-eating Venus fly trap all in the same programme, they might understandably be somewhat puzzled. But the answer is that these are some of the very diverse elements in the latest show put together by the music and drama group which started at Oakfield House and now involves men from three other houses as well, all run by autism west midlands. The script of the performance is given in Appendix A at the end of this paper.

History of the Group

Their history involves several projects, many of a similarly off-the-wall-nature. They have taken part in a full production of The Magic Flute at the Old Rep Theatre in Birmingham, in honour of Katherine Thomson, the grandmother of one of our members. They have acted in a Greek folk story at an international conference at the University of Birmingham. They have written and performed music and plots with the help of the rest of us, they have attended an annual summer school for singers, in some cases for the whole week, and they have studied the Alexander Technique at the highest possible level.

This year is the twentieth anniversary of the first performance, which came about because Katherine Thomson raised £100 at a fundraising evening and asked me (SC) to put on a Christmas show. I was then a freelance musician, having recently left Welsh National Opera. I now run a voice department in a university and the project has naturally been affected by my research interest in philosophy. So, at this juncture in our history, we have the opportunity to take stock of the theoretical underpinning of the work we do and assess how it fits in with the rest of the world of performance.

Therapy or Performance?

From the outset, we have been clear that what we do is not therapy. There is a very robust music therapy industry which is, no doubt, very effective for certain individuals. But what we do is not aimed at making people better, but at asking what they have to say to us - asking them to show us the inside of their heads! It is, in other words, about self-expression, but it is also about authenticity. In addition to its obvious meaning, this is a philosophical term particularly associated with Jean-Paul Sartre, the French existential philosopher.

Here is Leigh Roche describing Sartre's concept of authenticity:

> Authenticity is about using a form of expression that comes from within, not just appropriating someone else's form of expression. ... I can think of nothing more authentic than finding success in an endeavour that is an expression of one's true self, (Roche, 2012).

And she quotes John O'Donohue, Anam Cara: *Celtic Spirituality*:

> We should not force ourselves to change by hammering our lives into any predetermined shape. We do not need to operate according to the idea of a predetermined programme, plan or goals for our lives. Instead we need to practice an art of attention the inner rhythm of our days and lives which will bring about a new awareness of our own human and divine presence. (Op cit above).

That is to say, the idea of personal authenticity in performance is not a pious generalisation, but a specific and philosophically-based approach, based on a commitment to clarity and specifics.

I have learnt over the years that this takes time and effort and a concentration in the case of every member of the group which is far beyond what would normally be asked of them. Here is Leigh Roche again:

> Authenticity is the drive to achieve something from within to make your life the way you know it has to be to feel "right"; and often the labor, heart and agony involved is a necessary part of the process. (op cit, above).

So I am saying that in this context performance is about authentic self-expression, which is self-affirming for the participants and makes an impact on the audience.

The Alexander Technique

The discipline we have used for this group has been The Alexander Technique (AT). As an "alternative therapy" (most of it's protagonists would say that it is not a therapy but an educational process) it is very patchily regulated, and we have felt the effects of this, with the occasional rogue practitioner/organisation on a local level. But by engaging with Alexander Technique International (ATI) and teachers from Boston, Massachusetts, we have found teachers with a worldwide reputation who have benefitted our work enormously, (The ATI On-Line Library, 2016).[13]

What we have found is that the AT gives people the time and space to be authentically themselves. By a meticulous process of becoming aware

[13] See this website for some excellent articles on the provenance of the Technique, and contact details for reputable teachers.

of unnecessary effort and the physical effects of anxiety, they are able to attain a freshness and freedom, physically and, by extension, emotionally and spiritually, which is exhilarating for them, gives them more space to be themselves artistically, and is very moving to witness. You may have seen a person with autism from some distance away and realised that their general stance and physical movement give away the fact that they have some kind of condition. It is this physicalising, often of inner distress, by, maybe pulling the shoulders forward and pulling the head down, which is profoundly disabling over many years, and which can be addressed by the AT. When working in this way, service users begin to look “normal” (ie like anyone else their age). Given the visible physical benefits and relief of stress associated with this as well as the vocal and intellectual benefits, there seems to be a clear case for its use in these circumstances!

The AT also has a strong effect in making the groups more cohesive, apparently by circumventing the classic social awareness deficit of autism. It appears that, once people let go of the physical signs of anxiety, they are able to be in a community or group in a different way, which is more profound and more fundamental to them as people. The fact that they have been unable to interact on the normal social levels to varying extents may mean that these more profound communications may have been developed more than they are by many “normal” people.

As a tool for enhancing vocal ability, the Alexander Technique is without parallel, and is standard in music colleges in the UK and elsewhere. It is explicitly acknowledged by Lesley Garrett, the opera singer, for example (‘In the mid-80s, she actually lost her voice, which she regained with the help of Alexander Technique. “You sing with your whole body and mine was very weak,” she recalls,’ (BBC, 2001)). Over time, I have become much more confident in spending more time in allowing people to find their balance physically and to take the pressure off themselves at the physical level as well as other levels. We do this by talking about AT related issues like not pulling down and closing in the chest so that people can breathe more easily. I stress the affirmation of their right to be themselves and the importance of using their physical set up in a poised way, not necessarily fitting in to what they think other people expect. All of us have distorted

physical ideas of what is an appropriate response to any given situation. That is the fundamental thesis of the Alexander Technique. In people with autism this seems to be more acute, presumably because of the differences in their physical self-awareness. However, what we have observed is that once they let go of these ideas of how they should be, their retention of that changed awareness is much more reliable than the rest of us. There are people in the drama and singing group to whom I can say, “Do you remember what (some AT teacher in the past) did?” and they will physically return to the mode they had in that lesson, even though the original experience might be several years ago. (This obviously has an implication for the cost-effectiveness of the technique. Something that has benefits lasting years is better value for money than something which produces fleeting feelings of being better!). Most of them suffer considerably from the stress of being around other people and apparently find it a great relief to share this stillness.

The Process

With all this in mind, I want to describe the process or working out of the approach described above to this particular project. Our guiding principle is to use the creative impulses and insights of the service users in the group as far as is possible. This is obviously a priority because they do not have other options, in many cases, for expressing themselves. The second priority is to give a platform for the creative abilities of the carers. Although they live in the community, they may also, in some cases, have had limited opportunities for self-expression. These twin aims help to form a community of creativity, in which every individual is encouraged to take responsibility for their own poise and creative input through AT–related material. Within this context, we negotiate (between people who like to talk all the time and others who find this stressful, for example) and do creative work.

There cannot, in this situation, be a fixed, finished formulation of the finished product. People do not always come ready to start work immediately (carers as well as service users) and take time to get into the right mind-set. For the final rehearsal of the Higgs Bosun show, one group arrived 45 minutes late, with the carers having mistaken which area of the

city the rehearsal was in. These carers had never attended a rehearsal for this show before and had no idea what was going on. They then left early, taking three very motivated service users with them!! In this situation the normal process of setting a show and then rehearsing it is open to constant question.

Post Existential Philosophy – Derrida

There is, however, a philosophical current which can be used to conceptualise this situation, which derives directly from Heidegger and Husserl, the architects of modern existentialism. They are the architects of the thinking on which Sartre, referred to above, based himself. Although, of course, he disagreed with them over some aspects and developed others in a different direction. The crux of Derrida's approach is described thus by Adam Schatz, reviewing a biography of Derrida by Benoit Peeters:

> ... you have to bid farewell to the idea of a stable, unified self. That notion is one of those reassuring fictions – like ... Heidegger's "being", [and] Levi-Strauss's structures – we have devised in order to escape difference and find some anchor, some "meaning of meanings." We would be better off, he suggested, if we abandoned this search for foundations, and these god-terms, in favour of a Nietschean affirmation, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and the innocence of becoming. ... This affirmation then determines the non- centre otherwise than as a loss of the centre, And it plays without security, (2012, pp. 11-12).

This is an uncannily accurate account of the way this group operates. And the innocence of becoming is one of the best ways I have come across of describing the freshness and deep originality of these men and the work they produce (provided that we have set up the conditions as described above). This means that we have to be continually open to changes in the plot and ways of working. By normal standards, of course, this would be nerve-wracking, but we have developed a way of riding the waves and picking up and running with ideas as they arise. There is a script, and it is rehearsed, but it is always, even during performance, open to question and improvisation.

This does not mean that we do not have strict routines and structures built into the work. Indeed, we could not operate without them. We have strict time limits for the sessions, for example, and clear responsibilities within the group for moving furniture, chores and consideration for other members of the group. But the creative work is at a different level to these devices for making life possible, and has a freshness and innocence partly because it is independent of the usual rules and structures of performance. People are set free to express themselves, and this freedom is further enhanced by their embracing of the demands of the Alexander Technique.

An Existential View of Autism

There is a passage which describes an existentialist view of human nature which is particularly relevant to this issue:

> Nietzsche toys with the idea that ... the ultimate “truth” about the world might be what we would regard as Chaos, that is, the complete absence of what we consider order and manageability. In the end, we really have no reason to suppose that reality must be designed in such a way as to satisfy our craving for intellectual mastery. ... Nature is under no obligation to measure up to our intellectual standards.

This is the real point of this whole project. We have no right to expect that people with autism should fit into our concept of humanity. We have to learn to see them as they are. And a platform for their creative work seems to be the obvious vehicle for this. If we can make space for their imaginative responses to the world, it would seem that we have a much better chance of understanding them.

Of course, a more or less obsessional desire for order is often a feature of autism. I remember a talk by Donna Williams, (1995), in which she described the desperate search for order by someone who inhabits a world where all stimuli are of undifferentiated importance, and they therefore feel an imperative to respond equally to everything. In other words, the desire for order is a response to a world which may be subjectively totally without order, and therefore, for the subject, the only way to make life liveable. But this does not mean that we cannot embrace a lack

of structure or fluid structures at a creative level. The anxiety for manageable structures is a real need for all human beings. But it is a prerequisite for creativity, not a replacement for it. Our aim is to meet this need and to support our people in realising their potential beyond this basic need.

Creativity and Language

Another area in which people with autism may help to illuminate our preconceptions is that of the use of language. It is well known, of course, that the relationship of someone with autism to language is different from what we might consider the norm. Words are used, broadly speaking, not as a means of self expression, but as formulae for negotiating situations on a fairly basic level. It would, in my experience, be a gross error to assume that you could judge the intellectual ability or many other important aspects of a person with autism from their use of language alone. One of the important indicators of how a person feels and their relationship to the world is always their physicality. This is the importance of the Alexander Technique, in that it sets the physicality of a person free from intellectual, unexamined assumptions. This obviously becomes much more important if one of the other ways of understanding someone, their use of language, is severely compromised.

If the search for meaning through language is doomed, as Derrida maintains[14], it appears that people with autism might be able to show us another layer of human creativity, beyond their linguistic limitations. and drawing on another layer of human experience. We ignore this wisdom at our peril.

References

Guignon, C and Perebom, D, (Eds) (1995) Existentialism: Basic Writings

Schatz, A (2012) 'Not in the mood', London Review of Books, 22 November, p. 11 and 12

[14] Derrida's argument was that Western thought from Plato to Rousseau to Lévi-Strauss had been hopelessly entangled in the illusion that language might provide us with access to a reality beyond language, beyond metaphor: an unmediated experience of truth and being which he called 'presence' (Schatz, 2012, p. 12).

Williams, D (1996) Talk at Kids West Midlands, September 1996

Appendix A: *In Pursuit of the Elusive Particle (with Apologies to Professor Higgs)*

A show for our friends to show you what we've been doing!
Higgs' Boson: a sub-atomic particle which, it seems, came into being? A fraction of a trillionth of a second after the big bang, and which makes matter hang together.
John's Dance Tune No. 2
Narrator: What would happen if Higgs Boson stopped doing its job? We'd all fall apart! In fact the idea gives a whole new meaning to falling apart.
Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah verses 1,3
Narrator: Sometimes people have tried asking God to stop things falling apart. Some people turn to fashion!!
Blue Suede Shoes
Narrator: One thing's certain, the journey continues whether we're on board or not! So we'd better get on board!
Animals Lie in Wait: Fred's Scary Music.
Dr Who theme
All travel to Hadron Collider in underworld in Tardis. Tardis music changes into Niebelheim music. Trolls all hammer at rocks and sing Whistle While You Work!
Narrator: No, no. You need the Hadron Collider for sub-atomic particles. Picks and shovels are so yesterday!
Dwarfs and visitors look puzzled and scratch their heads. Then everything goes dark and a big voice says:
Big Voice: Today, the physicists of the CERN laboratory make history. We are going to start up the Hadron Collider and reproduce the conditions just after the big Bang.
A Small Voice: If this particle started the world and we don't quite understand how, mightn't this machine finish the world off?

Big Voice: Quiet! We are increasing our understanding by means of scientic experiment. In this way, we will free mankind from the need for belief in God.

Small Voice: I didn't think science and God were quite the same sort of thing, but I'm sure you're right.

Big Voice: Stand back, everybody!

Big noise and ashing lights. Then long silence.

Michael: OK So what do we do now, clever clogs?

Big Voice: We rescue the exploited workforce and go back to Earth to start utopia. **Everybody**: All right, then.

Tardis won't start.

John: Oh dear! All that energy has blown its fuses (fiddles with fuse box). There. That's better!

Tardis starts off with everyone on board, some hanging on to the outside. Very windy on journey back (Use fan for wind?)

Then the Tardis stops with a bump.

John: Oh, it's run out of fuel. We'll have to walk from here.

They all pile out and trog off through the jungle. Following signposts saying "Earth, this way". Then the signpost starts pointing the other way and up in the air.

Michael: We're lost!

Animals roar again.

Fred: Moseley bells music calms them down

John: Look out for the Venus' Fly Trap!

John: And the tickle trap. It squirts liquid dangerous to humans ... but if you tickle it, it let's go!

Scary music as they negotiate Venus Fly trap. And tickle trap.

Adrian: This is all very well. But how do we get home?!

Jason: We cross over the water!

My Bonny Lies Over The Ocean

They find a flower: *Edelweiss*

Michael: Yes, but we still don't know how to get home! Let's ask him –that funny thing there!!

Points to Adam as Sloth. Sloth Song. Adam takes over on verse 3 and fades out.

Michael: Or you can ask us!

Tenor and Baritone

John: 'When e're you meet a crocodile'

Michael (*pointing to the crocodile*): He'll tell us the way home.

Somewhere Beyond The Sea (*instrumental*); *Finlandia*

The End

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To come back to the recent history of the groups, the following is an account of a very recent episode in one of the groups' history.

Session Nov 2015

Arrive at hall where sessions are normally held. It is on a main artery out of the city centre, which is walking distance from two of the three residential care communities served by the group, Speak to the organiser of the hall, who will play the guitar solo for the song

"Just Another Brick in the Wall" for the performance for friends and family the following week. He is relaxed about it. Talk to visiting electrician working for the church and explain that social interaction makes the service users who are members of the group anxious, so it is better to keep conversation with the service users to a minimum.

We set up the larger of the two rooms for the rehearsal. One of the service users helps me to move the electric piano into place. (We normally use an upright acoustic piano in another room). This is our second rehearsal in this space. It is a large, echoey room, with no soft furnishings, measuring about 25m x 7m. It helps that there are no windows out to the street, because any human activity outside distracts the performers. We are able to change the lighting by drawing the curtains. This is our second session in this room. We normally meet in the adjoining lounge, which is smaller (about 6x6m) and has more soft furniture, which deadens some of

the echo. Many of the men in the group (and some of the volunteers) are hypersensitive to sound.

The service users (2-5 from each house, all men at the moment, with one or two carers per group) and their carers arrive with a purposeful air. One of the care managers starts to set up a computer to project images for the performance. It takes some time to sort out where people will sit for the performance. They tend to settle in discrete groups as far away from other people as possible usually around the edge of the room. It is quite usual for the service-users, and the visitors with an asd, to have no sense at all of their physical presence in a room. To get them to face outwards and direct themselves towards people in the audience is an enormous amount of work.

I get the mother of one group member to sit in to represent the audience. Even apart from the issues described above, singing out to an audience is an unfamiliar experience for the group: they normally work in a circle, so that they can hear and see each other.

(I once worked in a group with someone with an asd who was going to sing a solo in a major concert. He was a member of a weekly singing group in the community which I ran, which had several members who were very skilled and experienced singers. Week after week, the other group members pointed out to him that he was waving his hands around, looking down at the floor, or moving forward towards the audience without any reason to do so. I was in the audience for the concert itself, in a large theatre in south Wales, when this singer stood still, looked at his audience and did not wave his arms. He completely won over the listeners, who were then able to respond to his essential vulnerability and the courage of his performance.)

I start the group by asking everyone to stand and talking them through an Alexander Technique (AT)–based voice warm-up. I talk about the need to soften the body (many of the service users have very recognisable physical patterns of anxiety and tension which manifests itself as varying degrees of rigidity). I talk calmly and as quietly as is practical, revisiting the key concepts repeatedly. We talk about breathing softly and calmly, and letting the voice rest on the breath. We talk about the key AT

concept of the poise of the head in relation to the neck, including an exercise involving looking up at the ceiling and then dropping the nose to momentarily give a new freedom in this relationship.

This part of the session is helped by the fact that we have had a visit from an AT teacher from Edinburgh two weeks previously. So the group have recent memories of this experience to draw on. They are able to respond to this work viscerally without necessarily relating verbally to what is being said. It can, however, be difficult to find an AT teacher who is able to relate to this need, as it doesn't fit comfortably into any of the traditional modes of AT work, such as the STAT training of hands on – getting people in and out of chairs. (See Chapter 2 on AT for a more detailed analysis of this problem.)

The carers are asked to take part in this as well, since the group dynamic needs to be one of concentration and mutual support. Most of the carers take to this very naturally and benefit visibly from the work. When a carer does not take part or, at least, pay consistent attention to what is going on, I have to gently and persistently remind them that visibly withdrawing attention from the group (and, in extreme cases, doing personal business on a mobile phone) disrupts the work and undermines the commitment of the service users. Many of the carers are shy about taking part in music activities, for personal and /or historical or cultural reasons. But, in most cases, they overcome this reticence over time. There is a matey, even ribald atmosphere between some of them, which appears to dissipate the accumulated strain of the work in other situations. It is very hard work giving 24hr. care to people who, as a result of their condition, often react with great anxiety, or even aggression, to anything unexpected in their lives. The mutual support which the carers give each other in this way is hugely important.

We sing 5-note scales and whole octave scales on different vowels. Most members of the group can pitch accurately. One of the features of autistic spectrum disorders is, after all, a very literal exactitude. But that same exactitude can mean that they are very easily misled by other voices, particularly by me, since the pitch of my voice is an octave higher than theirs are in terms of absolute pitch. Most of them are baritones: we are

fortunate in having an assiduous volunteer (who has also had an asd diagnosis) who is an experienced singer at post graduate level. He is a baritone, so members of the group can match his pitch without having to make adjustments. Several of the service-users who do not speak (or who speak only repetitively and formulaically) sing, at least intermittently, pretty much on pitch, especially when the whole room is singing. One of the more able members of the group has passed his Grade 5 singing exam. The hardest voices to incorporate into the whole are those which are unusually low, since there is no-one for them to imitate.

There are two tenors, one of whom is extremely accomplished and would be an asset to any singing group. He is also extremely precise, as one would expect, (see above). When we are singing a pop song which I do not know so well, he takes charge and steers me through it, signalling repeats and moves to a new section etc. He can sustain the tenor part in any 4-part arrangement, once he has heard it and understood it. The other tenor is much more subject to obsessive and repetitive behaviour. He has a very secure high tenor voice, and can also sing falsetto very easily. It is, of course, more urgent to make use of his talents, since his daily life is even more circumscribed by his more obvious disabilities.

The story has been devised by one of the carers and concerns rich and poor overcoming their differences and combining their efforts. He has put together a series of slides which illustrate the theme, and we have drawn up a list of songs of all genres, to make a reasonably coherent story. Several of the songs, but not all, have been sung by the group before. They very much enjoy the familiarity of singing what they know, even pieces that they have known for years. Repetition of the familiar seems to give them a sense of security and allay their anxieties a little.

We start with the second half of the show, since we have spent less time on it recently. It starts with “Va pensiero” from *Nabucco* (in English), and we spend some time sorting out a way of keeping everyone in time, since the accompaniment is an arpeggio figure and doesn’t have such an obvious pulse as the pop music which we sing, for example. One of the more able guys is keen to conduct, but he cannot physically reproduce a beat. One of the carers does a reasonable job, but then realises she won’t

be there for the performance. Another service user, who also plays the piano, agrees to do it. They have been singing this piece for years and know the bass and tenor harmonies. There are no women, however, to carry the soprano and alto parts, so I have to do the best I can with this.

The piece continues with the Gendarmes duet for tenor and baritone, with the volunteer on the bass part and the two tenors on the top. The volunteer has bought policemen's helmets and truncheons with him! The singers are secure with this musically, and enjoy the irony of the text. One of the tenors struggles to follow the text, but manages better when I point to the words as they sing them. He enjoys tackling it and it is worth the effort to give him an outlet for his talents.

We have a version of a "fast food song", very loosely based on a popular song about fast food outlets – complete with silly voices ("Can I take your order?") and demands for "Chicken chow mein" "Kentucky fried chicken" and other foods which are familiar to members of the group. One of the service users plays the piano for this, which takes the form of a chant with piano, and with orders for various dishes being shouted over the basic simple tune, based on two chords.

The person who plays piano anxiously demands that he has time to play his own music on the electric keyboard. He prefers the acoustics of the conventional piano, an old upright, in the other room, but gets very frustrated with its technical imperfections. We arrange for him to play his own music at the end of the session, when the others have left (they need to be accompanied, whereas he can walk to the next venue on his own). He speaks to me in German[15], which he speaks with a high level of exactitude and a very authentic accent; this has become an established mode of communication between the two of us . He translates the conversation for the rest of the room, but there is an element of privacy about these exchanges which is all too rare in these men's lives: he will sometimes say things about how he is feeling in these conversations which he would not say in English.

[15] He studies German on his own, and has reached a high level of conversational skill . He seems to find it comforting to converse in a different language to that being used the rest of the time. He then translates for the rest of the group, but, of course, he has control over how he translates what has been said. (SJC)

The group finally sings “Happiness” which is going to be the finale for the show. It is hard for them to negotiate the words for the verses (which are pretty superficial), but they make a good stab at it. The song has the advantage that it is familiar to most of the people in the group, even though it is dated by modern standards. This is a familiar situation: many members of the group are very attached to songs that they have known at some stage of their childhood or teenage years. It is difficult to know why they have latched on to some music and not other pieces, but I don’t know their family histories in detail.

They leave on time – they would find any uncertainty in this matter very difficult – calm and contented. We leave as old friends, with hugs and embraces from many of them. It surprises me that they value this affection – it is not normally considered part of the social repertoire of people with an asd. But anything that makes life calmer and easier is to be valued, and it is, on my side as well, a sincere expression of my friendship for them.

What Has Changed Since 2013?

1. The most obvious change is that the script for this piece was written by one of the carers, whereas in 2013, I wrote it myself.

2. It is also much shorter, and almost all the pieces in it are there because they have been suggested by members of the group. The Gendarmes Song was suggested by me to provide an outlet for the talents of these particular singers and Va pensiero is there because it gives them all a chance to sing classical music in harmony.

3. *Just Another Brick in the Wall* was completely unknown to me until it was suggested by someone in the group. The (very angry) words never fail to evoke a lusty response from all, both carers and service-users.

4. The other significant change is that I am more tolerant and accepting of the differences between the members of the group - both carers and of

the service-users. The concert will be less of an occasion than it would have been two years ago, (we are not hiring in any visiting musicians, for example) but it will be more representative of their thoughts and feelings. And people will have more fun. There is more of a willingness to “let their hair down” and sing raucous songs and do a “take-off” of the assistants in a fast food outlet than there would have been two years ago.

5. Changes in my situation: There have been profound changes in the group, partly as a result of my own personal development. I am two years older, I have lost my husband, which is only one of several profound family and professional changes, and have begun a process of Buddhist meditation and regular Alexander Technique lessons.

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To return, then, to the changes in the group since 2013 outlined above:

The surprising thing about this script is that it is explicitly political. The foregrounding of *Just another Brick in the wall* can be read as anger at their situation, and their powerlessness. There is rarely any explicitly political discussion in the group, from one week to another, although there is an implicit understanding that doing the work we do at all implies a political position –that people matter because of their humanity, and not merely because of their usefulness, for example. There is also an implicit understanding that the carers are doing a very skilled job, requiring much higher than normal levels of commitment and personal sacrifice, for an extremely low rate of pay (the national minimum wage). This is treated with a sort of resigned cynicism by all of us, and I have very rarely heard any explicitly political interpretations of this – and certainly not party-political. One might say that the script lacks political realism and refinement, but this is not the point. It is the expression of something which appears to be a deeply held point of view. And it embodies an incipient anger which is the more eloquent for being so unworked-out and, even still in the dream stage.

The lyrics of “Just Another Brick in the Wall” are:

We don't need no education
We don't need no thought control
No dark sarcasm in the classroom
Teachers leave them kids alone
Hey teacher leave them kids alone
All in all it's just another brick in the wall
All in all you're just another brick in the wall.[16]

I don't think any other song that the group has sung has evoked such an enthusiastic response. No doubt this is helped by the fact that it was so popular at a time when many of those in the group were teenagers. But the gusto with which it was sung seemed to indicate more than a simply historical connection with the text, from the volunteer, who had been privately educated in a famously liberal institution, to all of the (state-educated) city-based carers.

The fact that the songs were all suggested by the group partly reflects the fact that I am much more relaxed about popular music and other lyrics that I would have previously considered unworthy of their efforts. I still have a commitment to exposing them all to harmonies and musical patterns which they would not otherwise have encountered, both for reasons of extending their cultural palette and to increase their neurological repertoire

[16] The following political background to this song may also have resonances for this group of people, who are, perhaps, also oppressed, though in a less obvious and more subtle way:
Life imitated art in early 1980 when South African school children, fed up with an inferior apartheid-era education system, took to chanting the lyrics of Pink Floyd's "Another Brick in the Wall (Part II)." The song, with its memorable line stating, "We don't need no education," had held the top spot on the local charts for almost three months, a total of seven weeks longer than it did in America.
By May 2, 1980, the South African government had issued a ban on "Another Brick in the Wall," creating international headlines. "That apartheid government imposed a cultural blockade, so to speak, on certain songs – including mine," Pink Floyd's Roger Waters told the Guardian. "... People were really driven to frenzies of rage by it," Waters later said. "They thought that when I said, 'We don't need no education,' that it was a kind of crass, revolutionary standpoint – which, if you listen to it in context, it clearly isn't at all. On the other hand, it got some strange reactions from people that you wouldn't expect. The Archbishop of Canterbury went on record saying that if it's very popular with schoolkids, then it must in some way be expressing some feelings that they have themselves. If one doesn't like it, or however one feels about it, one should take the opportunity of using it as a starting point for discussion – which was exactly how I felt about it."
Pink Floyd's use of actual schoolchildren to convey those thoughts certainly made its sentiments all the more identifiable for the young. A group of more than 20 kids from London's Islington Green School, around the corner where engineer Nick Griffiths was adding sound effects to The Wall, were asked to participate in the session. Griffiths then tracked their voices multiple times, giving "Another Brick in the Wall (Part II)" a monumental send off. For singing on the album, the children got tickets to a Pink Floyd concert, and copies of both The Wall and the single.

of brain connections And they know that. But their choices take a more prominent place in what we do than previously, and this lends coherence and confidence to the group. They are singing music that is more a statement of who they are, in other words.

But this is not simply an individual expression of preferences. For all their systemic social difficulties, this performance will be an expression of who they are as a group, and of their shared lives and concerns, and also of the close ties which bind their lives, not only of needs which are being met, but of personal authenticity both in the case of the carers, constrained as they are by low pay, long and anti-social hours and low expectations of them by institutional management, and of the service-users, living their lives with all crucial decisions taken by others , subject to all the usual limited social judgements and lack of perception of others and with no possibility of ever being able to escape from that.

This performance will be an expression of individuality and confidence in the face of all the odds.

Further Sessions: 18th December, 2015

This session, the last before Christmas, was very relaxed. Men from one smaller house arrived with their carer, who told me later in the session that their manager had left. We all know how difficult the service users find changes of this kind: they are desperately attached to what they know. But, on this occasion, there was a new confidence about the demeanour of the young woman carer accompanying these men. She was making decisions with them and they all seemed very comfortable with that, and with not having to refer every decision back to the manager, with all the attendant uncertainties and lack of confidence which that involves.

But carers can feel desperate about a lack of consistent support, sometimes to the extent that it affects their health. We did not discuss the consequences of staff changes. There is a tacit understanding that any comment would raise the anxieties of the service users. She laughed and said that all their journeys had been booked for the next twelve months and

that this had allayed any anxieties they might have had. This is certainly the situation on the surface, but I see, from knowing the service-users for longer than she has, that there will be other consequences of these changes, both positive and negative.

Since there were tables and chairs out in a conference style format, we decided to use this layout rather than moving all the furniture. In fact, since we decided to discuss future projects, it helped to promote an atmosphere of equals. Some of the more verbal service users joined in vigorously. But there was also a concentrated atmosphere amongst all the participants, which could not have been there if there had not been a community of interest and concentration on the part of the non-verbal participants as well.

We had discussions about the form that the next show might take. There are songs which people want to sing which have been put on one side until the Christmas project is over, such as “I’m walking in the air”, which many of them know. The piano player is keen to do the Fast Food Song again, which might make sense because one of the main protagonists was ill when the performance took place. Some of the care workers very much enjoy the technical side of theatre work, and enjoy working in a fully equipped theatre such as we sometimes hire from a local boarding school in the summer holidays, another issue which we discussed in this session. This discussion also had the benefit of including some of the newer carers, as well as those from care houses further away, who sometimes don’t get to the sessions.

And a More Recent Group Session:

The group was preparing for a performance at the end of the year. The piece consists of a series of songs linked by a (fairly off-the-wall) narrative about a journey through the seasons of the year. The schema was produced by one of the care managers, and gives him and the other staff a sense of being more in charge of an art form where they could easily feel excluded by a lack of specialist knowledge. It begins with *Four Seasons In One Day* sung by a bunch of people going off on a journey to the seaside

(*Oh, I Do Like To Be Beside The Seaside* - sung with great gusto!) ending up in a forest (with an improvised piano vocal piece):

I'm lost in the forest –
What'm I gonna do?
Save me from the entity which has trapped me in the forest[17]

(by a member of the group, sung in a rough "rock" voice).

Another member of the group sings *Yesterday*, which he sang in another setting. This time he is working with piano accompaniment. He adapts, apparently effortlessly, to the new situation. This is someone who uses speech only in a very restricted and formulaic way, but can sing words as eloquent as this extremely well. He is a natural tenor, so the higher notes are no problem to him. Because his social interaction through speech is very limited, communication through singing is extremely important to him (and to his family).

We continue with a version of *Walking In The Air* with another service user taking the part of the "mighty monster rising from the deep" with great relish, and others flying around representing the boy and the Snowman. The words of this are quite complex, and the music copies have complicated repeats and jumps to a different section which can be difficult to follow. I am reluctant to assume and reinforce a lower level of musical literacy by providing words rather than music copies. But, on the other hand, care workers may be pitched into these sessions having never seen or certainly not having been asked to follow a piece of printed music before. I have developed an approach of trying to put people at their ease by telling them that they can just "make a noise" and it will be ok. And this does, in fact, work. It is more important that they join in, however raucously, than that they are "accurate". Accuracy, especially of pitch, almost always comes with time. I have now developed a way of calling out the words just before they occur, while playing the accompaniment. This reassures those who may feel lost, either because they have no experience in music or because

[17] It is, perhaps, reasonable to suppose that these words, which he devised and has repeated consistently for more than a year, reflect his own experience.

they are not primarily verbal in their dealings with the world, that they can join in, and that they will not be made to feel stupid or be criticised.

We continue with a raucous version of *She'll Be Coming Round The Mountain* with four different care users taking solo lines and everyone joining in with the chorus "Aye, aye, Yippee, yippee aye" with great gusto. The narration is done by a volunteer with the group with a very forthright voice and a lively sense of humour, and we will re-use the backcloths used for an earlier music event this year; one of the care managers will put together a set of images which will be projected onto a screen as part of the show.

We also sing a song composed for them by Duncan Fielden (of Birmingham Conservatoire) which is one of the few songs one of the participants with a very limited range of musical responses, (but enormous joie de vivre) sings. It is very skilfully constructed to promote rhythmic and melodic accuracy, with words which are both comic and engaging, (see Appendix 8).

Further Session 4 November, 2016

We were joined on this occasion by two more men, who live more independently in accommodation run by the same organisation. They know several members of the group from previous contact – they are all about the same age, and many went to the same school. These two are very forthcoming. One plays the guitar, and was very happy to discuss chords, and possibilities for playing. They know many of the rock/folk tunes we are working on. It changed the dynamic of the group from that of people being "cared for" which however well-meaning, puts them in a passive role – the opposite of realizing their existential potential, to a group of men sharing an enthusiasm, fairly raucously, but with obvious potential. They all joined in round the piano to sing Horse with No Name and the tuning was noticeably more accurate on the second and third renderings.

Relation to the Theme of the Thesis

The aim of this thesis is not to "prove" a theory. There is no proposition here which is falsifiable. Rather, I am asking what are the features of the

description above which would support an existential interpretation, or "frame" of these events. This cannot be established beyond doubt. But it may provide a helpful lens to view events and a means to more effective action.

That is to say, if we can understand the meaning of these sessions and performances for the people involved, we will be able to take more effective action, increase their enjoyment of these events, and make better use of scarce resources.

The neuroscientist Francisco Varela (whose theory is used by Rachel Zahn to give a theoretical background to the Alexander Technique – see below) responded to these issues. He

> began to respond to an impasse in the field of cognitive science. He insisted that laboratory science had to develop methods for experimenting with and validating awareness of our lived experience, for without it we would never successfully create a full definition of consciousness. The simple word 'experience', which we use so often, divides modern science, as it has done since the seventeenth century. (my underlining), (Zahn, 2005).

Varela himself embraces 'This down-to-earth pragmatic approach,' and further:

> On the whole, what emerges from this material is that, in spite of all kinds of received ideas, repeated unreflectingly in recent literature of philosophy of mind and cognitive science, first-person methods are available and can be fruitfully brought to bear on a science of consciousness. The proof of the pudding is not in a priori arguments, but in actually pointing to explicit examples of practical knowledge, in case studies.

And he refers to literature which:

> addresses the 'explanatory gap' between computational and phenomenological mind, ... variously phrased, as we already said, in terms of subjectivity, consciousness, or experience. (Varela and Shear, 1999).

I hope that the first person experience and case studies offered here can forward this project in this way.

Concluding Philosophical Reflection

As discussed above, Adriana Cavarero reflects eloquently on these issues:

> The sphere of the vocal implies the ontological plane and anchors it to the existence of singular beings who invoke one another contextually. ... the voice manifests the unique being of each human being, and his or her spontaneous self-communication according to the rhythms of a sonorous relation, (2005, p. 173).

There is a particular urgency to acknowledging the “embodied existent” in Cavarero’s words - of the ”singular beings” described in this chapter, as already described, because their daily lives are so circumscribed, sometimes necessarily, and because they usually have no other opportunities to give voice in this way.

A consideration of this group is also important in positioning this thesis in a general human context, because they necessarily live in a cut-off and separated community, and because their normal communication with the rest of us is so limited, in the conventional sense. That is to say, they represent a kind of purified case-study, unmuddied by educational, socio-political and class-specific considerations. They are, perhaps, a purer example of what it is to be human. My submission is, that if the frame suggested in this thesis works for them, it may be more generally applicable as well. To say that they are human beings whose voice should be heard and received by the rest of us is not a pious well-meaning generality, but a concrete, weekly necessity which also informs the needs of other singers who are able to live in the wider community.

If cultural overlay gets in the way of what music is, perhaps those who are not good at the cultural skills of language and artistic finesse, are a better guide to its real nature?!

Chapter 4
The Voice in Opera

What is the Real Philosophical Issue?

Much has been written, by Žižek and Dolar for example, about the philosophical implications of operatic texts and plots, some of it with a specifically existentialist direction – for example on Schelling's '... opposition of the pro-ontological real (*sic*) of drives (the ground of being) and the ontologically and fully constituted being itself ...' (Žižek and Dolar, 2002, p. 167). Wagner, particularly, seems to provoke endless speculation about the metaphysical and social orientation of his texts. It is, of course, interesting to read a critical appraisal of Wagner's relation to the thinkers of his time, and the intellectual context of his works and their intended impact, especially as these intentions are encapsulated in the continuing Bayreuther Festspiel and it's home, the Festspielhaus. But the over-riding factor for Wagner devotees seems to be the impact of the sound of the music (especially the voices – see below). To those who are there, it's almost as though this fact is so self-evident that it is never stated!

The following is an excerpt from a fairly typical (and sympathetic) review of Barenboim's recording of the Ring Cycle at Bayreuth, filmed in 1991, a production in which I sang at the beginning of its run.

> The strings are, to bring on a metaphor from rock music, a wall of sound, and Barenboim uses them as a cushion for the operas. The rest of the instruments are part of the fabric and always audible. The listener is entirely enveloped. The volume never has to be adjusted. ... The performances "sound" live, (Levine, 2007).

Levine clearly assumes here that being "entirely enveloped" is what listeners are interested in, although, how possible it is to be enveloped by a recording is, perhaps, not clear, especially as any recording will be a compromise with Wagner's original idea for the Bayreuther Festspiel, performed in a very specific building and acoustic.

Classic FM advises its listeners to “prepare to get lost in some of the most intoxicatingly sublime Romantic music ever composed,” (Classic FM). This advice is offering a pretty straightforward pleasure from listening to opera – which, no doubt, Barthes or Žižek would interpret sexually. What is missing, (and perhaps the writers of the above would say that only the simplest layer of meaning is attempted here), is the fundamental, human importance of the sound of the human voice, representing the whole being and not just the sexuality of the recipient.

Both these reviews, on different levels of musical detail, assume that the listener wants – or needs - to “get lost in” or be “entirely enveloped” by the sound. What both ignore is the specificity of the human voice(s) involved and the challenge and even the philosophical force of being accosted by the human voice in this way.

Many reviews of Wagner operas are, it appears, aimed at cognoscenti, who want to compare the perceived merits and demerits of performances, and who want to imagine themselves “entirely enveloped” in sound as if they had been in the house . But to me, as a participant, it drastically misses the point, and I am not sure it captures the real concerns of those devotees who travel to the far reaches of Franken to hear Wagner in its original acoustic. The point, for those taking part and those who worked with them, was the presence of the voice. I was often surprised how unconcerned Jewish members of the company were , for example, about the politics of Wagner, and his history of anti-semitism – it was the voice embedded in the music, and the way it spoke to us all which interested us. This was also true of children. I remember a nine-year-old girl emerging from the first act of Götterdämmerung (one and a half hours) as fresh as a daisy, having been engrossed by the music and having received it, of course, uncritically.

The only thing which interested me, when I stood night after night in the wings listening to the singers before my next entrance, was the impact of the sound they were making - a visceral combination of language (the sounds and poetic shape of the words and their trajectory) and of pitch and rhythm. The performers were a close community – away from home in a remote corner of southern Germany for three months, and I never heard

anything in normal everyday conversation about the work to dispel the impression that this was the main concern. This was not due to a lack of knowledge or ability to distinguish other features: there was a great mix of academic and other backgrounds.

What the Festspielhaus is built to promote (a wooden interior with no soft furnishings and an unusual arrangement of the orchestra) is a particular impact of the sound on the ear. And this, rather than Wagner's neurotic relationships with sex, Jewishness, politics and everything else, was the main concern amongst the people I knew who lived and worked at Bayreuth during the summer season. And of course this sound can only exist at that moment in time – however much the financial interests of the recording industry need to promote another view.

To understand what is, in fact going on, we need to harness Cavarero's and Barthes' insights into the direct reception of φωνή. This is illustrated at the end of this chapter by an account of a young Welsh tenor, with no formal training, who unfailingly moves audiences - experienced or not - with the sound of his voice.

Alice Coote

On May 19th 2014, mezzo-soprano Alice Coote responded to a review in The Telegraph of a Glyndebourne production of Der Rosenkavalier talking about the "intractable physique" of the singer singing Octavian, and describing her as "dumpy of stature". One might consider that this kind of description of a young woman who has the courage to perform such a demanding role in public is simply appallingly rude. But Alice Coote homes in on the importance of the sound of the voice. She writes very interestingly and passionately on *Slipped Disc* as follows, about the effect of:

> a voice, maybe of recognisable or greatness of tone, that has been trained for decades as an athlete and musician, launches its instrument – part of the human body and identity- upon the greatest and most challenging music that has been written for the human singing voice, (Coote, 2014).

And, in relation to conventional expectations and portrayals of characters on the operatic stage, she writes:

> Opera is NOT about that. (ie “a conventionally beautiful or attractive person”). It is about and really ONLY about communication through great singing. If you go back not too far in our operatic times, Pavarotti stood on stages and sang audiences into near hysteria, (op. cit., my underlining).

So this is a quintessentially φωνή-based critique, with, of course the authority of someone who, herself, practices the art she describes at a world-class level.

She also makes it clear that the audience should be treated with respect, rather than duped by an ever-increasingly commercialized music “industry:”

> Audiences aren’t idiots. They can sense when they are being duped. They can sense when they are witnessing something OK and when there is something happening that is EXTRAORDINARY, (op. cit.).

This eloquent plea for clarity and understanding of the fundamentals of singing is a striking assertion of the human existential significance of the human voice.

In the rather more measured words of the very seasoned opera critic, Tom Sutcliffe:

> Music, the composer’s notes on paper, may seem to endorse the notion of a prescriptive performance tradition. But in reality performance, though now technically preservable or recordable, is just as fragile, temporary and vital a phenomenon as ever. Today, the cultural wish to have history rescue the present is balanced by a strong conviction that opera needs reconstruction and rejuvenation through performance and reinterpretation, (1996 p. 41).

So, in order to embrace the immediacy of opera as an art form, and to explore the precise manifestation of that (rather than the popular idea that opera is a moth-balled manifestation of old-fashioned and pretentious art,) I will include two reviews of performances in 2016, and an interview with the conductor of the second piece, performed by Music Theatre Wales, Michael Rafferty.

Opera in the Present - Birmingham Opera Company

This is an account of two opera performances in Birmingham in March/April 2016. The first was Birmingham Opera Company's (BOC) Dido'n Aeneas, (#DnA - See what you're made of) as it is announced on the company's website) (Birmingham Opera Company, 2016). with a very large chorus and group of actors of local people (non-auditioned). The Birmingham Opera Company, directed by Graham Vick, has, of course, a long history:

> Born of a passion and a belief that opera can speak directly to all kinds of people, they set out to create a company that the people of Birmingham - a city of many peoples - could be proud of.
>
> This means ... opening the doors and inviting people in to watch you work and to work with you. This means sharing a great art with great people. It's a different way of making opera.
>
> ... We conjure our theatres out of spaces used for other purposes or maybe just abandoned. A brief period of illumination and then we move on - not tied to bricks and mortar ... nor tied to having a big organisation. ... we can reinvent the company for each project. <u>This way the company exists to make the art and not the other way round</u>, (Birmingham Opera Company, 2016 – my underlining).

And just to make it clear that this is not a fixed position, but is responsive to the existential reality of the time and of the community -

> We've got more exploring to do to discover where opera can be performed. How to perform it. How to re-write the rules of engagement between audiences and performer. How to experiment with space and acoustics. Who can we make it speak to? (op. cit.)

Not only is this statement extremely "cool" way ahead of its time (Birmingham is now increasingly enlivened by "start-up" businesses - coffee shops clothes businesses etc, but BOC was using abandoned spaces and people long before this trend.) But it is also a very potent statement of opera as being ('the company exists to make the art') and becoming ('How to re-write the rules of engagement between audiences and performer. How to experiment with space and acoustics. Who can we make it speak to?' (op. cit.)) . It is also a radical departure, of course, from the usual mode in which opera is performed, from a stage suitably removed from the rest of us, with the impression of emotional and political distance increased by the orchestra playing in a pit between the stage and the

audience, and received – by a largely passive, mute audience. The observations of Adriana Cavarero are relevant here (see below).

So the audience, singers, and management are in a radically new relationship – finding a way of being as a community through their art. This is a responsibility as well as an opportunity, of course. Community singers who take part have a very strict and demanding schedule, and it follows that if the company is part of out community, we must do what we can to support it.

Birmingham Opera Company often performs works already in the repertory (although a dazzling exception was the première of Stockhausen's *Mittwoch aus licht* as part of the Olympic celebrations in August 2012) as opposed to Music Theatre Wales, below, whose existence is based on commissioning and performing new work.

So this performance of Dido and Aeneas, a standard repertoire work, was very familiar and yet oddly not what one expected, based on previous experience. The instrumentalists played at baroque pitch and on period instruments, but with tremendous energy and verve. The singing style was gutsy and, while musically precise, not at all musicologically "authentic" to the period. The over-riding emphasis was on the human reality of the drama – often sexually explicit and rumbustious. The soloists were rolling around on the stage and striking contemporary, often sexual poses.

The chorus also had gritty and sexually explicit roles to play, in some cases to their visible delight. They also, at times, involved the audience directly by dancing with them or interacting in other ways. And the action of the opera was always physically close to the audience. There was not a delineated "performing space" and a separate place for the audience. The performance happened in and around the audience. While sometimes uncomfortable – my companion at this performance was not able to stand for long periods and he was prevented from sitting down some of the time - this arrangement undoubtedly adds to the sense of being in the drama and of it being part of our lived lives.

This intertwined aspect of the drama was enhanced by the fact that the very large group of chorus and actors were people, many of whom we knew, and who were representative, to some extent, of Birmingham life, as

set out in the mission statement above: that is to say, there was a much larger proportion of young people and black and ethnic minorities than would normally be present at a classical opera event. In this sense, it is clear from this and their mission statement above, and from everything they do that this was part of the aim of the company – to represent the life of the city back to us and to give a balanced representation of the people of the city. This policy was also reflected in the soloists used. There is always a much higher proportion of black and ethnic minority soloists in BOC performances than in other companies, due to their policy which is implemented by the tireless Sarah Playfair, their casting consultant. The fact that she finds singers who are not only representative of the population in this way, but who are also often better singers than many of those singing in some of the large opera houses would, in a saner world, give us pause for thought!

In the words of Graham Vick: 'We target all the peoples of this ethnically diverse city and positively act to cast ethnically diverse professional soloists,' (2016).

The elderly Jamaican jazz singer who accompanied me to the performance was visibly overjoyed to see his community represented in this way, as well as transported by the quality of the music making. He went into a sort of trance from the beginning of the piece and remained transfixed until the end, in spite of all the medical difficulties with which he was contending.

The love story and the helpless passion of the two protagonists was foregrounded in this production in a very direct way – which was mirrored in the singing by the soloists. The fact that the (English) text (by Nahum Tate, after his play Brutus of Alba, and Virgil's Aeneid), was the original helped enormously with this, of course.

The dance rhythms of the music were also realized to the full, especially by the chorus, with (modern) dance and rhythmic movement. Dance is a familiar feature of opera of this period, of course, and it fitted well with the physical enthusiasm of the participants on this occasion. All this made the subject matter surprisingly contemporary, since it refers to mythical events (the war of the Trojans and the fall of Carthage) from

stories many hundreds of years old. The contemporary reference was also enhanced by the reference to the present-day refugee crisis (the performance starts with men in lifejackets desperately climbing over the barriers on the first floor of the performing space.)

But, as in the MTW performance, it was the precision and incisiveness and commitment of the music-making which was decisive to the impression that we were witnessing opera in the present. The chorus had been exceptionally well-trained, and in spite of their large numbers, and very mixed musical education, there were apparently no passengers. I heard from members who took part that they were required to learn the piece by heart from the outset, and this may have made a crucial difference. The instrumental musicians, too, who played standing up in most cases, were rhythmically compelling to listen to and utterly committed. And the fact that they played with such obvious gusto made the performance feel very "present".

This approach to opera is vividly illustrative of this description of the work of Cavarero, which makes the point more incisively than her own words:

> In her critique of Western metaphysics, Cavarero offers us a genealogy of how "logos lost its voice." Reviving a rhetorical dimension of human life and action, **Cavarero's work promises a more pluralistic and inclusive form of sociopolitical relations. Significantly, she teaches us that any progressive politics will demand that we redeem this voice in its manifold uniqueness and plurality**. This quite possibly is her most important lesson, (Burgess & Murray, 2006, p.167).

There is an overwhelming impression in this performance that we are witnessing "a more pluralistic and inclusive form of social relations" encapsulated in a performance of a piece which is hundreds of years old, but which is directly relevant to our present age.

There is no more eloquent way to describe the existential impact of this work than the words of Graham Vick, the company's Director:

> We have been singing stories for as long as we have existed. The music has always been in us and the stories always about us. However new or strange or alien a creation may seem, it can only be made from what already exists.

And ...

> All sound, all thought, shares roots. Our work is the revelation of what is. This boundless mystery can't be captured on a printed page - it's only music when given life and breath in performance - when heard, experienced - when the listener is a participant contributing through their own existence to their own unique work of art, (Vick, 2016).

Contrast this with Roger Scruton's determinedly slamming shut all doors to music which he himself does not understand and his invective against:

> Boulez and Stockhausen, clever charlatans who were able to intimidate the world of music lovers into believing that there could be no future for music if Boulez and Stockhausen were not put in charge of it. The fact that the resulting music was entirely without appeal was put out of mind as irrelevant. The point was the charm of the theory, not the sound of the result.

And

> It was precisely by building on theory rather than intuitive understanding that the music of the future ceased to be music, ... (2016).

In contrast, this is Graham Vick's much more nuanced description of some of the music dismissed by Scruton :

> Stockhausen's *Wednesday from Light* is a dazzling riff on the theme that to receive music is only a matter of tuning in, like a radio receiver. All sound, all thought, shares roots. Our work is the revelation of what is. This boundless mystery can't be captured on a printed page - it's only music when given life and breath in performance - when heard, experienced - when the listener is a participant contributing through their own existence to their own unique work of art, (Vick, 2016).

The obvious flaw in Scruton's account is that his "Intuitive understanding" may not be the same as that of other people – it is a merely subjective description, of no interest or relevance to the rest of us. And, since Graham Vic does, in fact, manage to connect with a huge variety of races, ages and social backgrounds, one has to draw the conclusion that he may be right!

Where Scruton has credibility is, of course, in his writing on certain areas of analytical philosophy. Perhaps it is a sign of the lack of

connectedness of this particular type of philosophy that it relies on such an oversimplified model of human intellectual functioning, and cannot connect with the many-layered experiences of sung art described in this thesis, and, specifically, and with such eloquence, by Graham Vic above.

The Devil Inside by Music Theatre Wales

The second opera performance referred to here was *The Devil Inside* by Music Theatre Wales (MTW), "a new opera composed by Stuart MacRae and written by Louise Welsh ... a gritty, glittery Faustian fairytale, set firmly in the 21st Century," (Music Theatre Wales, 2016a).

This company has an immediacy and relevance of a different kind. It was founded on the courage and vision (recently recognized by MBEs in both cases) of Michael Rafferty (conductor) and Michael McCarthy (stage director) in 1988, when it was very much a new idea and its raison d'être not part of the received wisdom of opera as it is now becoming increasingly, in the present time. Its immediacy is of a different kind to BOC, presenting new works which speak directly to a contemporary audience, of an uncompromisingly high standard. There is no sense, in an MTW performance, of being a spectator at a performance of something which is being preserved because it embodies some kind of superior art form to which we should all aspire – which is overwhelmingly the impression to me as an audience member at performances of traditional works which I have attended at Covent Garden or Deutsche Oper, for example. This is art which, through the self-discipline and lack of egoism of its proponents, speaks directly to our present human condition.

Music Theatre Wales: Background Information

The Arts Council website traces the history of Music Theatre Wales from 1988 with a production of Peter Maxwell Davies's *The Martyrdom of St Magnus* in the graveyard of the Saxon church in the grounds of St Donats Castle, detailing its promotion of

> new ground in opera, presenting newly commissioned works, bringing new artists to the form and finding a new place for pieces already written which are either neglected or unseen in the UK. (Arts Council of Wales, 2016).

For further information about Music Theatre Wales see Appendix 5.

The Devil Inside

The story is described as follows in the official information put out by the company:

Synopsis (from MTW website)

> The devil inside was adapted from Robert Louis Stevenson's 1891 short story The Bottle Imp. The imp of the title grants the owner of the bottle their hearts' desires. However, if the owner dies in possession of the bottle their soul is damned for eternity, and the only way they can get rid of the bottle is to sell it for less than they bought it (Music Theatre Wales, 2016b).

This performance was in the main house of the Rep Theatre in central Birmingham – which has a strong recent record of putting on cutting-edge productions, but which is not normally used as an opera venue. However, apart from the fact that the acoustics might not be ideal for opera, this is part of the point. This is music theatre - of immediate relevance to contemporary lives and issues. And for that reason, it is of direct relevance to this thesis.

The most obvious feature, which jumps out at an audience member, especially anyone used to traditional opera performances, is the proximity of singers to the instrumental players and their utterly integrated working with the conductor - Michael Rafferty. While we were, of course, in a conventional theatre, and the performing space was clearly delineated, unlike the BOC performance above, the arrangement was still quite radical for an opera performance. The musicians were at audience level, only just below the stage and very visible to everyone. This meant that they were quite obviously part of the action – as opposed to the traditional arrangement where instrumental musicians provide "accompaniment" from a pit.

This arrangement also meant that their interaction with the conductor and the synergy between conductor, singers, instrumentalists and audience was clear and visible – and it was one of the most impressive relationships of this kind that I have ever seen/heard. The players were playing more like

a string quartet, and the singers singing like the instruments of a string quartet. This was the more eloquent because one of the characters, the imp in the bottle, was explicitly voiced from the instruments, and not by a singer. Reviewers speak of the music as ‘unsettling and evocative, encasing the performers in a sonic world of shadows and anxiety,’ (Vile, 2016).

Because MTW usually performs new works (see company information above), there are no expectations to fulfil, such as those of romantic excitement in association with Puccini’s operas, for example. So the sung text relates in a much more direct way to the lives and psychology of the audience – we see/hear reflected in a much more immediate way our own thoughts, fears and preoccupations, without the pre-ordained need to fulfil a set of expectations associated with conventional opera. One can interpret these, or not, as Lacanian conflicts and fears of a suppressed psyche. The Stage puts it succinctly: ‘Timeless and abstract, it brings out opera's anti-naturalism and allows meditation on the consequences of desire,’ (op. cit.).

Since studying social science at LSE I have shared the general approach there that psychoanalytic theory, in any specific case, makes too many intrusive assumptions about the inner workings of the minds of - in the case of my professional practice – criminals and psychiatric patients. This is hardly surprising in Lacan’s case, since he followed ‘Clérambault's theory of paranoia and supported the systematic internment of those deemed to be insane,’ (Webster, 2002).

The same writer comments on the

> contemporary tendency to move almost imperceptibly from a description of real events and reactions to an account of unseen processes supposedly taking place in a mental realm not susceptible to observation.

And on ‘its readiness to mix empirical observation with occult speculation,’ (op. cit.).

I prefer an existential frame for the descriptions here because it does not intrude upon human freedom in this way, either actually or theoretically. An existential frame, by contrast, clearly focuses on the free response of

the listener to what is being performed. As Alice Coote makes clear above, this, for performers, is fundamental.

Psychoanalytic theory may have some usefulness in unveiling previously unacknowledged drives and motivations which might affect the experience of operatic performance. I am, however, seeking here a more direct connection between the being of the audience and the performance. This means that the Financial Times review of The Devil Inside, below, while obviously heartfelt and eloquent, slightly misses the point:

> It asks questions, stirs the imagination, challenges complacency, grabs the heart. It does everything modern opera is supposed to do. <u>You come out feeling different</u> – about love, life and death, (Fairman, 2016, my underlining)

The issue, in terms of this thesis, is not whether we "come out feeling different" but whether we are different – ethically, experientially and psychologically. What we "feel" is surely only the subjective refraction of this phenomenon. And this is why the quality of the art we experience is of such vital importance – inferior art makes inferior human existence! This is also, of course, a radical philosophical position, as opposed to one based on well-meaning liberalism.

The story of The Devil Inside progresses from a couple of practically destitute young men encountering an apparently easy answer to their difficulties in the shape of an elderly man who offers them the bottle. From the start the music embodies the danger and the temptations inherent in this, and there are times when it seems like a commentary on the dangers of capitalism. The scene when the two protagonists have used the powers given them by the bottle to become international financial magnates resounded, for me, with some of the scenes from the film The Big Short:

> a story of greed, venality, incompetence and barefaced corruption in which the good guys are the renegades who see disaster coming and stake their shirts on the apocalypse (Kermode, 2016).

... in which "the apocalypse" is the 2008 financial crisis. Certainly, the addictive aspects of the wish-fulfilment granted by the bottle imp are fore-grounded:

Richard: (*to James*) I am dying,
desire for the bottle is killing me.

And in this respect, the piece is about the out-of-control inner conflicts and desires of human beings, which could, of course, be susceptible to a psychoanalytic interpretation, as described above. But the most significant feature, of this work, I would suggest, is the way it resonates with our lived reality – of loving and fear and having and losing. It is the fact that we see our own lives reflected and resonated back at us in the performance that makes this work so powerful. Of course there are times when this is less effective – the sung sound at the very beginning seemed oddly divorced from the text as though the singers were singing an aria rather than communicating with us directly. But this was short-lived and insignificant in comparison with the way we were drawn into the narrative and lived the conflicts and dilemmas as though they were our own.

And, to return to Adriana Cavarero's argument, above, this was a question of the sound world and the lived experience through which we participated in this performance, and only secondarily a matter of the words in which this is described. Together with the singers, we lived through the human dilemmas of greed, possessiveness, love and loss. And perhaps we might gather hope from the, arguably redemptive, ending of the piece. It is important to be clear that this is not an ethical argument, but a simple statement of the way things are – and of the way we are as human beings. And that is marvellous enough, without needing to gild the existential lily with moral righteousness as well! Morality and social control changes with the needs of communities and human systems for survival and sustainability. Being is just what it is.

A Conversation with Michael Rafferty, of Music Theatre Wales, eloquently illustrated some of the points above.

MR: What every body seems to need in any culture is singing: singing or music is important to any culture - You sing to a baby to get it to sleep [cf.

Cavarero, The Maternal Chora, p. 131]. There's something very fundamental about music and – well - and vocal expression and - so when people go to the opera – there's two aspects. Fundamental is the sung voice and opera seems to work well - it works to a big degree, even in a foreign language even if you don't understand a word.

There's a whole culture built up round – "You have to understand what an opera's about – you have to do your homework beforehand." Because you're getting the sound of- -the most important thing is the emotion of the opera.

(SJC Comment: There's a clear resonance here with Cavarero's analysis: Cavarero sees this as a problem of metaphysics:

> Metaphysics ... decides to ignore the reciprocity that is inscribed, as a decisive relational factor, in the economy of the gaze. The metaphysical eye, starting with Plato, fixes as its model a gaze that allows for the isolation, distance, and non-involvement of the observer, (2005, p. 176, my underlining, SJC)

But this is not a simple opposition, but a correction of perspective:

> Cavarero does not seem to advocate a simplistic overthrow of metaphysics in favour of phenomenology. ... but to understand speech from the perspective of voice (Thomaidis, 2015, p. 18).**)**

MR: Obviously, the story is a part of it as well – but contemporary opera – there's a view now that - there are operas now written without any particular story – where it's (a) multi- media experience – that does something for the people involved – but not necessarily telling a story where you have to understand every word – you get a sense of a happening -- so for me the big thing about an operatic event is the ritual – the sense of ritual which is also part of football matches and things – a set of people coming together . At a funeral you have the bells tolling - or in whatever culture - in every culture there's some aspect where the music- the sound goes deeper than simply the words that are being expressed. And, in a way, the operatic plots – the ones that deal with simpler emotions –simpler stories, but with a strong emotional content are the ones which hit home,

perhaps, more that the ones which are complicated stories which are – er - very up-to-date.

The sense of a person uttering - in some of the repertoire that I've been involved in - one of the most powerful pieces – and still remains powerful – is 8 Songs for a Mad King. It's not really a story – it's a ... portrayal of the mad king – George III) ... and Maxwell Davies' starting point was - it came from the Roy Hart theatre.[18]

MR: Roy Hart was trying to express things - or to use the sound of the human voice as it was in battle.- because he reckoned that - the vocal expression we use is generally only a small part of what the voice is capable of so he was trying to get to a point - where the sounds that men make in battle and which are much – more extreme the tension and duress that - -(someone) in those conditions experiences – and that that piece is a piece which always works, provided that its done well – because of what the voice is asked to do –to go to these extremes – which it's capable of – which you would normally only hear in a battle context – and it's a piece which touches everybody – and it's not something you generally hear – everybody goes out of that performance from a shattering experience. and the story of the king singing to his birds and being in another place is - is deeply touching (Kelvin Thomas) did it 20 years ago with me then 2 years ago – he thought that was going to be his last one.
Yes. So – <u>the sound of the voice – you know, there are things that a voice can do – with no words - which touch you</u>.

(*SJC Comment*: See references to Cavarero and Thomaidis above**)**.

SJC: Yes! And how about the voice with other instruments?

[18] The poems forming the text of this work were suggested by a miniature mechanical organ playing eight tunes, once the property of George III. The King struggled to teach his caged bullfinches to make the music which he could so rarely torture out of his flute and harpsichord. He would sing to them with his ravaged voice made inhuman by day-long soliloquies. The songs are to be understood as the King's monologue while listening to his birds perform, and incorporate some sentences actually spoken by George III. The flute, clarinet, violin and cello represent the bullfinches that the King was trying to teach to sing. In the performance the instrumentalists representing the birds sat within spot lit golden cages. Maxwell Davies acknowledged that within his work, he had drawn on many styles from different composers: Handel, Birtwistle, twenties foxtrot and other influences (Hart, 1969).

MR: Yeeah! Well, you know, learning to play a violin – technique – something that many teachers will say to a pupil is "You need to make it sing" and pianists – even though it's mechanical - the instruction you know - make the melodic line- make the instrument sing. Because everybody's trying to approach it and –um the Indian music – sometimes the sounds blend between the violin and the ?sarangi and the human voice and that's when it's often the most touching.

(*SJC Comment*: It may be that when Rafferty talks about apparently sentimental issues such as being "touched" by music, he infers something more –deepseated and , perhaps, closer to an existential interpretation – this would be consistent with the rest of this interview.**)**

SJC: So - when you're listening to singers, and choosing singers, is it possible to say what you sort of – look for?

MR: No. It's choosing a role – matter-of-fact things like – do they have the vocal range?
But apart from that – when they're singing western music, you want to know that they can sing in tune –but also have a range of colour – that the voice is supported –

I think, actually, not looking for a voice. Everyone wants to feel comfortable with vocal expression, [...] you want the sound to be natural and unforced and not pinched -

(*SJC Comment*: This is obviously a refraction, from a fairly conventional vocal pedagogical point of view, of the requirements of a musician from a different discipline (violin playing and musical direction). What is interesting from my point of view is that I have worked with MR and seen the liberating effect that his meticulously detailed direction has on the sound and expressive possibilities of the singers**)**.

SJC: I suppose sometimes in extremes [...] it might be forced – someone screaming?

MR: Yeah - that's different, [...] Isn't it? By and large, [the] sound that will impinge on you – I suppose that's different to the sort of sound you're looking for to fill an opera house –is a trained voice – just so that it can get from the stage – to the back of the hall.

The Use of Microphones

SJC: You don't mike people normally, do you?

MR: No never.

SJC: Oh, never.

MR: that's not completely true, but sometimes the miked voice is for an effect and – so - if it was Philip Glass's work – his work seems to need amplification, so you end up amplifying the voices as well as the instruments. But that's to obtain the quality rather than -

But interestingly, in the Sciarrino piece that we did a year or two ago, Sciarino's music generally is interested in the quieter sounds *ppp* or *pppp* or *ppppp* so – often the music progresses with the tiniest sounds, then breaks out into something enormous and ... in a concert hall ... again its expressing a true ... his music expresses some very natural emotions – you know – when you're just sitting and things are going on inside you – [...] it's just the sound of your breath – His music approaches that and forces the listener to listen towards that sound.

Now I did – in my preparation for that piece – I went to meet Sciarrino at La Scala. And after I met him we went to a performance of one of his works – it was a concert work, not an opera. <u>And in that, these tiny sounds , which were *pppp* – on the edge of breath – you could hear a pin drop – a thousand people just listening to the tiniest sound – and –so it created huge tension, because you were listening to something which was</u>

a part of human expression. It has been commented on in some reviews that – Scarrino's music was too quiet – that you couldn't possibly hear it – so they amplified it! Which then defeats the point of the - so that the audience isn't listening on the edge of their seats. It's just presented like you were on a hi-fi.

And the naked sound of a singer – whether it's loud or soft – is really important –

SJC: Do you have a view on children's voices – children's sounds -whether children should come and listen to that sort of music?

MR: My experience with children – I've done the 5 Maxwell Davies childrens' opera starting with the youngest one is 'The dinosaur at large' which is , I think for age 6-7?

SJC: To listen or to sing?

MR: To sing – and play the instruments. He's written 5 of these operas. – about an hour long and they're for participation by the whole school. And the children love singing them – and it's a subject which is interesting – dinosaurs and space or something [...] they love making the sounds and my experience is that children love music – love singing. And ... it's a natural expression of what they do and they ... they say things like—"you listen and it makes you feel good". So there is something very fundamental about the sung voice.

Working with Conservatoire Students

MR: My own contact with them is not on the technical side of singing, which is - - it's trying to help them realise the music.

SJC: Yes. So how do you do that?

MR: Well – finding the expression in the music and getting them to sing accurately and in tune ...

SJC: So if someone was out of tune but still found the "grain" ??? ... if somebody still found the meaning of the music, but wasn't quite accurate?

MR: Well - you'd try to get them to listen - I always think the worst thing is to say "Could that be a little sharper of flatter?" Because when you're singing, you think you're singing in tune – you don't deliberately sing out of tune. So saying "a bit flatter" and they think "Well, I'm singing that note in tune, but I have to sing it sharper because somebody said so" ... that doesn't work.

You've got the pitches and rhythms to work out in a class ... you learn to sing the notes in the order on the paper – in the same way for a classical piece as for a newer piece.

Some singers sing more by ear than from the notes on the page - - for a new work, sometimes, it's a different process for a – if someone sings by ear, who may not appreciate the difference between a rhythm that divides a beat into 5 - because for the sound – the perception from listening might not be very different – between dividing the note into 5 and dividing into 2 parts - but the effect sometimes of a complicated rhythm – because the composer wants to achieve a certain effect - and a singer who sings primarily by ear – might- in a straightforward, simple piece of music, bend the rhythms a little – for an effect – and the difference is that the composer's already written that effect - into the notes – so – (laughter) so there is a way of getting to - of saying "this is the effect he's trying to do – and that's why the notes a bit longer at the start – but that's quite a laborious process for somebody who sings primarily by ear, [cf. Cavarero SJC].

MR: Well, the mathematical precision is a way of getting to the expression. So - whatever is written on the page - once the process is gone through, and its sung accurately – the effect – nobody is looking at the score when they're listening to it. But everybody appreciates the effect of it. –

If there's a tension written into the music because it's - because the rhythm is not even – then that's - then the end result is a tension. So the notes on the page express a tension that's - if you ride over that – and make them all even

[i.e., make it fit in with your preconceptions SJC] you might not get that tension.

SJC: Is it that the singer is prepared to live with the tension that the composer has created? In a way, we always want to resolve tension, don't we?

MR: Maybe that's not the – in some pieces of music there's not the tension. ... Ultimately, the singer's got to be free - at the end, you can be 100% accurate and still express nothing.

So - it's finding the expression that works for the accuracy of the music. So the approach, in a way, my approach to making a piece - is to start from the notes, get it accurate, or, get a sense of what the expression is and then work the two together. But if you decide - you may decide without looking at the notes that this piece is - you know – is easy and relaxed and - gentle and so on – and if you are determined that that's what the expression is, then it's never going to fit the pattern of the notes on the paper - when it's something that's more complicated - So it's trying to work out the expression and the notation and the finding a way of making those two work together.

Conversation with young tenor (February 2017)

He has a very direct experience of singing - he studies Italian all the time and listens to singers (he was talking about Corelli[19]) He talks about his teacher, who sings in the extra chorus of WNO, more as a colleague, and says he can hear the problems or successes in the way he is singing - this is not arrogant, but simply a calm assumption that his reception of the

[19] 'One of the most exciting tenors of the 20th century, Franco Corelli, who has died aged 82, had a voice that was as handsome as his appearance. When I first heard him, in Tosca at Covent Garden, in 1957, I recall thinking - as he launched into Recondita armonia - that here, at last, was a tenor with trumpet-like timbre to penetrate into the furthermost corners of the house. Indeed, his was an instrument of Rolls-Royce magnificence, capable of engendering visceral thrills in an audience,' (Blyth, 2003).

sound is of equal validity with anyone else's. (When he was referred to a famous bel canto teacher – an older man – he was very reserved about it, and eventually told me he thought the teacher was wrong about some aspects of singing - again this was not arrogant, but a simple statement of fact.)

He has a quietly spoken, calm and very direct manner: there seems to be an almost total lack of the usual insecurity and over-compensation for it that is normally so characteristic of men his age (about 28).

He talks about belief in God – says his parents and his wife are atheists, but that he believes in God because of the experience of singing. He draws comparisons between singing and rugby – he says they are similar - and the comparison between sport and singing is one that is familiar to me from working with Bob Lada, (Alexander Technique teacher – see Chapter 5) He talks to his rugby club mates about singing, and apparently there is no embarrassment about this at all.

He explains – with a sort of calm transparency, that he and his wife decided that all the pressure to buy things is just irrelevant - a distraction from the real business (of life - and of singing).

When we start to work, on Italian arias, it is a completely different experience to anyone else I have worked with. He is sometimes not strictly accurate, but he has such a compelling overall grasp of the music that it works in conjunction with the accompaniment: he has a visceral connection with his sound which is over-whelming, as it always is. But when there are problems, as in a smooth passage through the upper middle voice (the passaggio), the discussion is more one of colleagues than my "teaching" him. I have an outside ear, but he has already thought through the issues we are discussing, in depth and over a long period, and crucially, as the subject of the voice rather as an onlooker, which I inevitably am. For example, in the passage from Tosca *(E lucevan le stele)* he sometimes cracks on the high note in the last phrase, but he has a very thought-through understanding of why that is happening. When I suggest that he needs to lighten off before the high notes and approach it more smoothly and "on the breath", he knows exactly what I mean and does it straight away. I've never known anything like it! The Italian is nearly always

seamless: there is one word that he repeatedly puts an extra syllable into, but apart from that it is correct – but, more importantly, he captures the poetic nature of Italian vowels.

When we work on the spoken language (without music) he speaks it legato - without meaning. I don't want to distract him from that, but we need to find the cadences of the text: (I know he can do that because he sang *Vesti la Giubba* with very specific characterisation of the words and a very detailed dramatic interpretation in a concert 2 weeks ago) So I speak the text as spoken text - and then he sings it – as drama!

We work on one "music theatre" piece, Lonely House –which is possibly sung too loudly (this repertoire is not my specialism!) Again, he works his way round to a much more accurate way of doing it, and sings the top B flat falsetto (thus avoiding a loud- over operatic sound which would be inappropriate)

Further conversation

We were working on arias and songs 2 weeks after the above conversation, and he talked about the need to "activate (the) connected part of the brain – the kind you haven't got a language to speak."

The implication of this is that there is no adequate language for talking about singing and voice

This session does not fit into the normal frames used for singing teaching. But it is important that it is adequately described and that the theory embraces this experience.

Significance

This young person has been repeatedly dismissed by prestigious teachers who cannot imagine that he is likely to be successful without conservatoire study and the musical literacy and conventional processing which goes with that. But he has in fact had success in being featured on *Wales on line*, for example, and in getting paid gigs with orchestra. Welsh National Opera have agreed to hear him on the basis of a video clip of a small charity performance. The reason for this seems to be the visceral quality of his

vocal connection with the music he sings, and the transparent, almost naïve quality of his connection with the Italian operatic music he sings. It could be said that his singing radiantly reflects his being –in-the –world, and that this is what audiences (and news editors) respond to.

Prof. John Rink, whose research focuses on performance as creative practice, refers in a recent discussion on Radio 4 to

> many scholars who highlight the importance of performers' own musical imagination and creative engagement with the works that they perform (St. John's College Cambridge website, 2014).

It may be that this focus provides a more appropriate way of understanding this person's vocal practice.

Conclusion

I have tried to show in this chapter that "creative engagement" is an integral part of the contemporary opera landscape, and that this is best represented by an understanding of authentic personal (existential) presence of the singers. Moreover, the fundamental, visceral power of opera and the commitment of its protagonists is more adequately represented in these terms than in some of the liberal, but misleading descriptions in popular discourse.

Chapter 5
Summer School Case Study

This is a description of a singing summer school in the Italian Tyrol in August 2016. It was a pilot project to establish, clarify and test out the philosophical model defended in this thesis. For this reason, there was a very high level of staff (6) to students (14). The staff were all outstanding practitioners in their varied, but overlapping fields. Four of them gave a public masterclass which they consented to have recorded and used for this thesis.

I will describe the setting of the summer school and the background of the staff and participants, and will then give excerpts from these masterclasses, in an attempt to identify a philosophical frame which will incorporate and contextualise all of them.

The groups are based on an unusual, possibly unique, ethos of individuals who collaborate to combine sung sound of considerable virtuosity and power, sometimes on the way to a career in singing, but often, not. Nevertheless they tend to study and collaborate at a very high level, meeting what appears to be a fundamental need to sing and support each other as a community.

The context

It should be pointed out that Opera Mint classes have been taking place over many years (since 1995) and have had some outstanding success (former participants who are pursuing solo careers are Richard Wiegold, bass, Catherine Foster, currently Brünnhilde at Bayreuth, Paul Carey Jones, baritone, and many others who benefitted in other ways). Nevertheless, the summer school under discussion here marked a new departure, in a very different venue, in a remote (Tyrolean, German-speaking) and extremely beautiful setting, and surrounded by a small, coherent and intrigued resident community! This is also the first time that I have attempted a systematic conceptual account of what is going on. The intention is to identify and explore a philosophical frame which gives

coherence to what might appear to be several disparate approaches. The comments from the participants at the end make clear that it was experienced by them as a seamless whole, and the reason for this needs to be identified.

The participants

The participants were all people known to us, and all except two are members of singing groups which meet regularly in England or Wales. These other two are associates/pupils of one of the staff members for many years. So those taking part already had a group consciousness and understanding of each other and of the work they are doing. This was crucial, as the group dynamics were commented on as fundamental to their experience in the reflective statements returned by members of the group after the event.

All participants are singing in a high level amateur/semi-professional setting to a greater or lesser extent. Four members of the group had given solo/duo recitals in the last six months, and all the others had sung regularly as soloists in group concerts. One is studying popular music singing in a London music college. The group included a small number of people with neurological conditions (in one case related to an autistic spectrum disorder, for example).

It is also important to make clear that the work we did was not necessarily genre specific. Although most of the teachers were from the classical music world (Dane Preece, the exception to this, who works in Music Theatre, also trained as a classical pianist), we had two young people who were studying other genres, one in pop and one in Music Theatre. There was no sense that most of the work we were doing was less relevant to them – they simply picked their sessions to chime in with their particular musical interests.

The staff

The staff included me, as teacher and co-ordinator, and the following teachers, in order of teaching:

Zoe Challenor

Zoe Challenor (travelling with two children of two years and ten months old) who works as a singing teacher and choir trainer at the Saturday school at Trinity College , London, She is also accredited by the ITM Alexander Technique organisation. She did not give a masterclass, but taught the ensemble singing classes in the mornings.

Her statement of her professional identity is:

“Many adult students come to me worried that they haven't got a voice or won't be able to sing in tune. I believe that everyone has a voice and in the absence of illness or injury, everyone can learn to sing in tune. What's more, it's good for us to sing.

David Miller

David Miller’s background is as a repetiteur at Belgium National Opera. He has an extraordinary memory for music and linguistic ability. This is his description of himself:

The Belgian/American musician David Miller has made a 35 year career based in Brussels as a pianist, conductor, and composer. The majority of his piano playing has always been as a repetitor in major European Opera Houses, including La Monnaie, La Bastille, Toulouse, Dresden, La Scala, as well as the summer festivals Bayreuth and Pesaro.

‘As a conductor, [he has assisted,] among others, John Pritchard, Giuseppe Sinopoli and Sir Colin Davis, ...’ (Bruocsella Symphony Orchestra website, 2017).

Dane Preece

‘Head of Music at Arts Educational School of Musical Theatre - He was on the music staff of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company from 1992 until 2003. ... he has conducted shows in the West End, the National Theatre, RSC, UK Tours, ... (Arts Educational Schools London, 2017).

Robert Lada

Robert Lada is an important figure in the ATI Alexander Technique organization in Boston Mass. He also teaches at the Berklee Music College in Boston Mass. Originally an IT engineer, he brings an almost uncanny sensitivity to his AT work on the functioning of singing students.

His self-description is:

> Bob Lada is a Certified Teacher of the Alexander Technique accredited by Tommy Thompson and from Alexander Technique International.
>
> Bob teaches at Berklee Performance School in Boston, the Alexander Technique Center of Cambridge, [...]. Bob's background is in athletics and analytics and he looks as the Technique as a tremendous aid in getting out of one's way in performance situations so that creativity and skill can come through, (Lada, 2017).

Ingrid Surgenor MBE

Ingrid Surgenor MBE is one of Britain's busiest and most successful pianists and is internationally renowned for her work as official accompanist for the BBC Singer of the World Competition in Cardiff. - - - - -. In addition to a long association with Welsh National Opera she has worked at the Vienna, Passau, Taormina, Buxton, Hong Kong and Bayreuth Festivals.

- - --. Ingrid Surgenor is also principal opera coach and Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music. In June 2000 she was awarded an MBE for services to music, (Naxos, 2017).

This was, then, a very varied and high level group of staff, all invited because of their previous professional connections with me and with the group, which (without wishing to speak for them!) includes a commitment to the philosophical frame of the group – to making high level singing education available to a wide range of students and participating in a community with a quite exceptional shared commitment to this. Thus, they also have in common a willingness to bring this formidable expertise to bear on a very varied group of students. It was interesting that Ingrid Surgenor, in the introduction to her masterclass, specifically embraced this approach of high quality teaching and coaching for singers outside the normal

conservatoire/ professional system (see p146 for further examples of this support for .”creative engagement” in music performance).

There are, as will become clear from the following, some fundamental differences in approach between these teachers – between the emphasis on text (Dan Preece) and Bel canto technique based on air flow (Ingrid Surgenor), for example. But the participants certainly experienced the whole week as a seamless and deeply enabling series of classes (see feedback below). So, maybe we should look for an underlying unity of frame beneath some of the surface disagreements. Certainly, there is an ethical unity between them. These teachers had to juggle the demands of severely ill relatives, and world-class opera events, not to mention complicated journeys (a 20hour flight in one case) in order to be there. Perhaps it is this commitment - way beyond that normally implied in the conventional professional frame, which is part of the unifying philosophical commitment? This is something which I shall examine below.

Each of the teachers had a very clear message of who they were (see above), and what they wanted to offer to the assembled singers. Because this was an out-of-the–way, low-key event, the element of having to impress or think about the public relations implications of what they said was kept to a minimum.

I have transliterated parts of their classes and reproduced it without a large amount of editing, in order to keep the flavour of each person’s approach. This is an approach which has also, interestingly, been practiced in the visual arts, by James Enfield, for example:

> The structure of the series was intended to maximize open-endedness: [...] to reflect the disarray of its subject as accurately and thoroughly as possible, (Elkins, 2008, p. 305).

This chapter is intended to “reflect the disarray” of this mode of singing training.

Dane Preece Masterclass

The first masterclass, on the second afternoon of the course, was with Dane Preece, whose biography above is supplemented in his introduction to the class, as follows:

I started off as a classical pianist for quite a few years, kind of drifting into opera - and then by chance, I kind of moved into theatre and then into musicals and then I was chosen for the West End and so on – and I never ever thought I would end up in that world, at all. And what I found - I mean, we're basically still in the same world - opera, musical theatre is about story-telling – it's all we do, really - with very specific voice qualities and different qualities in musical theatre - and what I found when I moved into musical theatre was just the balance of that was different- it was more intense. So [...] *the people I worked with in musical theatre – directors and the actors just have far more focus on story-telling, the characterisation, the journey, the text, the lyrics – all those things. And there are fundamentally, I think, two different ways of working. My experience of opera is that opera companies' casts, when they turn up on the first day, they're kind of expected to know the music? That sort of right? That's my experience. Actors in musicals are not expected to know the musical at that stage. But what they are expected to have done is some kind of research on the character, and the story and the plot, and where they fit into that.*

Later on in the process, that's when we learn the music. So that is quite different, and I, initially – particularly when I was responsible for a show, I got a bit nervous because I was sort-of pushed out of the scene for a few days, really, while the director and the cast got to know each other. and then at some point – the director would say "Over to you". And the most extreme example of that was when I did Fiddler on the Roof at the Savoy Theatre in London; we had this guy called Lindsay Posner directing.

Day 1 Meet and greet, read through the script.

Day 2 Everyone got round a table and just discussed the play form start to finish, line by line.

Day 3 Wednesday, carry on chatting about the play.

Day 4 They brought in a Rabbi - a real live Rabbi - to talk about the divinity side of things.

Day 5 They brought in academics to talk about Steckel life in Jewish communities. And that was it – that was the end of the first week. And we hadn't done any of the music!

Beginning of the second week, Monday, carried on talking about the play. Tuesday, the same thing – until the Tuesday lunchtime: then the director said "They're ready to learn the music". So by that time I was kind of getting sweaty about it – we've got only another two and a half weeks. But what I found was they knew each other so well doing that process – they knew their own characters – they knew how they fitted into the story – that actually they almost found a sound world of their own, [my underlining SJC]. They were gelling as a community and it did make teaching the music fairly straightforward and easy. And what was - so I think that's a fairly healthy approach. You're finding out what the story is, and what your part of that journey is, and you find a voice for it. Does that kind of make sense?

Now I don't know if – I guess that can be useful in opera as well. But I just don't think that's necessarily the approach that 's done.

***DM**: 2 questions - had they already sung it somewhere else?*

***DP**: One person.*

***DM**: Tevye?*

***DP**: No Tevye had to learn it*

***DM**: And the first week, when there was no singing, was your presence required, or tolerated?*

***DP**: Yes – I was required – so I was sitting amongst - the director always wanted me there so - like he wanted me to absorb it - it was useful.*

So that has kind of changed the way I approach listening to songs, listening to shows, even listening to opera. I do want to be taken on a journey. If the singing is good, that's a kind of bonus but for me it's not a priority. So, whenever I'm working with young professional students on any piece of material, there are 5 questions (I've done this with a couple of you already) that I think need to be answered by the student.

First one is "Who am I? Who is the character?"

Second one is "Who am I talking to?" This might --- The person you're talking to on stage is more important than you are – always more important even though it's your song and your moment.

The third question is "What do I want?" There's a reason for the singing.

The fourth one is "What - how important is the reason?" What is the reason for getting there?" How important is it to achieve the goal?

And the fifth one "What will happen if you don't achieve the goal of the song?"

Does that kind of make sense?

***1**. Who am I? Very important. You've obviously got to know what the character is. You've got to know whether it's high –status character, low-status– if they've got money- no money? 21 Cent, 19 Cent? – whatever it might be, find as much information about that character as possible, flesh that out –*

***2**. Who am I talking to? It can either be directly to the audience , or it can be to one or more people on stage- it could be to a group of people on stage - it could be to God. Something like "Bring him home" in Les Miserables is you talking directly to God. Or it could be a soliloquy, where you're talking to yourself.*

***3**. What do I want? Again it's a matter of – in any song – any well-crafted song, there are high stakes – so there is something very dramatic – there's a conflict that's got to be resolved – or there's a high emotional state that's got to be resolved or expressed in some kind of way. So the stakes are always high. Whenever anybody sings, - it's a big deal! It's never just an everyday event. Particularly if they're going from speaking into singing. – that's a big deal. So – very often, if you're talking to somebody out on stage, it's because you want to get something out of the other person. So your whole focus is "I want to get something out of this person – or from God, or you're wrestling with a problem yourself, and you have to argue that case – and then there can be a resolution. Yeah*

***4**. How important is it? Well, on paper it could be "It doesn't really matter, but in dramatic terms it really does matter." So, you have got to come up with the reason- say "This really is important – I have to get the result I want. Otherwise the show will go in a different direction – or the song will go in a different direction -or the character will just cease to exist, or whatever. You've got to achieve what you set out to achieve.*

***5**. What will happen if I fail? - You can't fail. Even though on paper it looks as though it doesn't' really matter – so the stakes are always high in any musical theatre – and possibly in opera as well, to some extent? There is a reason for singing, there is a reason for that song existing at that particular place.*

I'll give you an example: The Sound of Music - "My Favourite Things" We all know that, don't we? It's a lovely song which puts a smile on everyone's face. But there is a dramatic reason that song is in the show!

Who am I? It's sung by Maria - she's a nun.- a novice- she's left the convent and she's come to the family to be governess. And there's a long line of governesses – they haven't succeeded – there are 7 children.

So, who is she talking to in that particular moment? – Do you know this show – when they had thunder and lightning and all the kids have come onto the bed? – so - there are all these children. She doesn't know them yet - they've played a couple of nasty tricks on her - they don't really want her around – they want to get rid of her - so that they can just carry on having a nice time – on their own. What does she want from the song – from the start of the song, what's she trying to achieve? I think she's trying to achieve a greater relationship with those children: She can see that all they've got in their lives in terms of family is a very strict father – so there's no warmth or love in their lives – they're just allowed to do anything they want to do. She wants to bring some structure to their lives – some love- some warmth, some time: She wants to spend some time with them.

How important is that to her? We have to say that it is very important to her. She, being the kind of person she is, she wants to affect those lives in a positive way, so that when they're adults , they have a sense of wellbeing and all that kind of thing.

If she doesn't manage to achieve what she sets out to achieve in that song, what will happen? She could get fired from the job, she could go back to the convent – and those children will not necessarily have a good mother figure in their lives and the consequence of that could be pretty severe.

So it's a very lovely little song, but that's how I see it in terms of the drama of the show. If she doesn't achieve what she sets out in the song, the show could stop. That's where the show would stop. If she doesn't

manage to win those children over, the show stops there, she goes back to the convent and the show stops, halfway through Act1. And that's the Sound of Music. And so, she has to make it work – she has to win them over. Yup?

So, what I'm trying to say, is that the stakes - anything that you sing, today and later on, are the stakes always have to be high. So are we talking about energy and commitment, and being specific about the images that you're talking about all the way through.

So, bearing in mind that - whether they're bored or not doesn't matter. Your job is to be truthful to those lyrics and that music. There will be a reason that (it's written as it is) and it's your job to find it.

So, this class dealt with the dramatic situation of the singer, whose dual role as an actor is, in this context, taken very seriously. The singer/actor is expected to be in the song in a very specific and thought-through way, and Dane Preece had a variety of extremely clear and specific techniques which he used to elicit this.

This text-based approach used in Music Theatre has traditionally been regarded as opposed to the bel canto, operatic approach, as indicated above. But, seen in the context of this set of masterclasses, it took its place as one aspect of a very sophisticated approach to the issue of being present in sung music. In the approaches described below, the singer has no place to hide. She/he must engage emotionally, intellectually and – existentially- with the precise nature of the sung text and music. And it is taken for granted that the audience and the performer are entitled to this level of commitment and integrity.

It could be argued, of course, that this approach, with its focus on words and the text of a musical, is based on λόγος (logos) rather than φωνή (phone). (Compare the analysis by Cavarero referred to on p. 24 (Cavarero 2005)). But my submission is that, because it is based on the physicalisation and existential experience of the words and their context, rather than their abstract, academic meaning, it belongs to the direct transmission of meaning through sound (and physicalisation in other ways – dance and movement, for example) associated with φωνή.

And, indeed, this whole week of work with these teachers underlined this point. There was a clear thread of a very uncompromising insistence on authentic, personal embodiment of the music and text as a unified whole as the only acceptable way to perform opera or music theatre. One of the ironies is that this will be obvious to working professionals in these fields, but popular public discourse falls far short of this, as I demonstrate briefly below.

Music Theatre/Opera Conceptual Context

There is, of course, a background of popular conceptions about music theatre and it's relation to other forms of music in theatre.

Contrast the above approach with this description of another Music Theatre course in London, for example:

> our graduates continue to dominate the theatre industry both in the UK and internationally ... grounding students with the skills needed to succeed: acting, dancing and singing, (Mountview 2017).

- which is clearly based on a utilitarian philosophical frame.

Clearly, the presentation by Dane Preece is on a quite different level of personal commitment and intellectual nuance and in its demand for total personal commitment in the moment.

This is an attempt to place the use of (English) language at the heart of the debate:

> Musicals are often lampooned for not minding their language at all. Detractors highlight how irritating it is when characters burst into song arbitrarily. Then, they claim, the lyrics they belt are cursory, cheesy and slapdash. Rhyme swallows meaning; melodrama gulps away feeling.
>
> Lyn Gardner made the point on the Guardian's theatre blog that musical theatre haters are often snobs, like the Evening Standard's David Sexton, who dismissed musicals as repellent, embarrassing and stupid – even Sondheim's work: "The cleverer such an innately idiotic form tries to be, the more annoying it is." But some of the English language's most profound and powerful language can be found in the lyrics of musicals (Nunn, 2014).

All of these examples highlight different aspects of "music theatre" - a term which is given a profound cultural significance in its use by Music

Theatre Wales (p 131), as against the more manipulative agenda evident in:

> Brought to theatrical life by a legendary creative team, (this) new Broadway musical will sweep you into a world filled with beauty, comedy and breath-taking spectacle (London Theatre, 2016).

In contrast to all this, the embracing of the physical specificity in Dane Preece's material stands out. This is in contrast to the assumption that Music Theatre is about language, whereas opera concentrates on sound quality. In fact, in his presentation, it is made clear that the issue is one of utter personal integrity in living the text and the music, and this, I would suggest, is something which the form of music theatre presented here and opera, at its best, have in common, despite the difference in emphasis.

Here is a specific example of Dane Preece working with a student on Master of the House, from Les Miserables.

***DP**: So lets ask those 5 questions. Who are you, as in the character?*
***P**: I'm a very sleazy innkeeper. Trying to - -make everyone – cutting corners ---*
***DP**: Who are you talking to – most of the time?*
***P**: Most of the time I'm talking to my new customer.*
***DP**: Yeah, but before that, you've got these people there*
***P**: To the audience.*
***DP**: Actually to the audience? The people who are actually sitting, paying there - - This what I do - I'm likeable - I'm a likeable innkeeper - great personality - people keep coming back to my pub. What they don't know is - - I water the wine and beer and I occasionally, if they're blind drunk and they're leaving, I just put my hand in their pocket and I take what I can - it's fine! That's kind of - - -?*
-I think that's absolutely right. I think there's an element of him trying to justify the way he earns his living.
***DP**: 4th question is, How important is it for you to win us over– dramatically?*
***P**: Dramatically it would have to be very important*

***DP**: Yes. Because otherwise, if we're not interested in you, if we're indifferent to you, next time you make an entrance in the show, we won't build a relationship with you again – or show you any interest - so it's important you win us over.*

And the 5th question – if you don't win us over, how catastrophic is that?

***P**: Well it would have to be very?*

***DP**: Yes! Exactly!*

***P**: I was just trying to think of specifically why _ I guess he's kind of central to the plot, and if you don't build a relationship with him - - - - -.*

***DP**: Yes. Exactly. He's a very important figure in the story-telling. His presence has to be felt and we have got to understand that he's important.*

***P**: Especially because – you know the scene in the sewer – when he's picking himself up from the dirt - it's another aspect of him, and if you like him before that, it's more shocking - -*

***DP**: I think we need to do a couple of things:*

Zoe mentioned yesterday the physicalisastion of actions - a lot of actors do that- I think we need you to do this – every line- any kind of action - can you physicalise it? Great! So it might have to be a bit slower ... because you have to physicalise every action – with every line – we want to see you do that so that there's no doubt in our minds about what you're actually doing. So take as much time as you need to.

***Pianist**: You slow down, and I'll follow you*

***DP**: But it has to be for our benefit - -so we- the audience - - are more important than you are. You have to work to convince us - this business is absolutely valid - you're a good guy - it's a valid business. So keep making your (point) - - -*

(Song starts) [...] *Welcome, M'sieur*

***DP**: Can you go and get him? There's an inn down there - another one over there – he's just kind of walking by - you mustn't let him go –*

***DP**: (stopping him)*

Master of the house – so where's the house? You can't say anything unless you see it - you can't refer to anything unless you actually visualise it. OK?. So master of the ? If you see it, we'll see it.

"Keeper of the Zoo" What does that mean?

***P**: I think he's saying that everyone's like rowdy animals*
***DP**: Does he have respect for them?*
***P**: No*
***DP**: Not at all. Can we hear that in the way you sing that line?*
_ And really specific about the watering and the weights – I can't quite see what it is. – really specific – even if it means you have to stop and think about it, then do the action.

[SJC This specificity is, of course, an aspect of the singer/actor's personal, authentic presence in what they are doing.]

DP: *Well done! You need to work harder to get your result! – I'm gonna keep saying this to everyone.*
Ok let's start the song again. Let's have a competition – you've got to keep their attention on you. **(Technique 1) (DP tries to distract audience)
DP: *Whenever you express anything in singing, the stakes are high – work the words –*

David Miller Masterclass

The second class was with David Miller. His energy and experience and ability to take charge was immediately evident, and very helpful to people who had just arrived in a very out-of the-way corner of Italy, and were still adjusting to an unfamiliar situation. And it was immediately evocative of the role he played at the Belgian National Opera, there bringing professional authority to an often chaotic situation. The calm assumption that singers are there to work and to do justice to great music (in this case, *Cosi fan Tutte*) was also helpful.

At the beginning of the class, he states:

Recitativo secco - Dry recit is just singers and harpsichord. And if the orchestra is playing it's a different matter altogether. Cosi (fan Tutte) is full of them, (Clethero, 2016).

And he then sets out, in some detail his position on the musical scene, and the part played by specific orchestral instruments in relation to the sung elements:

[Dane Preece] has his special place in Musical comedy [SJC: known as Music Theatre in the UK]. For me that place is opera. And Graham Johnson, I was talking about the other day – he and I gave a lot of these summer schools together – Graham Johnson said - It wasn't true yet, because I was only 31 - He said" If you want to go to coach an opera, go to David – he knows all about it".

But what it actually means is: Graham Johnson used to say "I won't play anything in public that wasn't written originally for piano - so he won't play Violetta's aria in public – even as an encore. I believe this is still the case. And I love to play in public – opera arias. That's what I do best – what really thrills me is to imitate the orchestra on the piano. So I thought I would just have a little talk about that. - - -You shouldn't want to sing with someone who can play all the Chopin Etudes, because it's too loud and too fast.

So, this is a clear statement of his professional area and the distinctions which are clear in an opera house, but which need to be clearly spelt out to singers without this experience. It also casts light on the level of commitment of those who do this work - and in this case – the organisational misunderstandings of their skills with which they sometimes have to contend, which are referred to in the next section:

He further defines his position vis-à-vis different genres of music:

I was sitting there [during his time at the Belgian national Opera] - - -, waiting for something to happen. And all of those years, I worked out how best to imitate the orchestra on the piano [...]*. That's still a passion for me. You guys know the Traviata aria from hearing - - the introduction (plays) It's oboe with strings – then it's just strings - so if it was the flute with strings, it would sound completely different. Same notes but a different sound – the oboe is very intrusive. And when you're done with the introduction – then it's just strings (plays and sings). And all that takes place before she opens her mouth. And if you play the left hand too loud, it will sound like two oboes and two bassoons . (Plays) that sounds like nothing like wind instruments.*

But that's an example - and it's what kept me sane all those years at the Brussels opera – waiting for the stage director to shut up and let us play! It's imitating that – and that's what I love to do in public as well. So- I'm an opera freak!

It is interesting that, with this passionate commitment to the orchestral sound of the operas, he finds the director talking about the piece a distraction. This might seem to be the antithesis of Dane Preece's approach above. But what they have in common is a profound commitment to the meaning of the piece and its embodiment in music. They in fact collaborated extremely effectively on a practical and organisational level, and delivered a very coherent and committed training to the participants.

David Miller, in relation to the various conductors he worked with, commented:

an oboe is an instrument which is intrusive – it's a bit aggressive – a little bit – and the flute is very passive, so - it's imitating the sounds that was not really any different - - they didn't get on my case about being too loud or too soft, because they knew I'd already had to think about it.

And, further -

So - if the introduction – in other words, if the oboist didn't put down his oboe at the right time, it would sound like this (Plays) So the right volume for her is-(one in which) <u>there's a space in which the singer can exist</u>. And if you think "I mustn't be too loud" - and that's the only possible problem- you get frustrated - - It's true of lieder too – because - when the singer doesn't sing the pianist has to fill the audience's expectations of something (happening) - and then, you (are) two people – so if it's one person, it mustn't be too soft, [my underlining – SJC].

This specific foregrounding of "a space in which the singer can exist" has obvious existential resonances, and very usefully positions the singer in relation to the orchestral sound.

--I'm talking as if I'm talking to a group of pianists, but it's interesting, because you know what you can expect.

... because you need to feel safe – your first note – young pianists will have been told they're too loud so they will hardly touch the keys, the whole concert and if you feel unsafe as a singer, you have to articulate that – and say "I need some more support in the introduction" and then, when you start singing, they must back off.

So the pianist must be clearly present, as representing the orchestra, so that the singer can occupy their own place in the ensemble.

And further:

... the introduction to Una furtive lagrima, is really tricky, because it's a harp and a bassoon. And they occupy the same space. So you have to be like a harp, which is really soft, (plays opening chords) then you have to be like a bassoon separating them on the same variable piano. And on the piano the harp is "Has she started yet?" and the bassoon - -but these are the things that, for me, kept me sane all those years ago – working out how.

So let's look at a secco recit.

So – it's the beginning of the 2nd Act (of Cosi fan Tutte*) - - -That's what she's going to sing tonight - "Una donna a quindici anni" Despina belongs to the "lose your virginity as quickly as possible" school. And these two (indicating Dorabella and Fiordiligi) -they're the last of the (old school).*

-- - - - -everything (we did) yesterday [i.e. in Dane Preece's masterclass, SJC] - *the text first - and then the music - it goes double for this. Why? Because when I say the text first – it's in Italian! - - - you have to know what every word means and not trust the little translations.*

And, with reference to a particular recitative:

"Se noto si facessi" is the subjunctive - I don't want to be pedantic – but –" if we were to receive them" - - or "if people were to notice" –

So he foregrounds the common ground with Dane Preece in relation to the commitment – the being-there in the music, which over-rides any more superficial and structural differences. And, similarly, the commitment to the sound of the Italian language and the precise resonance of each is more important than a more general familiarity with the language. And the specificity of each Italian sound has its place in the meaning of the piece –

so it is the precise resonances of the embodied sounds, and not a general academic definition – which is important here.

It's a very important thing in Mozart recits that the 8th rest means nothing, because there's no comma, and because the real rhythm is the rhythm that we've found. And, Cate, "Sicurro" means "Sure". And sicurrissimo means "extremely sure".

We should also be on your case about single r s . Sorella only has one r . It sounds just as wrong to an Italian to miss single consonants - -

So, this is, on the face of it, a musicological discussion - an abstract discussion of the principles of performance of Mozart opera. But, in fact, nearly all of the material relates to the embodiment of the music – the exact physicalisation of consonants and the length of the pauses, for example. In addition, the authoritative manner in which it was delivered and the calm assumption that this is the normal currency of musical discussion for these singers was profoundly enabling for the whole group, in the assumption that he made that their standards would be equal to those in a professional opera house. So, it is the case made in this thesis that there is a philosophical frame to which discussion of this kind can contribute, but which is not limited to the passing on of musicological knowledge, and the implicit assumption that we are dealing with some sort of verifiable truth?

What was crucial, here, was the teacher's passionate, and very specific, knowledge of, and commitment to, Mozart's music and his insights into human foibles and, crucially, their precise interpretation in the music and the language, and as an extension of this, his commitment to creating "a space in which the singer can exist' –in the midst of a talk which otherwise makes no reference at all to philosophical frames or ideas. It is almost as if we cannot avoid philosophy if we are to do justice to our musical commitment!

Andrew Bowie, in his radical reinterpretation of the relation of philosophy to music, says:

> Music's 'meaning' might lie precisely in the fact that we cannot say in words what it means – why does music exist at all if what it 'says' could be said just as well in other ways? The important issue is, therefore, the differing ways in which something can be construed as 'meaning' something, (Bowie, 2007, p. 7).

And we might add that this is even more true of singing, where words can be redeemed from their merely philological and λόγος -based meaning by rhythm and pitch, and carry more of their poetic and personal meaning, and allowing more layers of significance and understanding than would be the case if the words were spoken or written.

So the way in which this speaker's contribution "means something" is that he insists on the fine detail, on the specifics of the opera, and that he addresses this to an audience who are outside the normal conservatoire system for classical music training: in this way, he leaves the space for the sung music to speak for itself. The implied message is that a person can engage with Mozart just by paying minute physical attention to the detail, with their whole being engaged in the process (hearing, social awareness, linguistic analysis etc etc.) And then, when they come to sing the material, they are able to do so with all their available resources of who they are, their personal and emotional history, their particular educational background, their physical specificity and history, for example.

So, this embodied transmission of an understanding which might, at first sight, seem to be academic, as well as its enabling effects on those taking part, would, perhaps, indicate that an abstract, purely musicological frame is inadequate here. I would suggest that what is in fact happening is that participants are being invited to participate in the opera in minute embodied detail, which is an existential participation. This idea is further developed below in relation to the other masterclasses on this summer school.

Robert Lada Masterclass

The third masterclass, on the use of the Alexander Technique in singing is, in an immediate sense, the most obviously relevant to the theme of this thesis, in that it deals specifically with the issue of embodiment of singing and with dealing with the problems that get in the way of that. The language and frames of reference used are also the most difficult to fit into the

academic context of these masterclasses, because they are deliberately informal. Positioning the AT in the intellectual landscape is notoriously difficult, as the reference to Rachel Zahn's work in the chapter on Alexander Technique shows. This is no doubt partly because FM Alexander's philosophical frame was ahead of his time. It is still being unpacked, as is clear in Zahn's paper and also, in the field of analytical philosophy, in the work of Tim Kjeldsen, in a "Thinking and Singing" conference which I ran at the Institute for Musical Research in 2013 and then in a paper in Voice Studies (Kjeldsen, 2015a).

Robert Lada does not engage with academic work- he is quintessentially a practitioner – and a very experienced and effective one. But, of course, it is fundamental to this practice that the thinking process (and, by implication, the philosophy) is clear. In addition, he is a key organiser of Alexander Technique International which is referred to in the Alexander Technique chapter of this thesis as probably the most effective research promoter amongst the AT umbrella organisations.

This is his description of his work in connection with his work at Berkeley College of Music:

> The Alexander Technique concerns itself with how you do what you do. We try to have you move as easily and freely as possible while making your music. We call that difference 'use': how you use yourself as an instrument. My belief is that the more you perform in a healthy manner, the better your sound will be. I've certainly seen it demonstrated.

So, this is a very experienced teacher, with extremely sophisticated skills, putting the Alexander Technique into deliberately non-specialised language. This may be partly the effect of an anti-intellectual aspect of US culture, of course (even in a multi-university city like Boston!). He continues:

> My perspective on this is to take all the energy that you use to keep yourself upright and transform it into something that's available for your creativity. Once you don't need that energy to stay upright—that's where posture and movements come in—that energy's liberated for another use, so you can put it into your musicality, (Berklee, 2017).

This proposal – that our functioning in every area (physical, intellectual and, perhaps, spiritual) is adversely affected by our "use" and the release of

energy which can be achieved by addressing this is a basic premise in AT interventions in music education and professional music (as described in the chapter on AT, above).

This is the introduction to his class at the summer school, addressed to everybody in the room:

... You're in the centre of the world: it's a world where you belong: you can be expansive within this world, even if you get smaller, because you change shape all the time. You change shape when you breathe, you change shape when your heart beats, you change shape when your cranio-sacral pulse beats in your brain - and all that changing shape, bigger, smaller, bigger smaller – you can be expansive– expansive with the outside expansive with the inside , because utterly supported, and utterly in the middle - utterly the size you wanna be.

So, he is taking those in the room through a sort of meticulous self-observation of themselves – a meditation, perhaps. He helps those present to find their centredness by talking through the way different parts of the body are aligned with each other. The importance of this for feeling secure in singing performance cannot be over-stated:

So, in your perfect centre, there are some landmarks. The bridge of your nose – is in between your two eyes - and your eyes are more or less between your ears. So you have landmarks (so) that you know where the outside of your physicality is. And the centre of your physicality. The tip of your nose, the gaps in your teeth, the tip of your chin – they're all kinda lined up –

Your breastbone - if you follow that line a little bit - -is lined up with your thoracic spine - that's the part of your spine where your ribs are attached – and they attach at the back of the spine- and at the front to the breastbone - and they go way up around and they're always moving. Your shoulders could move if you wanted, all 6 ways –up and down, front and back, or right down if you choose. Your breath is right in the centre of all that. Your upper arms you can free to and from the horizon. The inside of

your upper arms can breathe in and out from your torso – Your elbows pressing down.

So, this is not, of course, a physiological statement from a scientific observer, but a sympathetic accompaniment to the phenomenological experience of the body in singing – which is central to the subject matter of this thesis.

Again the next passage will sound familiar to anyone who has practised meditation – it is a detailed exposition of the physical act of being present.

Elbows away from the ribs,- away from each other ... simultaneously away from your shoulders and your hands.
Your breastbone, resting on the sides ... while your backbone rests on the floor.
Your belly button is kind of opposite the bottom of your lumbar spine. Your tailbone and coccyx is between your two hip bones. And if your tail bone weren't standing, that would go between your knees, between your upper and lower legs, between your ankles.

- Even there, you have a centre. Your heels get free all the way from your knees and your toes, simultaneously, knees out the side away from your feet and your hips. Hips away from your knees and from your head- head away from - - -- so you always have these movements of freedom which are there, waiting for you to come and find them - -

Energetically, which is another source of support from the world, - energy can come in through your little fingers and the backs of your arms and back through your little fingers. In through your thumbs. - In through your middle three fingers – the centre of your arms – up and down to the crown of your head. Other (energy) goes down through your torso, through your hips and your legs – and back through your heels and out through your toes and the soles of your feet. So you have this refreshing, cool [...] *source of sustenance and energy that connects you to the greater world, and -- more expansive. That greater world is far and wide – as you choose, as you need, and where you can expand to- always in the centre – always supported and always resting. So, hang out for a couple of minutes.*

This your time, and you've got all the time.

So, this is a kind of meditation for the people in the room, (and he would be aware, in doing this, of the issues that people in the group are dealing with[20]). As such, it would be unfair to subject it to too much academic analysis. Nevertheless, it is relevant to point out that it is a clear statement of the importance of physical presence, and a living, multi-dimensional relationship to the rest of the world (and to each other, of course). And that realising this potential is crucial for these singers – the key to their success in everything else they do. This combination of a simple idea (of physical presence) having far-reaching implications for the performance of a complex art form (opera) is one that recurs throughout this thesis.

He then asks for suggestions of what members of the group would like to work on:

- and I'll take them into my own terminology . One of the things yesterday was - what it is to be working hard.

It is interesting here that he insists (notwithstanding the informal language referred to above), on a high level of precision in the language he uses - a crucial factor in any philosophical reflection, of course. He, in common, I would suggest, with all Alexander technique teachers who are taking their discipline forward, is extremely clear and careful in his description of what is going on.

He then does an exercise in a bottle of water passing from one person to another, playing with the weight of the water and the balance of the bottle in the hand:

Eventually I'm sending it [the bottle of water] *back to you, but I'm not going to let go – so we're finding out - - -This is not about -you know the facts or you don't know the facts –*

[20] It became clear in the ongoing feedback after the end of the course that this teacher had been very effective in ways that I was not aware of at the time in dealing with problems such as long-standing panic attacks suffered by one student and other ongoing health/ emotional issues in a way that hugely contributed to the smooth running of the course. SJC

So he explicitly here focuses on experiential rather than objective truth:

- - - -And play around with it - - So- if we have liquid on the inside – it's like- really nice if it doesn't get out –
So when we move, if we have in our minds a container of soft (mass?) that's moving like weight?
But we also have a structure - - - So we have a nice structure that is joined together, –
[demonstrating] Look how far he goes before he comes back - - - - -
- - -So we have this structure that keeps us together – right? That's why that liquid was contained in the bottle. How far we can get (and keep our balance).

He then uses another exercise, based on the principle of tensegrity in, for example, architecture:

Tensegrity is a relatively new principle (50 years old) based on the use of isolated components in compression inside a net of continuous tension, in such a way that the compressed members (usually bars or struts) do not touch each other and the prestressed tensioned members (usually cables or tendons) delineate the system spatially, (Jáuregui, 2004, p. iv).

And he makes specific reference to the work of Ingber (see Appendix 7). Clearly, this issue cannot be examined here in depth, but its implications for singing were eloquently demonstrated in this class, as follows:

But we also have a structure, that - - - is joined together –
Look how far he goes before he comes back - - - - - So we have this structure that keeps us together – right? That's why that liquid was contained in the bottle. How far we can get - - -Find a partner and play with sway.
Let's see how far you can go and they'll stay in one place. Play with a structure which keeps you in place – more than in traction. Right? You're kind of spring loaded – right?

So, he is encouraging those in the room to experience their physicality in a very immediate way, not only individually, but as a member of the group.

And then he makes the connection between this work and the need for total personal commitment to the sound and the drama of the piece in Dane Preece's masterclass:

So one of the wonderful interpretations that you can (do)when you hear Dane [in the previous masterclass, described above] *pouring out is to find your springloadedness and bring it through. – bring it through the physicality – so to work harder you go even deeper inside. So that you can come out. There's a little, small delay Right? And you ride on it – right?*

So, everyone in the group connects physically with the others in the group- by joining hands or with a hand on someone else's shoulder, for example, and the whole structure sways and moves around.

So everyone get around in a circle and you're going to contact – so we have one of these nice swaying structures, Right? Now check this out - G-lock your knees [when one person locks their knees, the whole structure stops moving, including those who are not touching the person who has locked his knees, SJC] *– now let go - -we all started moving again -*

So P, if you can feel that kind of when it gets through – so we all started moving again - so that energy is stored up.

This that we're doing here is tensegrity -

So, he is working with different members of the course to help them to experience directly the effects of tensegrity in their own bodies, and its relation to their performance.

And he says in relation to a building in Boston built on the principle of tensegrity:

It only touches the ground in 3 places.
I'm all about creative laziness.

Why should I try to create something ("cos I've been doing it for forty years) when mother nature [has already done the work]*?- -*
Why wouldn't I look at how natural structures work?
We are omni-directional creatures.- we can go every which way. So it makes sense that we have a structure that can absorb forces from every different direction.
Well, it turns out that the structure which has greatest and minimum force; it's a pyramid.
This chair does great like this (weight down). If you had a stand of bricks, and you pile them on top of each other, the brick at the bottom gets the weight of everything. And if you look around – look at the chairs. There are all these right angles –heavily influenced by geometry.
***DM**: It's a hexagon.*
It's based like that - And you have a structure that's tremendously resilient and adaptable.
So when we kind of (push down) like this, you're kind of going against the strengths of your structure. You're much more able to absorb and cut out this tremendously more controlled – and efficient than (demonstrates force)"I can do it – it's like this".
- - - -and the other thing would be your spine – right? If it was all bricks, the bottom would take all the weight. - - - - -
So all movements are based on fluidity and springiness and spirals. If you look at molecules – they are spirals. All of our building blocks - - - -
You can say – "My identity is the choices I make" - - - or some people call it posture.

And a further exercise:

Walk back and forth - -you 3 walk like that - - in that way.
And M's way is different from B's way Right? He sounds different – he looks different. 3 more Ms - -
OK. C's way if different, Right?
Ct's way is different.
Part of it is the specifics of her structure, and part of it is who Ct is.
3 more Cts.

(students walk across the room imitating the first person walking as they have observed it -much laughter)
That's a G I've never really seen – seriously-
P's younger – there's just more vitality and resilience in his structure.
Your job (in walking like the people above) is to be accurate.

The point made above that someone's movement is part of who they are is obviously fundamental for this thesis, and for its implications for singing education. It is important to note that he is engaging with the specifics of each person's physicality.

We have in our brains these things called mirror neurons[21] *- - - -*
they're a visual motor. – you see it – you can do it
So what you see will be what comes out. You can see potential in someone. - and work with that potential – cos' it's there. All of those movements that you made- are there within you anyway. Our idea of our identity – our personality – is that we select some of those – and we don't select some others. – but that doesn't mean that we haven't got them. – They're always there- they're always possible. So when Zoe [the other Alexander Technique teacher] *and I are working and we'll do the stuff with the hands, <u>it's as much working with those potential movements that are a little bit masked by - and uncovering them again., rather than trying to train you into something else</u>. It's more of what you already can do*, [my underlining, SJC].

Again, it is not appropriate here to attempt a critical analysis of the science underlying this statement. But what is relevant to this thesis is the unmasking of the person who is the singer and performer. In existential

[21] Described thus in the literature: Mirror neurons are one of the most important discoveries in the last decade of neuroscience. These are a variety of visuospatial neurons which indicate fundamentally about human social interaction. Essentially, mirror neurons respond to actions that we observe in others. The interesting part is that mirror neurons fire in the same way when we actually recreate that action ourselves. Apart from imitation, they are responsible for myriad of other sophisticated human behavior and thought processes, (Souraya & Samarth, 2012).

terms, one might say that the authentic person is being revealed through the process described here.

And another exercise concerned singing as though the singer was somebody else:

Lets' sing from the reality of Ct – 'cos you have the real thing right there to see - - so use your actual vision of her to inspire you as you continue - - and absorb her way of moving through you.

***CB**: The singing aspect just sort of happened*

***R. Lada**: It just sort of happens when you get out of the way. – and you have an idea. You just ride that wave and it comes out – like you were saying - it's inevitable.*

When I said "Just bring in aspects of everybody – you filled in the space remarkably.

Am I doing it all myself, or can I just let it flow through me and see what comes out? 'Cos that was really striking.

- And the effect of this singing as though the singer was someone else is that they become more truly themselves.

And this is his explanation of the workings of the Alexander Technique:

His [F M Alexander's] *second discovery was that you can communicate this stuff through a contact: I don't worry about the physical contact – you don't need the physical contact at all - it's the presence. So when I do this work, it's a journey of self- exploration. Where you* [i.e. the student] *are the expert. There's no better P than P : there's no better G than G. But I think my job is to assist you in discovering places in yourself that you'd probably forgotten. <u>You have more possibilities – you move with more choices – way different ways of going about this.</u>*

And on breathing for singing:

Breathe in – who can breathe while they're asleep?

How many can talk or sing – which means you can control when you're exhaling? So-it's a combination of voluntary and involuntary – of choice and reflex. The figure we'll go through today, which is the classical Alexander Technique exercise. The goal in my mind is to get you closer to the involuntary aspect 'cos that's the base of the voluntary breath.

The implication of this session is that each person has choices to make about how they use their physical presence, and their space in the world. The efficacy of their actions- in this case their singing – will depend on how they make those choices.

Thus, the emphasis is on occupying a body and a space, rather than on learning a technique for producing some pre-decided effect. In this respect, the implications of this material are more radical than they might seem – there is no place for pre-decided aesthetic judgements about the singing which is produced. There may, of course, be judgements about what accords with the expectations of a paying public, which is an entirely different issue, and also of importance to those training to sing. But we might also consider that singers who make a fundamental difference to the world sing with personal integrity, and educate, as well as please, their listeners, rather than necessarily fulfilling their preconceived ideas of how music and singing should sound.

Ingrid Surgenor Masterclass

The last class was with Ingrid Surgenor, whose biography is above. She began with a strongly supportive statement in favour of high-level tuition for singers outside the normal professional/conservatoire system. I assume this is based at least partly on experience in Wales, where many singers of opera who have made a huge difference to singing and to their public have not necessarily had a conventional musical education – or have had to supplement it with extra coaching outside the main stream of tertiary education.

The first singer sang "O mio Fernando" from Donizetti's *La Favorita*: Again, like David Miller, above, she insists on the specificity of the (Italian) language:

The thing about Italian vowels is that we want to hear all of them. Don't feel as though there isn't time to say them all. The interesting thing [...] *about this period of Italian composers is that they make it as easy as they possibly can for you, in that the vowels are longer - -*

One thing we were talking about this morning is that the air flow is most important – and that is what helps you get to the next note. You see a consonant – or whatever - in between, it's really important that you remember that it's the air flow that takes you there.

"Avrommi" – use the air to take you there – I know it's a double mm but – keep the air going, yes? So that will take you to the note rather than you having to reach for it.

- - - -Those portamenti from underneath ("Su' me" in O mio Fernando-) are a way of keeping the air flowing.

The flow of these high notes is complicated. - - - making sure that you always keep the air going – don't let the words get in the way. We're repeating the same words.

[Plays score so that singer can't pull back!]

You go straight up to the top note . When you have a choice, as you have here, (as in Rodolpho's aria in La Boheme) better not to put the word on it.

The "air flow" is, of course, the precise manifestation of the singer's relation between the music and the sound that they make – their physical presence in the world.

And, later in the class:

It's amazing really that the one thing that I find, no matter what level people are at – is remembering to keep the air flowing. And to keep the space.

[This is, of course, an AT-related issue. If the body is poised and free, the resonating spaces will be able to stay open, SJC].

And then she lists some of the distractions which get in the way of "getting the air flowing":

Because - all the time, if you're doing a 6-week rehearsal or a 2 week rehearsal or an afternoon rehearsal, somebody points something out to you, like the director says we want to have you here, or the conductor says "Sssh! That's too loud." or somebody says "Oh we want to hear diction – we want to hear more words", - or whatever - - nobody will tell you to keep the air flow going - nobody will tell you to keep the space. And the first reaction, when you hear all that is not to - - And it doesn't matter how high you are in the pecking order, that is, in the end, what I would be saying to you- what needs to be said. Because the brain is something different to the physical body, which is just the air and – you know - your body – it's a physical thing not a mental thing. But the mental thing can get in the way.

So, before you start, just think, and get the air flow going?

So, this emphasis on continuous breath flow – in other words the unbroken commitment to the flow of the music and words, found in soul and folk music when it is well done as well as in the best of opera singing,(see chapter on Jamaican jazz singer) is an uncompromising demand on the singer for continual commitment to the sound of the voice, without breaks of concentration or of breath flow, the physical manifestation of musical commitment. Clearly this is a distillation of the contribution of Italian Bel Canto singing to the world of vocal sound.

It is also interesting that she privileges the physical functioning over mental functioning. This can be read, of course, in the light of Cavarero's contrast of λόγος (*logos*) and φωνή (*phone*), (See reference to Cavarero above p. 28 (Cavarero 2005). It is interesting that Cavarero's assertion of the primacy of the resonances of the body over the logical structuring of the world finds an echo in the success of top-flight opera singers, as implied here.

But there is an even more striking echo of Cavarero in the emphasis on the breath as the primary mode of being of the speaker/singer. Cavarero discusses the primacy of speech in the Hebrew tradition and refers to: 'The vocal sound of speech, which is identical to the breath of life

(Cavarero, 2005, p. 22)[22]. She refers to 'a crucial resistance to the regime of signs' referring to the fact that the vowels in Hebrew have to be added by the speaker – they are not in the original text. This is part of her case that in the Hebrew tradition (which is, of course, the basis of western Christianity, and therefore of western culture, with a later Greek emphasis on the written word) 'the sacred Word is first of all a sonorous event,' (op. cit., p. 22). And, quoting Mahmutcehajic: 'The voice confirms the Word: to speak is our way of seeking the Voice at the beginning, (Rusmir, 2000).'
Perhaps this contribution, placing the primacy of the voice as breath at heart of the origins of human culture, goes some way towards explaining how compelling this insight is in the context of classical singing.

To return to the masterclass:

- - -with another singer, she has a clear strategy for using the strengths of the singer in the context of auditions and dealing with audiences and surviving in the classical music landscape:

We were talking about finding out about voice types – we were doing a lot of that this morning with you. And find something that shows all your good points and choose it for that reason.

Often panels are not aware that something is difficult, so why choose it just for the sake of it, if it's uncomfortable for you? It's important to look for something that shows what you can do right at the very beginning.

I don't know whether you've ever sung "No word from Tom" from The Rakes progress? Well- the main reason for singing that is to show that you've got an amazing top C. which doesn't happen until the last note that you sing, and there's 7 minutes of music before that. So, if you're showing us that you've got a top C , all the panel or the audience have got 7 minutes to get there! So it's really, really important that you actually show us something , in a concert or an audition, or whatever, to show us straight away - what you can do. 'Cos the audience hears – and they think "Oh Yes – I enjoyed that". And then if you make a mistake later, they think "Yeah well, ok, but the beginning sounded really great."

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[22] (my underlining), קוֹל (*qol*) sound, voice, רוּחַ (*ruach*) – breath, wind, spirit,' Hebrew characters and additional meanings added by SJC - only transliteration provided by Cavarero]

We got some fantastic top notes today, didn't we? Absolutely amazing in Je veux vivre wasn't it?

So – (back to Doretta) you shouldn't think about the word that you're singing. Right? You're starting on an A. In J's voice this is really the part in which she feels most comfortable. So don't think of a particular word. So (at this point) there's just one note. (Folle amore) But it's a real good exercise for you -with your voice. But- the other thing as well is - and it's really important for M (tenor) as well, is that when you're going up in the voice the natural reaction is to think you've got to give more. But, in fact, it's exactly the same. And so, if you can keep the air flow going, you're going to hear the top notes anyway. – so there's no need to give any more. There are 8 double basses in the orch. And there is one piccolo, which is more sound. And it will never, ever drown the piccolo. So – the high notes will always carry. You never heard Pavarotti do (more effort on top notes) It would always be joined. – so that the air flow would take you there.

The intimate relation of the breath in the use of the voice to human being is something which the singing community usually takes as obvious, if often unstated. The argument in this thesis is that it needs to be clearly stated in order to avoid confusion and a crucial waste of energy, especially in the context of training, which carries a particular responsibility for clarity. And it is this clarity which is so admirably shown here. It is important to put the argument on the level of the history of thought, rather than that of fashion, or superficial aesthetic preferences, which may well be of no interest, essentially, to anyone but the subject. A direct and very striking comparison can be made here with an interview with philosopher Andrew Bowie:

> The crucial element in playing and practicing music is that you become absorbed by it. Hence, it is a particular mode of being. The nearest equivalent is probably meditation. However, playing music also differs from meditation, as you are physically active and you are trying to make sense in what you do ... The other manner in which playing music relates to meditation is that it involves a focus on breathing ... It involves your whole body, (Four By Three Magazine, 2016).

This, from a philosopher with a very wide range of interest (Adorno, Kant, Heidegger , inter alia) is very striking indeed. He is speaking from the standpoint of playing jazz saxophone, but the same comparison is clearly even more true of singing, where the resonance dependent on the breath is produced by the body, rather than by an external instrument.

It is very clear that his philosophical and his music practice are crucially interlinked. For example, he says in the same interview:

> ... philosophy, it seems to me, if it is about anything at all, is about sense making
> ... involvement in music may give you more of a sense of the absolute than philosophy does.

And he further reflects on the crucial relation of music practice to philosophical understanding thus:

> The relation to philosophy here has to do with the realization that it is only through participation in a specific kind of practice that you come to new kinds of understanding. That dimension is missing from too many ways of thinking philosophically (op. cit.).

Bowie's account in this interview relates directly to Ingrid Surgenor's insistence in this masterclass on the primary importance of singing on the breath, and places it, fascinatingly, in a wider context of European thought.

The connection he makes with meditation is also significant, since the prominence in Buddhist meditation of mindfulness is arguably an eastern form of western existentialism, (see introductory chapter).

Reflections From Members of the Course

Members of the course were asked to provide an (open-ended) statement of their experience, and its meaning for them. I deliberately did not specify the kind of responses I was looking for, and this was justified in some of the unlooked-for topics foregrounded by the participants, such as the importance of the group experience. There is a further resonance with insistence on "participation in a specific kind of practice" in the above interview with Andrew Bowie in the emphasis which those who were studying on the course placed on the importance of the group experience. One participant commented:

I feel the group bonded during the week and this was possibly due to the location as we were all together for the entire week and in a way cut off from the rest of the world.

In my opinion this meant we all focused on the music and each other far more than if we were just having a lesson or even a day's tuition. The varied teachers each brought their own expertise which we could all tap into and the standard of tutors was extremely high.

And, in the words of another participant:

One of the best things about the whole week - how integrated the whole group was - whether it was amongst the students, between the students and the teachers, amongst our helpers and friends who'd accompanied us or the "locals" - . Everyone was so generous and I think that really contributed to everything that was achieved.

And another singer:

The team you assembled were amazing, and very well balanced in offering different attributes, all with the same relaxed, no pressure or egos manner , which created a wonderful working environment. True to your word, the experience was certainly transformative, in more ways than I could of imagined. Now (I'm) armed with a new set of ideas, skills and philosophies which go way beyond just singing, which I'm still trying to digest .

WHAT A WEEK!!

26.4.17

All I really want to say is that Kaltern was the most inspiring musical experience of my life so far! I have always loved singing but never pursued it with any great intensity as dance was my passion in the past - though I have been in a few amateur choirs "just for fun" (and am currently). When Sara and Zoe invited me to join the Opera Mint summer school, I was a little nervous as I knew there would be some very good singers there and the

line-up of tutors was so impressive. They assured me it would be very inclusive and there would be no pressure. I secretly thought if I felt I wasn't up to it, I would just enjoy the fact it was in a beautiful location in the Italian Tyrol and do a bit of sightseeing! Instead, I found myself completely and utterly immersed in music for 7 days and entirely supported and encouraged by all the fellow students and by all the tutors, so that by the end my confidence had grown in leaps and bounds and I think possibly my singing also was a little better, I felt more free and was producing a richer sound. This is thanks to the incredible spirit of joy that Sara imbues into her work and that is infectious - the expert tutors in opera, musical theatre, Alexander technique and choral technique gave us all such attention and treated us with such care and integrity - in one-to-one sessions and in masterclasses - despite their being used to working with international professionals: finding our strengths and building on them, finding ways of thinking about the sound we were making that certainly I had never thought of before! There were several revelations in the course of the week and daily inspirations. Some of the students knew each other beforehand but not all, but by the end of the week we had become a true family, eating and drinking together in the local cafes and restaurants between classes and after "school", practising and singing together (culminating in a spontaneous "flashmob" performance in the town square, which drew a crowd!) and providing mutual support, and lots of laughter and sharing. There was a final concert to work towards, to which the public were invited, but also daily evening and lunchtime concerts by some of the more experienced singers and one of our tutors, Zoe Challenor - another inspiration. The venue was fabulous, a four-storey building right in the centre of a beautiful town, surrounded by mountains bathed in blue skies and sun and opposite a church - as we walked to our lessons, we could often hear the voice of fellow students pouring out of the windows... The only slight problem was the hourly chiming of the church bells!! A week that feels as fresh in my memory now as if it were yesterday and I think will stay that way for ever! THANK YOU to Sara and all those who made Kaltern 2016 possible.

The following is interesting because the writer identifies herself as thinking visually, and so is sometimes struggling to describe her experience adequately in words. This is a useful reminder that, as is the case with the case study of men with an asd (Chapter 3) not all of us would choose to use words to describe the profound experiences which go with singing study. I have inserted a copy of the Van Gogh picture to which she refers, but apart from this, we just have to bear witness to her struggles to express the inexpressible! I have left her statement complete in its original version. It was not, of course, envisaged as an academic statement.

Reflections of a Mezzo-Soprano - OperaMint Summer School, Kaltern, August 2016

‘Music opens to man an unknown region, a world that has nothing in common with the world that surrounds him, in which he leaves behind all ordinary feeling to surrender himself to an inexpressible longing...’ E.T.A. Hoffmann, Essay on Beethoven

When I returned from Italy following the OperaMint summer school I could not get the word 'transformative' out of my mind. My head was buzzing with new ideas and I was excited by the experiences I had had vocally, new concepts that I had learnt and a new sensory, auditory, experience that I had lived. The word 'existentialism' also came to mind. I thought I comprehended this concept from previous reading and from hearing Sara Clethero (our esteemed singing teacher, mentor and friend) speak so eloquently on the subject. Suddenly I understood the concept with a different vision and clarity that I had not experienced before. Now there was depth and meaning to my vocal journey that I had only imagined and now I was living. With this came a burgeoning awakening as to what it was about singing that had always moved me and given me a deep seated desire to express myself through this art form for as long as I could remember.

I have taken time to try and make some sense of this and before committing my thoughts in writing. My first and most logical thought was how can I have had such a transformative, powerful experience, in so short a time? The school was less than a week in duration. We had access to

world class coaches and teachers, classes in ensemble singing, preparation for concerts, rest periods for consolidation and a marvellous esprit de corps amongst an eclectic group of people from different walks of life and professional backgrounds. We all had a common purpose to express ourselves through voice and to hone our art to the best that we had the potential to be. The experience was there to be embraced but no one could say what its impact might be. Could this result be considered illogical?

I return to the word 'transformative' and why I could not shake this from my mind. It was on the last day when our delightful tenor told me that Sara had used this word in context with the school and that this might indeed be our experience. A bold statement and yet one that I knew had totally affected me. This was exciting but why? My next thought was to try and make sense of this and to understand what had happened to give me these emotions. This, intertwined with the philosophical paradigm of existentialism, the state of being open to change, giving you permission simply 'to be', gave me a basis on which to try and make sense of what I was feeling.

The place to start might be to consider what it was I wanted to achieve from the school. What were the opportunities laid before me? In answering this I realise how superficially we might consider ideas, thoughts and initiatives. I think my intent was very simple. Here was the opportunity to visit a beautiful place in the home of opera, to be able to immerse myself in classical voice and to have a full vocal experience with input from a world class group of professionals. There was also the chance to perform and to be able to say that I had performed in such a setting was manna from heaven for an aspiring classical singer. I do not think my thoughts went any deeper than this. In view of the transcendental nature of music and that of my experience, it is almost shocking to realise how rooted in day to day reality my initial thoughts were. I was soon to learn that as the American poet, Wallace Stevens said, that the essence of art is insight of a special kind into the concept of reality.

Now that I look back on this experience my first lesson was to comprehend that opportunities and new experiences, have many layers and

that voice and its exploration within this genre is a multi-layered journey that may not have an ending. I have always said that a singing lesson with Sara, the vehicle that opens our hearts and minds to the wonders, colours and textures of classical music expressed through voice, is never simply 'a singing lesson' but 'a lesson in life'. More than ever I hold true to this belief and so to add to these layers perhaps one should look right and then left as other facets unfold and there is a realisation that that search for beauty, for purity of sound and supreme self-expression maps across to our application in making sense of the world around us. This was a new and startling insight and suddenly the thirst to use our bodies, indeed our instruments, becomes a very profound experience indeed.

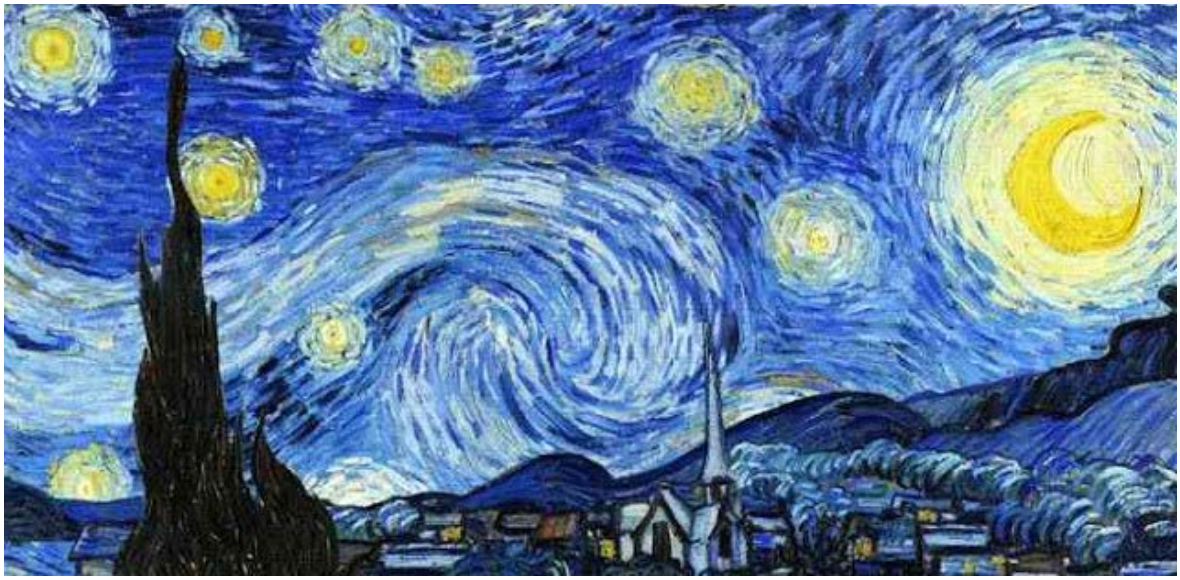
As these thoughts began to formulate in my mind I can go no further before introducing another powerful thread that underpinned this work: FM Alexander's principle of the Alexander Technique. Whilst this way of learning might be an interwoven thread that could stand on its own merit, the existentialist aspects of its technique provides an additional facet to a framework that is beginning to make sense to me. The Alexander Technique that teaches that 'less is more' and illustrates that you have a choice to move in conception, becomes inextricably linked with this powerful transformative experience. Here the physical and mental, the mind and body, have a causal interaction and teaches us that we need to understand ourselves as psychological and physical beings. It is apparent that the existentialism model best meets these needs, providing an act of simplicity and yet of such integrity. I was beginning to understand how we need a philosophical model for how we practise and the multiplicity of paradigms that this might suggest.

This now lends itself to the concepts of authenticity in performance and harmony, the blending of ideas that music espouses. Here there is a requirement not to become diverted by outside issues but to remain open to your art and commit to making your individual statement through the vehicle of song. This involves a clear understanding of what it is that you want to say and how you would want to say it. The interrelation of such ideas and finely tuned alignment also seemed to relate to the Alexander Technique, encompassed by a cloak of harmony, the blending of musical facets,

people, concepts and sounds which may feed the soul and indeed that of our audience.

If Plato saw music as a means of developing the human soul, here were the constructs that provided some sense to this journey. Indeed illuminating art has been with humankind since its beginning, guiding humans in their evolutionary ascent. Hermes, an ancient Egyptian savant, was seen as the founder of the musical arts. As to the antiquity of these musical arts among the Egyptians, Plato said that songs and poetry had existed in Egypt for at least ten thousand years, and that these were of such an exalted and inspiring nature that only Gods and Godlike men could have composed them. The same may be said of the many different art forms through which concepts and ideas may be represented to us in a way that has personal resonance.

I have discovered through other professional work that I am very much a 'visual learner' and that I make sense of ideas through colour, shapes and textures. This style of learning, as identified by the Fleming VARK model, also includes kinaesthetic and auditory learning hence a useful learning style when applied to this art form. For some time I have seen the production of vocal sound, the flow of air over the vocal cords, as a mass of bright colour in swirling, rotund shapes. Within this picture may be images reflecting the story or emotions being portrayed. Coincidentally a painting by Van Gogh entitled 'A Starry Night' illustrates for me this visual interpretation of the production of sound, this flow of air over the vocal cords, encapsulating the expression of my instrument as I wish it to transcend the space before me. Here is one form of art being personally interpreted to represent another but this raises the question of all art forms in their expression being intertwined.



[Picture from http://www.astandsforclass.com/2015/11/art-corner-starry-night-vincent-van-gogh.html]

This picture creates such a visual image for me and the setting in which we found ourselves (Kaltern or Caldaro in the Italian) seemed to intertwine with this image. Here was a Tyrolean village on the Kalterer See, resplendent with Church and fascinating features nestling in a bowl of hills evocative of the rise and fall of sound with nature, art and beauty combining as one. I remember commenting to a fellow singer on the first day, sitting in the picturesque square, that it felt as if we were in the land of 'make believe'. I had also just visited the Church St Anton, adorning a corner of the village square, architecturally simple on the outside and full of culture and beautiful artwork on the inside. How interesting that one of our esteemed coaches spoke about the benefits of conducting the school within such a different environment for all of us. Van Gogh's picture too, coincidentally featured a spire of a Church reaching out to the sky.

As Van Gogh proved such a master of capturing the essence of a picture laid before him, so too could the scenes that we were gazing upon enrich the soul. There was a light, warmth and energy that enveloped us in synergy with all that we were there to do. The village was also German speaking amidst the Italian landscape. A cacophony of sound and languages in the open square were reflected by those of our musical texts.

Music has no barriers, nor too this international population. Friendships were forged amongst the locals who were inspired by this English speaking group who had descended in their midst, their music floating out from open windows. I know that when we return some familiar faces will greet us and how formative and enriching such relationships have proved to be.

Layers were building upon layers from the everyday adjuncts to this intense transformational experience. Coupled with this was the heightened desire to comprehend one's art in relation to one's own experience and desires. At the time I probably only sensed that I had this deeply rooted question as to why singing meant so much to me or why it made me feel the way it did. Singing has always been a sensory, auditory and heightened experience for me, perhaps bound with a spiritual longing and the feeling of being in the moment. Curiously I went to Kaltern not knowing that I really had this question nor indeed was floundering for an answer. In a split moment however, under a night sky that Van Gogh so easily captures, the answer was verbalised for me by a fellow, inspired soprano.

It was a truly enlightening moment. One can talk about the transcendental, a sense of losing oneself and then finding yourself through singing. My friend had instinctively reached out into my very essence and laid bare the elusive answers that I was seeking. It was as if she knew that I was vocally lost, bringing me back into the fold of wisdom and understanding. The connection was profound creating an excitement and mutual understanding that was new to both of us. I recalled Sara's poetic example of Jonathan Livingstone Seagull whose sense of flying may equally be reminiscent of singing, as illumination came and freedom was found. Was this also reflective of true authenticity as I became aware and excited by these new insights?

Suddenly singing, as an intense personal experience, began to make sense and again I return to the idea of this whole experience being transformative. Indeed transformative art may serve as a portal to a higher consciousness, propelling the readied psyche to dimensions higher than those previously experienced, indeed to epiphanies. It seems that psychic upheaval and transport to higher awareness may occur in any area of human life and at a multiplicity of levels. How simply Plato captures the

essence of ideas suggesting that instruction in music is a more potent operation than many others, because rhythm and harmony find their way into the inner regions of the soul, with which they forcefully interconnect, imparting refinement.

I found myself thinking and being in another dimension as these ideas took hold and were ready to be explored. A new awakening was emerging about what it was in relation to singing that had always so moved me and given me such a deep seated desire to express myself in this form. I return to Van Gogh's work and my picture of the tumbling movement of sound. This also reflects the momentum that we have gained from this phenomenal experience and the tide on which we continue to travel. We return to Kaltern next year and I hope that I will not, in one sense, repeat this experience but that this framework may be used to enable me to achieve, explore and discover a new epiphany. To this end I feel that I should clear my mind, allow my senses simply to be and to permit the exploration of these many layers to take me to a new and wonderful place as yet unknown.

22 November 2016

All this coincides with Bowie's statement that:

> Music enables connections between people that only a few other forms of human interaction do. We really do live in a world, in which we need things that help us to connect with others, (op. cit.).

"Art is supposed to engage your whole being and not just your conceptual capacity," (Four By Three Magazine website, 2016). This insight into the importance of the group setting for the learning experience was not something I necessarily expected when I asked for feedback and will need further, post PhD reflection. It may well be that there are resonances here with a sociological analysis such as that suggested by Tia de Nora in *Music Asylums: Wellbeing through Music in Everyday Life*.

The Further Philosophical Context of this Approach

At the heart of this event is Cavarero's plea for an acknowledgement of

> ... the human voice as unique ... the "throat of flesh" that repeats words with an unrepeatable voice ... the simple vocal self-

> revelation of the existence, which ignores every semantic interference (2005, p. 3).

To restate the problem identified by Cavarero in a summary which states more clearly and economically its contextualisation:

> She [Cavarero] ... wishes to deliver us from language, as it were, through a recuperation of the force of the vocalic, the acoustic, the resonant and sonorous auditory quality of phone ... (Burgess & Murray, 2006, p. 166).

The “force” (or perhaps, more precisely, the expressive power) of the voice is clearly foregrounded in all these classes, as are the liberating effects of this form of expression. There is, of course, a pre-history in the group’s experience of this kind of work – it is well-established in their previous experience of working together that their “recuperation of the ... voice” is of primary concern to us all. They all know and understand at a deep level that this is our communal endeavour. So there is a shared understanding of the importance of this.

This project is also a way of avoiding the class-specific uses of logocentric language, and affirming the right to self-expression of people of different socio-economic backgrounds. The logocentric metaphysical tradition belongs to a particular strata of educated society: the use of the voice, on the other hand, is an (almost) universal human right, and part of this project underlying this summer school is to make this available as widely as possible.

> ... this sonorous aspect of the vocalic stands as a corrective to our logocentric metaphysical tradition that singularly values the visual over the acoustic, semantic content over vocal utterances, and an abstract, anonymous “what” over a particular, embodied “who.” Cavarero claims that the vocalic is an “anti-metaphysical” force that exceeds and challenges signification, (op. cit.).

Clearly this assertion of the “particular, embodied “who”” over what is “abstract and anonymous” is crucial to this project, both in the sections dealing with the production of sound, as in the Surgenor and Lada masterclasses, but also, perhaps more unexpectedly, in the Preece and Miller classes. The issue is the specificity of the expression of the self,

through the language (in the case of David Miller, through the original languages of the opera). The language is important, not for its metaphysical resonances, but for its concrete, specific meaning and the connection of that with the personal reality of the singer, in the context of the drama, or the imagined drama, in the case of concert performances.

This is in contrast to the objectification of the voice by, for example Žižek in *Opera's Second Death* (2002), where the psychoanalytic implications of the operatic narrative are examined at the expense of the foregrounding of the personal significance of the voice - another example, I would suggest of the privileging of λόγος over φωνή.

Implications for Continuing Education

In the sphere of education studies, there is here an obvious implication for David Watson's examination of the future of

> the prospects of higher education's contributions to a more fluid, flexible and responsive lifelong learning, summed up as 'post-institutional higher education (Taylor & Francis Online website, 2015).

after the Dearing Report of 1997 (Watson, 2015).

David Watson writes about social work education, but the project described above has clear implications for the future of "a more fluid, flexible and responsive lifelong learning".

> In policy terms, if we want a system of post-compulsory education with better prospects for achieving our social, economic and cultural goals, we are going to have to take lifelong learning more seriously, and that means a post-institutional future for post-compulsory education, (Watson, 2015, p. 561).

The possibility of embracing different cultural, educational and neurological backgrounds in the experience described here is extremely powerful and profoundly enabling. Although it is not examined or conceptualized here as a therapeutic project, it has clear implications for the effectiveness and self-confidence of its participants, which is a resource which should not be neglected.

Clearly, a detailed examination of the implications of this project for higher education will have to be a separate project, but it is useful to position the project described here in this landscape, as a case study of what can be achieved and an analysis of the extraordinary personal and professional resources available if a way can be found of connecting with them.

Chapter 6
Case Study: Jamaican Jazz Singer

It's quite common for many pop/rock/country singers to develop hoarseness or lose their voices entirely with nodes or polyps. Not singers who sing using Bel Canto however. A perfect example of someone using this technique is Tony Bennett, now in his late 70's, who still sings many dates per year. This is an Italian technique, and for that reason a lot of the old Hollywood cats like Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Andy Williams, all sang like this. Almost all of the world's greatest singers over the ages have used the Bel Canto technique.

Volmer, Brian (2016)

In refining an existentialist frame for the human act of singing, and in deepening its resonance for all of us, it is clearly helpful to have an example from a culture other than white, western culture, and even from one in conflict with it in some respects.

Prof Andrew Bowie, in a seminar on Hegel at the Hay-on-Wye Festival, discussed the importance of music, and especially rhythm, as a medium for understanding the world, and as another dimension of philosophical enquiry: 'You learn more from listening to music. ... Art is to make sense of world ... Beauty matters because it gives meaning to life,' (Bowie, 2016a).

We might say, I would suggest, that music, in the resonance of its pitch and rhythm in bodies (an image especially relevant to singing, of course) adds a connection of our being with the world of thought – and concepts - of philosophy. That is, of course, an existential connection – one of being. And if it is a fundamentally human reality, it is true of people whose culture and relation to music is different to our own.

Human existence does not take only one form. We like to reassure ourselves that we are "normal" and, sometimes, that our mode of being is the only one – or the best one. But this search for a short-cut to feeling secure in the world is a futile one: we are vastly enriched, of course, and

our perception is deepened, by engagement with other modes of being, either from other cultures, or with people whose neurological set-up is different to our own – people with autism, for example.

The following example, of a Jamaican jazz singer, challenges the traditional western model of musical history in several respects: There is, of course, fraught relationship between the descendents of African slaves and the culture which attempted to depersonalise them. We could argue that this background of suffering gives an added urgency to the need – and even the imperative - to say who one is through music.

In an interview on his role of Kunta Kinte in the remake of Roots “a universal ancestor for African diaspora, an everyman of black history,” Malachi Kirby talks about the scene in which Kinte is beaten until he takes on the western name of “Toby”: ‘It felt like I could see every other person who went through that – I could hear all their screams and I could feel all their pain,’ (Rose, 2016, p. 11).

At the same time, Kirby is clear in rejecting the demand to ‘represent every black person that exists. “I’m only me! I’m just Malachi.”

So, the right to one’s name, one’s identity, transmitted through the voice, is crucial, but so is the specificity and the identity of the actor.

Interlinked with this urgent question of identity, is the reliance on aural, rather than written traditions – prioritising speech and sung words, with all their inflexions and rhythms over merely written words – the usual lingua franca of philosophy, of course. There is a clear connection here with the models used by Cavarero, above (p 28 for example), in distinguishing between logos (λόγος) and phone (φωνή).

So, in order to test and refine the ideas set out above, I will examine the suggested philosophical frame in the context of several case studies of individual singers and groups. The person who is the example referred to in this section is a jazz singer from Kingston, Jamaica, who came to the UK in 1960 at the age of 27. This is a fairly extreme test case for the frame outlined above. The nuance and structure of language used by this person is radically different from that of people born in the UK.

But it is also clear from the extracted conversation below, he does not regard himself as speaking “patois” (known to linguists as “Jamaican

Creole") examined, for example by Peter L. Patrick, who has done fieldwork and recorded examples in Kingston which:

> examine a recorded corpus for linguistic variables that are phono-lexical (palatal glides), phonological (consonant cluster simplification), morphological (past-tense inflection), and syntactic (pre-verbal tense and aspect marking), ... (Patrick, 2004, p. ??).

And Patrick portrays the "Jamaican urban mesolect"

> as a coherent system showing stratified yet regular linguistic behavior, embedded in a well-defined speech community; despite the incorporation of forms and constraints from English, it is quintessentially Creole in character. (Patrick, 1999).

While it is outside the scope of this study to examine the precise relation of this, modified Jamaican speech and use of language to "Patois", it is interesting to contextualize it in this culture. The question which I am seeking to answer here, is that of the way singing in this case reflects the "being–in-the-world" of someone from another culture, originally African, of course. This issue will arise at various points in the material which is reproduced here.

So, his chosen way of expressing himself is through English, but it is an English refracted through a very different cultural experience from that of those born in this country. His primary school education was crudely colonial: the children were taught by rote and the education was heavily overlaid with moral and social imperatives , directed, no doubt, at ensuring survival in an essentially hostile environment, and of coping with a way of living irrevocably based on the horrors of slavery, and all the assumptions of superiority of the perpetrators which went with that.

The use of language in this case, in the form in which I encountered it, is quintessentially musical. He is quite likely to go from speech to song in the middle of a conversation, and bureaucratic English, or English where legal precision is necessary, as in letters from a bank or the health service, for example, is a foreign world to him, and very difficult to negotiate. This excerpt from a conversation in May 2016 may help to give an idea of this, and also of the evocation of rhythm and music in story-telling:

Conversation Birmingham 30.5.16

We goes - I remember the time when I go - with the crowd - in a truck – not a bus – a truck and we sing (as we go along the road) along the road. Most of them song of [claps rhythmically] *rhythm.* (Clethero, 2016).

The use of language to capture the colour and sense of a story is also clear in this excerpt:

There was a lady - her name was like Mary Seacole - "Sister Mary" - she was a bishop - they crown her as a bishop– she went out to America – to a convention.

I remember that yard where the church was - used to have a big mango tree: we used to walk - the birds used to pick the stem of the mango and the mangoes them drop. We used to go and pick up the mango – sometimes rude enough to use things - catapult - vandalism, actually. (Clethero, 2016).

And his predilection for vivid storytelling is also clear in this story, of going to visit his family in the interior:

I went to the countryside: the other half of the family live - I went there -me and some other cousins – they was walking him quite peacefully tell me to get on him – so I – I never – I was a big boy about 13, 14. I get on this donkey and I was walking quite a few yards - actually walking- suddenly this donkey put up his tail and start farting – and run and kick up his back feet - and he throw me off! And he bruise up my knee. When he done that he run, and kicking like he's laughing –he stand up like to that light there – seems like he's actually laughing: let them guys come for him. It seems like he knows he shouldn't give me a harder fall than that.

I never been on a donkey before that or after that. – Donkey want water (song title) - I don't know if its water he wanted -

Where my cousins them used to live – them want transport to the home – four-and-a-half miles [away].

Sometime they bring a donkey and mek you rest your legs. They have about 4 or 5 bedrooms – all made out of wood.

SJC*: Did they go to school?*

Vic*: Yes.*

Those guys likes Kingston –everybody want to go to Kingston – all the glamour. – They thought "Kingston" is "kill some".

They sell coffee - to go to the marketplace.

I was a bush man and I drink mint and tea.

There was a time when I was up there and I went to school up there. My mother went up there to look after my niece and nephew- them people was very dedicated.

When I used to go to that place – the area of that place call Mount Vernon.

The house was like here - mainly wood – tell you what they was mainly worried about – there was a rock up there- it was about one and a half the size – or two time - the size of your car – they always have a thing about if that rock come down it crush the house – they was making some kind of preparation -

They got goats –they don't even have sheep – Rabbits – put them in a cage and fatten them and eat them - I ate it too.

Any how, you can't go back, but you have some nice things that can keep you company while living in your memories, (Clethero, 2016c).

And it is also clear in the way he evokes the slightly edgy feeling of being a teenager in Kingston:

Lead singer outside - in the night- His story was -I think it was based on (sings) 'Jane and Louise will be soon" Well –for the elders - well the adults them write these things down- we growing up and we adapt it- there's one river and the bank

And this one can be dangerous –'cos there's stones or brick - you hit the floor - with the rhythm

Pooh bally – I don't sure

You got to watch cos every time you hear "'bang" you see, everyone got a stone-you can get hurt. It go round in a circle till everyone get a handle – of the brick.

Some time it go on for maybe 10 min. Not really kids - kids – the adolescent age group. That's the last verse – the interest of that play -"let him put it down the alley it's the last stone you have-"

Teacher (in Birmingham) asked me about a fictitious story – supposed to be a story about this wise spider and his name was Alanci His title was Brother – he says Brother Alanci. It was written in a book. In a first-grade book. One of the kids them tell her about it. Louise Bennett – I think she the one wrote "Hold him Joe" It was maybe a farm and he had a donkey, and the donkey run away, and he shout to his son "Hold him Joe Don't let him go," (op. cit.).

So, how does this sit with Cavarero's opposition of logos (λόγος) and phone (φωνή)? Clearly, the use of language to control – through official letters and legal English, belongs to the world of λόγος. And, clearly, the use of language in song and in song-related speech, belongs to the world of φωνή. I would suggest that this relationship of the two uses of language, and its manifestation in this case, is crucial for our understanding of the two. And it is also seminal for this individual's expression of himself through singing (jazz) and his appropriation of the freedom to be himself through this expression. It is an expression of the self, independent of colonizing influences, and the necessity of survival in a strange and often hostile environment.

To contextualise this within the African context (in this case, South Africa) this passage from an article in The Telegraph on the background of a film about an orphanage for children of parents who had died from Aids is especially relevant:

> But the star role in We Are Together is not a person, but song. That singing is a big feature of the children's life is not unusual. Zwai Bala, a pop star who helped the children record a fund-raising CD, says, 'We South Africans sing before we sleep, sing before we eat; we sing when we are happy, we sing when we are celebrating, we sing when we are sad,' (Williams, 2008).

The singer who is the subject of this study went to South Africa with a local jazz band in 2005. Their sense of pride in the reception they received on this, their first visit to Africa and of coming home to the country of origin of their ancestors at last was very clear.

Cavarero comments, with reference to the work of Caribbean poet, Edward Kamau Brathwaite[23]:

> His English, however, is not the queen's English, but rather a language that is more akin to Creole English, to that which takes the name "nation language" – that is, the language spoken by the Africans who were taken to the Caribbean, (Cavarero, 2005, p. 147).

We could observe, of course, that standard English is not necessarily anything to do with the very peculiar version of the language spoken by the current monarch, but, nevertheless, Cavarero's phrase (originating, after all, from a non-English environment) is clear enough in its import.

In the case of the singer who is the subject of this study, his use of English is the source of some reflection on his part. He is aware that other people sometimes regard his grammar as faulty – but, at the same time, he is very confident in his own poetical self-expression (partly, of course, because of his success as a singer) and is also politically aware of the colonising pressure to speak the standard English.

This can be compared with the (more famous and very explicit) position taken by Benjamin Zephaniah, whose biography below makes his position very confidently clear:

> Dr Benjamin Obadiah Iqbal Zephaniah ... cannot remember a time when he was not creating poetry but this had nothing to do with school where poetry meant very little to him, in fact he had finished full time education at the age of 13. His poetry is strongly influenced by the music and poetry of Jamaica and what he calls 'street politics'.
>
> He ... gained a reputation as a young poet who was capable of speaking on local and international issues, (Zephaniah, 2016, my underlining).

[23] sometimes spelt Braithwaite. Playing with spelling is one of the features of his work. See https://englishsummary.com/summary-ananse-kamau-brathwaite/ for commentary on his spelling of Anasi/Ananse as a way of undermining colonialist written culture and foregrounding oral culture

So, Zephaniah eschewed the standardizing effects of English education at school, but has made a huge difference to our understanding of the use of language, both on an artistic and academic level, by Caribbean people and their relationship with other English cultures.

The singer examined as a case study here is less confrontational in his approach (and of a less forthright and more reflective character), but reaches an audience (white, Birmingham-based and other fans of 'jazz standards") which Zephaniah may not.

In Cavarero's more academic and less forthright language:

> ... the structure and sound of their original languages ... have acted like a hidden language, capable of modifying English and of undermining the cultural imperative of European languages.
> ... it is a question of their belonging to the different sonorous universes of the natural environment in which these languages were born, and in which they develop. ... (Cavarero, 2005, p. 147).

For the present subject, there is an unbroken continuum between speech and song – as is clear from the following examples: he goes from song to speech in gigs, including the (mostly white, often local) audience in his life experience, referring amongst other things, to the experience of failing powers in old age.

[Sung] *Don't put me down, you know – I'm only 82*
Anybody can be 82 if they live long enough
They must come to the conclusion -What goin' to happen before they 82 - ask God when are they going to be 82?

And on the same occasion:

[Singing] *Show me the way to go* home, [he was tired!]
please show me [repeated] *the way to go home*
[spoken] *to go home – go home.*
Thank you folks. - Happy for your company, (Clethero, 2016b).

Clearly, as well as the personal expression foregrounded here, there is an element which is inseparable from the political and social justice

implications of the study of black history and culture. For instance, the stark nature of our present engagement with racial dynamics is succinctly commented on by Paul Taylor in Race: A Philosophical Introduction:

> a post-modern racialism ... involves flattening difference, insisting on the unity of the human family and the declining significance of race which allow[s] the existing patterns of privilege to remain more or less in place, (2013, pp. 76, 77).

And Timothy Reiss writes of the difficulties of Caribbean people in

> Avoid(ing) the trammels of a history whose progressively causal order is taken to grasp and describe all the possibilities of events in time -

But

> The unhistorical and the supra-historical, fictive and mythic, are two sides of a single historical coin ordering its straightforward linear universality by an enlightenment schema ... (2002, p. 374).

In addition, Vassilios Lambropoulos, in his review of the above, refers to: 'the various cultural instruments used by the West (*sic*) to control other cultures –'and to 'the reworkings of these instruments by cultures which creatively refashioned them to fit their own needs,' (Lambropoulos, 2002).

"Refashioning these instruments to fit his own needs" is precisely the strategy being used by this singer, to resist being redefined in western terms (as just another black factory worker, of limited intelligence and command of language) and to occupy his own space as a singer, in which his voice is effective as a way of communicating who he is. This strategy, calmly and confidently employed over many decades, has been extraordinarily effective in garnering support and fellow-feeling from a wide demographic base of people who respond to him and for whom his music is an essential accompaniment to their lives. Even as he struggles with the health problems of old age (for instance, in a recent gig at the Blue Piano, 5 Ways, Birmingham) the response (from an audience reflecting the racial diversity of Birmingham) is still heart-felt and responsive.

There is also a willingness to embrace musical freedom in the form of "scat" singing which he does with enormous gusto and skill. The harmonies of jazz standards are fairly conventional, of course,

> The basic harmonic vocabulary of jazz standards derives from "common practice" classical music, but is adapted to fit the short forms (usually 12, 16, or 32 measures) of popular songs, (Spitzer, 2016).

But this form, which could be musically restrictive, can be set on fire by free improvisation in the form of scat, giving a talented performer a chance to express himself freely and eloquently, (Clethero, 2016d).

Clearly, it is beyond the scope of this study to explore the issues of appropriation of black culture by the west thoroughly, but they do form a crucial context for this study. His identification with the broad political left and left-wing values, along with his standing as a singer, gave him a confidence which enabled him to deal dismissively with racism:

Singing on the coach to myself - generally try and have a back seat

Len [his piano –player colleague] *laugh – says I get the best seat nobody disturb me*

says I get the best seat -not even the singing- no one want to sit beside a black man

got some substance in that remark

Question: Really??

Oh yes

they can't see me because - (the seat hid him until they were beside him)

That is something I know

I'm glad - I can see the countryside better, (Clethero, 2016e).

And in relation to discussion of black singers on the media:

Speak about Ella Fitzgerald what she's like and so on Guy who was commenting on her history Look like he was in his eighties he describe her as she was smell – woman coming across - they coming across like they can't be wrong. I think to myself it was undescretionate - you got to tell it like it is – but at the same time, you using discretion over what you tell –you not telling lies – but a bit of respect involved –or due in certain

conversations with certain people – that's the way I see it - everybody may have some fault - it's not everybody who claims they was there was really there.– there got to be somebody in a position who says "that shouldn't happen" it's been heard by hundreds of people because she's international. This is what these programme is for, any how. You making people know that you know – unfortunately some of your good things have to come out with the bad things.

[And, moving on to talking about Billie Holliday:]

Yeah Billie –she went through things-__
In those days that's how the world was like
If you're white in those times you're right
If you're brown you stick around
If you're black stay back

In those days that's how the world was like
That's life
What it says: If you're white in those times
If you're brown - etc
If you're black stay back

It's American phrase – America of the civil rights

Repeats rhymes
It's like that song I sing to you
It's a cold empty bed
Cold, hempty bed
Springs on its legs
Be like old Ned
I wish I was dead

Even the mouse
They run from the house

They laugh at you and scream out too

I'm white inside but that don't help my case

'cos I can't hide what's in my face

What did I do – to be so black and blue? (Clethero 2016e)

In a different context, Cavarero comments on the experience of the Holocaust -

> The triumph of the system requires that uniqueness be destroyed – until the human beings, by losing that which renders them human, are transformed in to "ghastly Marionettes" in which every specific character of humanity is absent, (Cavarero, 2005, p. 201).

It may be rather extreme to compare Jamaican experiences in late 20th century England to the horrors of the holocaust - but the experiences of attempted total control, and the resistance through the voice, have eerie resonances with the above.

This singer refers to singing while working on the assembly line at Longbridge car plant (in Birmingham) and of the anger and bafflement of the foreman and his workmates.

Most of the places that I work in, find myself humming and singing: not to entertain – to entertain myself –

Sometime them nosy people creep up on you – they come from quite a few yards – but they're watching your body –your body language – they see you shake

They have the cheek too to be sarcastic "What you bloody singing about?"

- they was the miserable one - just jealous because - (I can sing) they may have the voice but ... (Clethero, 2016e).

He did factory work throughout his life in the UK, alongside a growing local reputation as a jazz singer, and he recounts various health crises while working on night shifts at Dunlop plant, for example. It is reasonable speculation to surmise that his health problems in later life might have been connected to this.

> a growing body of research points to the negative health impacts of night shifts. The list runs from a heightened risk of obesity and diabetes through to a greater likelihood of cardiovascular disease and even breast cancer, (Balch, 2015).

Cavarero again refers to the Caribbean experience in which:

> The ear of the speaker is immersed in an acoustic universe that transmits to him its tones, its cadences and rhythms. The vocalic's[24] base is thus essentially musical in the sense that it conforms to the textual sonority of the world, to its noises; and it participates in it as well, (Cavarero, 2005, p. 148).

This has very clear parallels with the material detailed above. This singer identifies himself and his place in the world through song, and this is his preferred mode of self-expression – by-passing the need to negotiate class and racial differences.

He quite specifically regards song as the site of his resistance to totalising influences – quite calmly and without confrontation. That is to say, song and singing is fundamentally who he is. This is much more basic to his self-consciousness than his race, or even his family identity. His self-awareness is transmitted through vocalised storytelling.

Conversation Birmingham 1.6.16

Learning Tonic Sol-fa in Kingston - Mrs.Bromford- [taught him tonic sol-fa] *didn't have the education - even like what I have now. Trying to reproduce "diminished" chords. We couldn't stop laughing because we experienced it – the people like Mrs Bromford. -That would be in my boyhood days -it grows with me – that I'm talking to you about now. Things coming from a long time ago - that's why I can still bring out tunes- It get stuck in me head.*

He remained puzzled by the realm of music education and knowledge. He knew he heard more accurately than many other people, and, of course, his success as a singer depended on a very sure-footed negotiation of harmony and rhythm with a band or with other instrumentalists. He could never quite work out what it was that he didn't

[24] *Sic*: the translator is from the U.S. – SJC.

know (ie the standard English system of keys and tonality) he tried to learn the piano, but was prevented by family pressures, and several times instigated the purchase of a good piano at venues where he was working. But his musicality remained instinctive rather than cerebral. These inner certainties could be described, perhaps, as an inner myth of his life and music.

Carl Jung eloquently expresses this way of saying who one is in Memories Dreams and Reflections:

> What we are to our inward vision, and what man appears to be sub species aeternitatis, can only be expressed by way of myth. Myth is more individual, and expresses life more precisely than does science. Science works with concepts of averages which are far too general to do justice to the subjective variety of a human life, (Jung, 2011).

In addition to the specificity of his own life, he is a loved and celebrated member of a loose-knit community of, mostly Caribbean, but also other BME musicians. Interestingly, this included some devout Sikhs, but tended, often, to be discrete from the (mostly elderly white) “trad jazz” scene. It is clear from the interaction between them that they are life-long friends and mutual supporters of each other, with a sort of bush telegraph of messages passed on through chance encounters on the street and occasional phone calls to keep people informed of important events – these days, mostly funerals. Funerals are lengthy affairs with strong social rules about what to wear and how to behave, where everyone catches up on their news and, importantly, gives and receives mutual support.

This community is extraordinarily effective in training, and thus empowering, their young musicians. The band leader of the group this singer sang in most of his life, a Jamaican who came to the UK in 1947, ran a “big band” for young people which has propelled many of them to high-level conservatoire training (at Trinity Laban, for example) I have watched in awe as a young woman who played drums impeccably when she was 9 years old, and is now a conservatoire student a fixing her own gigs, now mentors a little boy of a similar age, in this band. This community, then, has been a crucial part of this singer’s musical life. He is himself in an existential

sense in his singing, but that existence is also for, and intimately related with, this community, sometimes at the expense of his own family life.

On an individual level, he tells stories through song which are myths of his origins , aspirations and his art. In a recent performance, almost every song could be interpreted as a commentary on his rich inner life and as he calls it, his “imagination”, and also reflect his coming to terms with increasing ill-health. For instance, the song “Bye-bye Blackbird” seems to have an immediate personal connection to his situation. His whole way of operating is geared towards a poetic, non-direct expression of himself, which is directed towards the other (his audience) and draws them in to his life experience.

Pack up all my care and woe
Here I go, singing low
Bye-bye, blackbird
Where somebody waits for me
Sugar's sweet and so is she
Bye, bye, blackbird

No one here can love and understand little me
Oh, what hard-luck stories they all tell me
Make my bed and lie on it, I'll be home late tonight
Blackbird, blackbird, bye bye[25]

This is a clear example, then, of an existential use of the voice in the terms described above, i.e.

> We are self-creating or self-fashioning beings. ... Everything we do is contributing to creating our being as a totality. In this sense, we are what we do [or sing – SJC] in living out our lives: we define our own identity in the choices we make in dealing with the world. ... (Craig, 1998, pp. 493, 495).

This singer is self-creating and expressing his own mode of being through his voice and his vocal presence in the world.

[25] Lyrics (as sung by this singer) adapted from Ella Fitzgerald.

It is a fairly obvious step from this, then, to saying that the act of singing is one possible manifestation of this. To make a noise with one's body is a fundamental expression of the presence of the self in the world. And to link these sounds in a way which is artistically expressive and creatively compelling is clearly a potent way of saying who we are and affirming the choice referred to above.

This singer negotiates the landscape of political and economic oppression, and his own personal and health difficulties as a result of this, by saying who he is in an immediate and very effective way through a highly personal and nuanced use of his voice which connects with others immediately and without artifice or manipulation – they sense immediately the authenticity of what he does.

Of course, this could be described in technical singing terms: he sings impeccably on the breath, for example, his consonants never interfere with the flow of the sound, and he sings with his whole body engaged, not just his throat and tongue, as is the case with some singers. Sometimes, when he is duetting with other singers, the contrast in technical ability is immediately obvious.

But the quiet confidence with which he connects with his audience depends on much more than technical ease, admirable though that is. He has the grace of speaking directly to people and reflecting back to them their concerns or myths (and his). And in that way they are sharing that moment of being, whatever the future may have in store. In this, he bypasses the cruelty of the history of slavery and the indignity of years of industrial labour, and that is clearly recognized by all present.

Interestingly, he also relates in the same direct way to classical music, although the social niceties of middle-class concert –going may be lost on him. There was one memorable occasion at the Wigmore Hall at which he gave a very audible sigh of satisfaction at a particularly eloquent (pianissimo) passage in a solo piano recital. The comment was appreciated by the soloist (Andrew Zolinsky), but not so much by the rest of the audience!

He has a visceral connection to all music – he can sit quite absorbed and attentive, even through more modern classical music. But Italian romantic opera is very much part of his sound world and even of his identity. He was late for a prestigious reception at the city Council House two years ago, so that he could attend a live performance of Verdi's *Nabucco*. And he was singing the tune of 'Va pensiero' to himself for weeks before and after the performance.

More recently, he was adamantly determined to attend a performance of *Cavelleria Rusticana* and *I Pagliacci*[26], in spite of his health difficulties in sitting through such long performances. He knew *Pagliacci*, he told me, from hearing/seeing it in cinema in Kingston when he was 16 or 17 years old. He knew the tune of 'Vesti la giubbia', even though his detailed knowledge of opera is often extremely approximate.(He often attaches the wrong music to the wrong piece, for example). His connection to the music is a physical one to the sounds, not an understanding of the surrounding detail. This connects, of course, to the fact that his own singing technique is fundamentally Italianate. He understands, physically, how to make sound and resonate it through the flow of the breath and by stabilizing his vocal mechanism from the lower part of his torso. In this way, the sound of his voice represents his own unique body and consciousness. It is not simply a reproduction of the singing of someone else. In this respect he differs from the overwhelming majority of the singers in Birmingham singing jazz standards.

When I found him in the interval after *Cavelleria Rusticana*, he was happier and more contented than he has been for weeks and he greeted me with the words:

It [the music] *went right through me*.

He talked –specifically about the melodies of these operas, on and off for several days. He was also interested in other aspects:

[26] Performance by Welsh National Opera, 11 June 2016.

The clothes them and - they got a lot of kids in it you know. They running up and down and - outside playing in a park or something, (Clethero, 2016g).

But it was the sung tunes which preoccupied him continually over many days and weeks afterwards.

The point here, with reference to this thesis, is that this singer relates to the music at the level of his own being, and his embodiment of the sounds, and the fact that Italian opera is only tangentially related to his own culture made no difference to this. He has a physical relationship to the sounds, and an embodied response to them.

In a recent article, Philosopher Raymond Tallis sums up embodiment:

> ... a body image mediated through literal mirrors, the mirrors of others' consciousness, the abstract mirror of actual or imputed social judgement, all merge in a subject seemingly trapped in his or her mode of embodiment, adding up to a quantity of so many kilogrammes that eludes introspection, (Tallis, 2016, p. 51).

This singer, by responding directly and physically to the music, bypasses these issues, as all of us, perhaps, must, most of the time. But the need to be authentic, to be himself, is urgent, as it is for all of us, if we pay attention to it.

With a confidence born of many decades of living successfully in a strange country, and becoming locally well-established as a jazz singer, as well as a very clear political stance of muted resistance to race-related and class-based oppression, he is able to be himself with a quiet confidence which is independent of the ravages of illness and old age. And the medium through which he does this is singing.

Perhaps Cavarero or rather her commentators, should have the last word on this subject:

> In her critique of Western metaphysics, Cavarero offers us a genealogy of how 'logos lost its voice.' Reviving a rhetorical dimension of human life and action, Cavarero's work promises a more pluralistic and inclusive form of sociopolitical relations. Significantly, she teaches us that any progressive politics will

> demand that we redeem this voice in its manifold uniqueness and plurality, (Burgess & Murray, 2006, p. 167).

This singer, living out his life far from his origins in a neglected post-industrial city, dealing with dignity with racism and financial strictures, finds his identity through his music. His life and his whole being resonates through song. For him, the issue is only secondarily “progressive politics”, although he embraces this in his own way. But it is closely related to his community, both of his audience and his fellow musicians, and in this way he expresses his being in itself and in interaction and even communion with others.

Chapter 7
Case Study: East African Asian Student

This case study is of a “community” student who started singing lessons in 2014 as a complete beginner in western classical music and voice study. He came to the UK as a child, in 1974, as part of the African Asian migration from Kenya. His family moved to the inner area of a large industrial city, and he went to the local comprehensive school, which at that time was chaotic and sometimes violent.

He tells stories of his childhood in Kenya – evoked particularly when there is an open fire in the room where singing groups take place, that seems to bring back strong memories in him of being around open fires in the countryside in Kenya. He is of Gujarati origin, and his mother still speaks only Gujarati. He retains the caste/class awareness of his origins.

I wish to make it clear, that none of the process described below is to initiate this student into some sort of superior, western, musical system, but simply to use the cultural resources available, and in which I am skilled, to facilitate his development. He is in an extraordinary position of straddling several cultures, with all the richness of diversity which that implies, and he is well aware of that, But there is a case to be made for making sophisticated art available to everyone, of whatever cultural background, in this case singing in a western classical context, which is what is available in this time and place. Timothy Reiss puts the case like this:

> ... to denigrate any culture is meaningless. [...] Their making, their processes and their effects, however separable, are at the same time interwoven. These efforts seem to me ... , part of our cultural responsibility in this time and place, (2002, p. 21).

And this encounter, with this student who had travelled round the world to be in this country, and grown up between the cultures of three continents, is very much in this spirit of “our cultural responsibility in this time and place.”

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His father played Gujarati music gigs locally. But his father died some years ago.

This is his account, given in a recent interview for this thesis, of his childhood experience of arriving in the UK:

Interview Birmingham, 13.6.16

T*: So - I just wanted to ask you – when did you come here?*

A*: '74 _ (returning to it) - April 21st 1974*
T*: And how old were you then?*
A*: I was 7 and four months*
T*: Oh, so you were quite young?*
[...]
T*: So, did you speak English when you came here?*
A*: (*quietly*) No.*
T*: So you had to learn English from scratch – when you were seven - I didn't realise that.* **[...]**
A*: It's ok - It's my third language – Swahili - that's gone now –*
... We lived actually in Nguru – Nguru's in the Rift valley – it's where Lake Nguru is ... That was my back garden.
T*: Why did you live there? – Did your Dad work there?*
A*: Yeah – my dad was a cobbler there - yeah, he was a musician – yes – so my influence was the local Masai - with the chanting and the music.*
T*: So you had access to African culture as well?*
A*: Yes to Gujarati culture – and we had a Gurdwhara as well – and my mum used to send me to a - some small Christian community from Goa - and they used to* [play on] *the guitar - and there was loads of children piled in a room and they used to sing – hymns I suppose they were – Christian hymns –*
[...]
T*: Were you sad when you had to come here?*
A*: (*immediately and emphatically*) It was dreadful. It was awful.*
T*: Was it difficult for your parents?*
A*: I think it was difficult for them – on reflection.*

***T**: What did your father do*

***A**: Nothing, 'cos he couldn't bring his tools with him - it was like chopping off his hands - there was nothing he could do here.*

And he was old – he was colonial old – he was just spent – his body was completely spent. He used to make shoes for the British army (in Kenya) - they used to hand-stitch shoes in those days – he was just spent – his body was completely finished. [...] *I think he was about 55 or something like that – an old, battered 55 - smoking – arthritis - he survived (lung cancer) –*

***T**: So your mother was younger?*

***A**: Yes she was younger – she was finished - her body – osteo-arthritis – just not good – lots of skills – lots of life skills –basic living skills - sewing, farming.*

***T**: You grew up around cooking?*

***A**: Cooking was the condition of worth. You could contribute to the family - And I'm glad my Mum - Boys aren't raised this way, but my mum - she was very different - very cutting-edge and - -*

[...]

***T**: So they were quite forward-looking, your parents?*

***A**: They had to help each other, 'cos of the conditions ...* (Clethero, 2016h)[27].

There is, surprisingly, a paucity of background information in the literature about the cultural aspects of the East African Asian migration to the UK at this time. This is especially surprising because concerts of Asian and other "world music" were popular and well attended during this period. For example, sketchy information like the following seems to be the best that can be found:

> Most East African Gujarati are Hindus, though there is a small minority of Muslims. In East Africa Hindus kept up the caste system, [...] the Patels had been employed by the Moghuls in India as revenue collectors, (Berry, 1987, pp. 7-8).

[27] In a later conversation (19th June 2017), he commented that his mother had had her hair cut – not usual for ladies of her age from that culture. He said that his father would have been quite happy with that.

In the face of this generalized approach to this phenomenon, it becomes more urgent to tell a particular story of course, to help us to understand how these events have worked out 45 years after the initial expulsion.

Some of the most eloquent material which is published about this culture relates to dance, rather than music in itself:

> The expulsion of Indian communities from ... Kenya ... brought not social stress but great benefit. ... What is less often acknowledged is their effect on the arts. Having a ready-made cultural construct, they needed only to set it down on British soil and set it going. [...] Even more important, there was a community with the habit of cultural consumption ... (Khan, 1997, p. 26).

This “habit of cultural consumption” is very evident in the avid grasping of cultural opportunities of this person, and his ability to follow up opportunities like joining the local university choir (see below). And the network of music making is evident, almost in spite of himself, in the account of accompanying his father on music trips below.

The threadbare nature of the contemporary discussion of this phenomenon is underlined again by the fact that the same writer of the above, Naseem Khan, is the author of the Arts council report published in May 1976 “The Arts Britain Ignores: the arts of ethnic minorities in Britain”. One has the impression that perhaps there was no-one else writing on this subject. I am very grateful indeed to the Arts council library for making this report available to me.

Khan comments bleakly:

> Ethnic minority arts are an energetic but struggling sub-culture. ...
>
> Lack of outlets will mean that work is kept at a self-contained amateur level. It is likely to become repetitive and eventually irrelevant. In that way we will have killed off a vigorous growth that has every sign of being able to contribute significantly to the cultural life of society as a whole, (1976, p. 3).

Fortunately, this bleak forecast turned out to be mistaken, due no doubt, to the efforts of Khan and others. It is difficult, now, to imagine an artistic landscape in Birmingham, for example, without the richness of

ethnic and other diversities. But the background of this report, published two years after this singer arrived in this country as a small child, goes some way to contextualising his anxious grasping at cultural opportunities, especially as he is neuro-physically unsuited to access these resources in the conventional ways, describing himself as dyslexic.

Khan further comments:

> Differences are heightened, and arts made static, when communities are turned in on themselves through rejection. At such a time preservation of a rather rigid pattern? [SJC unclear in reproduction of original document] becomes important and the arts suffer.
>
> ... several of our ethnic arts come from rural roots; they are village songs and dances celebrating harvest or rainfall and so on. When, however, farmers become Midlands charge hands or, even more important, the children of charge hands (possibly accountants or teachers), the picture changes. ...
>
> ... Preserved culture has, like dried fruits, a certain limited attractiveness. As sole and staple diet it leaves much to be desired, (op. cit., p. 6).

As is clear from the passage above, this singer's rural roots were crucial in his artistic development. His embracing of the opportunity to study and perform western music could, perhaps, be seen partly as an effort to avoid the ossifying effects of preserved culture commented on by Khan above.

A much more dynamic picture is to be gained from composer Sandheep Bhagwati in the following, and it goes some way towards describing the rich landscape available to some one from an Asian culture studying singing in a western context :

> ... in Atish-e-Zaban, I have composed for six voices that I have never really heard anywhere [...] – composing it has expanded my personal sonic and musical imagination, and has made me sensitive to the richness that the unknown sound of another's voice can afford me - and how it can guide me through the many cultural layers of my own musical imagination, (2013, p. 90).

The "many cultural layers of (his) own musical imagination" is precisely, and eloquently, what this singer is exploring, in the vocal journey which he has embarked upon. The following is his reflection on his childhood experiences with his father, playing Gujarati devotional music. I

have reported the conversation verbatim, without editing, out of respect for the sensitivity of the material, and gratitude to this student for sharing it.

Interview, Birmingham 4.7.16

***T**: So you used to help your Dad tune the instruments?*

***A**: So – he used to sing at a certain pitch. I can hear it - I know, if I had the instrument with me -*

***T**: So this was when you were here in the UK? So you were – like - a child?*

***A**: Yea – so from about ten onwards – Cos' we weren't allowed near it 'cos it was the only one he had - the other one was broken. It was the only thing he had when he came over from Africa – that was his most valuable possession.*

***T**: I can imagine.*

***A**: I remember him carrying it on his head in Heathrow airport – I remember that.*

You asked me how did the music start – basically it would start with him twanging the strings on that - and then he would breathe into the music – he would make sound – warming-up sounds - and then the percussion instrument would – with his black bells – with the combatyra (sic - we have been unable to clarify what he means by this - SJC)

***T**: So – he played with other musicians?*

***A**: Yes*

***T**: In Birmingham, obviously?*

***A**: They played all over*

***T**: So, did they know each other before they came here?*

***A**: Yes!*

***T**: Oh! So there was a whole community of people all came from the same place?*

***A**: Some of them did. Some of them went to London. They used to meet up in London and Preston - -*

[...]

***T**: Do you go to gigs with that sort of stuff?*

***A**: Yea – because I play certain instruments – so they invite me because I play: I can't sing – they won't let me sing - -*

***T**: Not in that style?*

***A**: Not in that style*

***T**: Why was that?*

***A**: It was a different dynamic with my Dad –* [...] *so I just didn't learn. But I went along, so I used to hear it all the time*

[...]

***A**: I used to take part in playing the bells - take part in playing the Jan[28]j. More a percussion sound – watching the tabla player who's taking his lead off the singer. Just that harmony of taking a lead off different people - They invite me for that – it's beautiful.*

[...]

it's about letting go – very devotional –very, very devotional.

***T**: Is it a religious setting then?*

***A**: Course it is - always - a religious thing – comes from that -[29]*

***T**: So when you travel around you're providing religious music for different communities?*

***A**: It takes on a mystical – I don't use that word – but it takes on a different air – as opposed to something classical – it takes on a different air because they're not singing for an audience, because the audience has left the building – and the singer has disappeared as well- then there's something happens – flowing-that's really beautiful –*

[...], *mainly in those days it used to be in people's houses – they used to gather and go on to the small hours of the morning – just beautiful-really beautiful)*

***T**: And how did you get home?*

***A**: (*Laughs*) Car – whoever had a car we'd all pile in. Yes – it's another world.*

***T**: So - your father would like to know you're singing now, would he?*

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[28] This interviewee is adamant that this is the correct name and spelling. He may mean 'Ghungroos are usually the small brass bells. It is a musical accessory used by performers of all classical dances. Number of bells are attached to a string or tied to a cotton cord, velvet pad or leather strap to form a ghungroo,' (Indian Mirror, 2016). But "Janj" are offered for sale at http://www.indiabazaar.co.uk/product-janj_kasa_special_4-5658.htm described as Weight: 400 gms; Dimension: 100x100 mm.

[29] This has since been confirmed by another student, who commented on the rhapsodic nature of the music she encountered in a religious community in India.

***A**: I actually - It's funny the irony of seeing his picture today with the piano behind him – that's nice - it's a holding – I'm desperate to sing in front of him – as critical as he was –*

***T**: Was he?*

***A**: He was very critical. I would still sing in front of him and I'd welcome* **[...]**

***A**: There's another layer to this because my father's first son - he was a golden child – he was a super, super person. I never met him, but I've met people who knew him and he was just – he couldn't do a thing wrong – he was a good person – so I was in the shadow of him – he died when he was 12 years old – he broke something and he died with my father there – burst appendix, you know? So that killed something in my father .*

[...]

***A**: I've had slanging matches with my father – nothing's been left unsaid – it is beautiful, because nothing's been left unsaid – everything's been said and heard (*emphatically*) – on both sides – so that's ... Yes, my Mum sings*

[...]

***A**: Women sing as well - It's predominantly a male thing – very masculine – that sort of thing – But women sing – my mum has a lovely voice – she sang at – when my Dad died, there was just a few of us in the room – and she sang a mantra over his coffin –* **[...]**

***T**: Does she still sing?*

***A**: Every morning – it's devotional – every single morning – she sings – it's devotional.* **[...]** *I think now I'm just connecting with me- with this vessel of my being – it's interesting. My daughter had a lovely voice – she inherited my Dad's voice – people were in tears - she'd always take the top part in the school plays – she'd project her voice - beautiful -* [30]

Even though his childhood memories are, no doubt refracted through his adult experience, and probably romanticised to some extent, this sequence gives a very eloquent and layered account of the personal and historical significance and context of his present work on his voice.

[30] It is relevant to note that this conversation, although reported here for contextual reasons, took place later than the other reported material here.

He originally trained as a cook and has recently trained as a volunteer for a prestigious local charity which seems to have been a very positive effect on his life, and bespeaks a new confidence – to give out to other people. This and the self-respect which it indicates is an important theme in this thesis as an integral feature of the act of singing. In this respect, voluntary work and singing in groups may bring similar benefits.

He is very aware of English middle-class relationships and facilities and particularly, artistic networks. This even extended at one stage, to temporary membership of the choir at the Anglo-catholic church up the road from where he was living, singing Anglo-catholic liturgical music - even though he is very specifically non-religious, and practices Vipassana Buddhist meditation! But this (temporary) commitment also reflects, possibly, the Hindu inclusivity towards other faiths of his religious origins.

He recently joined the choir, as a community member, at the local (Russell group) university, which has all the resources (language coaching, good quality Alexander Technique and mindfulness courses for example) which go with this setting. He has now completed two years there, and has coped extremely well, especially as he had no other musical training, and the repertoire included (sometimes modern and complex) music in four to eight parts! I always attend these concerts, and could clearly see that he was singing his part with the other members of his group.

He has an unusual learning style and neuro-physical orientation, which is referred to below. He is very good at story-telling and the many-faceted and many-coloured approach which this indicates. He finds strict insistence on particularities of rhythm and pitch much more difficult to embrace, although he is (mostly) a dedicated and reliable student. Strict coaching on precise pitch and rhythm do not come easily to him, and the need for it has to be frequently restated, and seems, sometimes, to be in conflict with his own, more poetic approach. This is all part of the ongoing negotiation and growth of understanding between teacher and student, of course. But the significance of his membership of this choir cannot be over-estimated, as this excerpt shows:

To go back to an earlier lesson**:**

Pre-lesson discussion Birmingham 27.6.16

A*: The group process of being heard – my first group is the family – and being heard within that family and extending that out – to the group of the choir –that's another group – and being heard.*

T*: When you say the choir, do you mean the singers here?* [It's actually a community singing teaching group – embracing solo singing and occasional choral music].

A*: Yeah, the singers here - and also the other choirs as well. And we've got that thing of actually not – I remember when I first came I could not hear my voice amongst the other people in the group. - I wasn't dumbing down or drowning it out – I just couldn't hear myself.*

And then, when I sang at Symphony Hall – with the university choir [SJC i.e. in Mahler's 8th Symphony] – there was three choirs going – and I could hear me clearly – and that was actually quite profound - [31]

T*: Yes and the fact that your mother was there ...*

A*: (*dismissively*) my mother there was a bonus, but that was actually quite a moving thing to hear myself amongst all those people - and in harmony- that's something special again,* (Clethero, 2016h).

So he is highlighting the communal aspects of singing and being heard in a group context. This feature is very consonant with Cavarero's work referred to above, of course. This singer, perhaps more than any others I have dealt with, is very orientated towards φωνή (phone) rather than λόγος (logos), (see p.28 above).

It is, however also important to make the theoretical connection with his neuro-physical orientation. As stated above, he refers to himself as dyslexic and this profoundly affects his processing of musical texts and instruction. The fact that Cavarero does not address this issue of neurophysical difference weakens her analysis, in my submission. The tendency towards seeing the world in a systematising way (based on λόγος)

[31] Six months later, he graduated to singing in the first tenor section, after singing second tenor for two years – a move much more in keeping with the character of his voice, and denoting a new confidence.

or a more instinctive, many facetted manner (based on φωνή) is not a universal constant, but a matter of neuropsychological orientation as well as social and political context. This is also relevant to the discussion of groups of people with an autistic spectrum disorder, above (Chapter 3).

Along with this self-identification as dyslexic goes an anxiety around printed music (see excerpts from lessons below). He is very keen to have printed paper copies of all music, which he marks up in yellow marker pen. This, again, highlights Cavarero's point that the structures of our culture (particularly classical music, of course) are logos–based, and are, in fact, very excluding for someone whose talents are more based on sound and pictures, and can lead to considerable anxiety about not fitting in to what is expected of him.

This aspect of singing practice also came up in a lesson with another student, a medical academic, who said, after being in a group with this student and taking part in some of the discussion:

> ... you were explaining to me that wonderful flowing technique - the sound just follows – it's all about production of sound– when you described it I visualised it like paint on a canvas of rolling waves and for me it was pink and blue and it was rolling like a swirling mass which is a continuum with the sound and not breaking it up into every individual note and having that constraint: it just flowed – but I saw it as a picture, (Clethero, 2016i).

This is someone whose work and life are based around logos-based procedures (in the forces, and the medical profession), but it is clear from this and from features of her singing, that her primary reference as a singer is phone - the embodiment and the fundamentally sensuous production of sound.

In the case of the first student, the anxiety associated with reading and paper-based information also extends to his own physicality. We start singing lessons with Alexander Technique-based procedures, which are based on existential disciplines of simplicity in "being there". He is familiar with this approach through his Buddhist meditation (see conversation below). But his anxiety tends to over-ride his response to the teaching

conversation, and makes it difficult for him to respond helpfully. The fact that he is aware of this, of course, makes it easier to deal with the issue.

Further lesson/Interview

Teacher*: Ok, so stop moving for a minute-be still (*laughter – audible sounds of breathing*).*

Now – it's thinking - rather than doing anything that's really important – yup- and if you're doing something all the time it sort of over-rides the thinking- so give yourself some space to - what are you doing now?

Answer*: I'm just turning off the sound.*

T*: Oh, Ok. Just think about your back, and how your back is linked to your feet – and how your back is linked to the top of your head – and your head balancing on the end of your spine.*

(NB All this is linked to visual observation of what the student is doing)

T*: Just think about it but don't do anything. I'm not watching you, so you're finding your own way – you're free – you're free anyway.*

Just underlining that – just let the air go in – don't forget you don't have to make an effort to breathe – you've been breathing since you were born. Let the air go in –right down to the bottom of your lungs.

How does that feel?

Answer*: Deeper and the awareness there*

T*: Good – because you've got all the tools.*

[...]

You're tall, so you're looking over some other people **[...]** *Well done!*

A*: It's just how to sustain that*

T*: You can't – if you hold on to it you lose it anyway - that's not how it is, really*

And a big sigh – keep nodding: you've got a lot more room to nod than that

[...]

T*: Good –well done!*

A*: You're very patient repeating everything – I'm not listening* (Clethero, 2016j).

The above illustrates the use of Alexander Technique (AT)-based ideas to inform the student's "being-there" in order to be present in the sound that he makes. This AT-based practice is used in order to enable his physical freedom.

This need for singing tuition to embrace the precise and individual physicality of the singer and this expression of his/her artistic expression is commented on, for instance, by Päivi Järviö in his article in *Voice Studies*: 'The Singularity of Experience in the Voice Studio':

> Gazing inside and listening to what is unfolding in one's body is characteristic of studying singing. [...] Breathing that moves me and makes me sound, forms a unity with the music I sing, with the score, with the space, and with all the knowing and experience that is me. My presence is filled with the music I sing. My presence is the music I sing, (2015, p. 26).

The use of AT –based ideas with the present student is precisely to orchestrate and articulate that presence, and to give him a way of dealing with his anxieties about it. He continually tries to put himself through some procedure (of 'standing up straight' by pushing his hips forward, for example), which is often counter-productive and increases, rather than releases, the tension that inhibits his singing voice. And the following illustrates his anxiety around dealing with (of course logos-based) written music:

Birmingham 20.6.16

Would you like to do Nessun Dorma? – I think it's benefitting from being left (he is pre-occupied with the state of the (paper) copy, and T has to repeat several times.

He eventually sings Quanto e bella (from Donizetti: *L'Elisir d'Amore*) (right through the first time, because he hasn't sung it for a while). He is still preoccupied with papers.

***T**: Are you listening to me?*

***A**: I am listening but I'm not seeing it here* (i.e.. on the written sheet).

***T**: All those sharps are bent upwards just like blues* [...] *- or in jazz,* (Clethero, 2016j).

So while I, the teacher, am talking about instinctive features of the colour and shape of the music which I know he can respond to, he is preoccupied with the paper-based, logos-centred features which make him uneasy and insecure.

When he can be persuaded to sing from memory, he has a whole new authority – integral to his story-telling abilities.

Continuing Conversation Birmingham 20.6.16 Working on *Bring him home*

[...] We concentrate on sound quality and story-telling , then sing it from memory (which he hates but manages very well). **[...]** From "he's like the son I might have known" he is much more fluent and eloquent:

***T**: How did that feel ? –*
***A**: Better -*
***T**: It must be nice to get away from the copy isn't it?*
***A**: It is nice.*
***T**: And you were free to tell the story a lot more* **[...]**
***A**: There was a balancing act between the memory and when I think this, that affects this - something not being right here* (ie. in his throat*).*
***T**: We're all afraid of that – that doesn't go away, I'm afraid* – (Clethero, 2016k, 2016m and 2016n).

Fascinatingly, the following conversation is based on the recording of the subsequent lesson, when he initiated singing this piece from memory with startling effect:

***T**: When you said you were going to sing it without the copy, it was like you were taking control - and the minute you started to sing, I had to re-adjust* [i.e. playing the piano part] *and I had to follow you - which is how it should be, you see - instead of me leading you through it.* **[...]**

[This is his comment after a further lesson on the same piece:]
***A**: Singing's more about listening than anything else,* (Clethero, 2016h).

He takes to singing in Italian with astonishing ease, and many of his preferred pieces are in Italian. (He is also very keen to emulate, for example, Pavarotti). The fact that he has occasional difficulty with individual words is fairly irrelevant in comparison with this spontaneous embracing of the language, which makes him more convincing in Italian than many better educated singers who have had many more opportunities to hear opera in the original language. (This singer has probably attended one full-length opera performance in his life – courtesy of the marvellous outreach team at Welsh National Opera!)

Of course, there is a perceived glamour associated with figures like Pavarotti, but his affinity with the language seems to go deeper than this[32]. It may be that there is something in his musical background, which is extremely complex, as can be seen above, which predisposes him to embrace this fluidity of breath and sound as it exists in Italian.

Of course, there can be problems in emulating other singers, even someone like Pavarotti. The singer under discussion here often puts too much muscular effort into the upper notes of the tenor range. This is especially frustrating because he can easily reach those notes without strain. But the use of this part of the male voice is a very strange sensation for most men, especially in the Midlands, where higher resonance in the speaking voice is often audibly suppressed.

This is partly illuminated by the following analysis by Nandhu Radhakrishnan, professor of communication science and disorders in the School of Health Professions writing as part of a group of speech-language pathology researchers at the University of Missouri:

> Primarily, Hindustani singing features a voluntary, rapid dip in pitch, which Radhakrishnan refers to as a "Taan gesture." In contrast, classical singers use a vocal modulation-like vibrato to make a smooth transition between pitches.
>
> [...] Radhakrishnan also observed that Hindustani singing requires precise pronunciation of lyrics, whereas notes guide pronunciation in classical music, (2010).[33]

[32] Discussions with other Gujarati speakers confirmed that they felt there was a strong affinity between Gujarati and the Italian language.

[33] Summary:

Hindustani music originates, of course, from a different part of India to the Gujarat where this student's family originates, but the two traditions overlap, according to this student. Some of the characteristics described above apply also to him, including the difficulty of negotiating the difference in volume between the (western) singing voice and his speaking voice, and the habit of a "rapid dip in pitch" on certain notes which comes very naturally indeed to this singer and which is often not acceptable in western music, especially in orchestral music which needs to have a consistent agreed pitch between instrumentalists and singers.

It is clear that for this singer, giving voice is a physical, resonant, experience of being, rather than an intellectual construct, although he has, of course, to wrestle with the connection between the two. The problem for him is, as is clear from the above, to reconcile his own physicality of the sound with his perceived need for logos-based procedures in singing classical music. The challenge is to ensure that his anxiety over this does not override his natural ability.

I learned an enormous amount about this student by going through this process, and my teaching was changed as a result. I learned to foreground, in many cases, the shape and colour of vocal sound, with startling results with other students as well as this one.

Interview Birmingham 27.6.16

***SJC**: So just tell me about singing*

[…]

***A**: It's a very emotive thing for me – it's very therapeutic.*
It's therapeutic at a very deep level, and it vibrates and touches parts within –sounds which I didn't think I could reach – it reaches deep within me as well, and that has a knock-on effect on the rest of my life – in and outwardly That may sound a little bit – I don't know- but that's my truth –

Hindustani singing, a North Indian traditional style of singing, and classical singing, such as the music of Puccini, Mozart and Wagner, vary greatly in technique and sound. Now, speech-language pathology researchers are comparing the two styles in hopes of finding a treatment for laryngeal tremors, a vocal disorder associated with many neurological disorders that can result in severe communication difficulties.

[...] *And - it's very expansive - it makes me a lot more expansive in my world outside of here – just I social settings – um – yeah there's the practicing and the singing that helps me to do that – to achieve that. Um - and I'm surprised how much emotion it does bring up, actually, and how it catches me unaware – making a certain note or hitting a certain sound – just - vibrates something within me and listens and touches something hard.*
***T**: You have a great richness that you can relate to that: some people – can't explain it like that.*
***A**: I think it goes hand-in-hand with the Vipassana meditation - sitting and listening and being what is when I replicate or attempt to replicate something – there's a sort of external listening goes on - and - I've never talked about this before –*
It is what it is. **[...] - - -** *And observing it.*
And listening to that sound that I'm creating – it affects me -
It affects me – and it's beautiful. **[...]**
***A**: That's the - with the meditation that it - what is - without judgement*
And - then observing it - just observing what is - and that's actually very, very valuable – to have the time and the space to do that.
[...] - - - *I may not be able to relate to the story because it was in another period - it was in another time.*
***T**: But they always are, aren't they? Even if it was yesterday It's still not now*
***A**: (*continuing*) in another culture.*
***T**: Like the French Revolution [*the subject of the piece being sung].
However - there are times when I - I make those words and I sing those songs and it resonates so deeply within me – the story of the song really, really touches me – and all the different layers of me, as a man – that Bring him Home is a perfect example – it really touches me deeply – it's beautiful very, very – holding.
***T**: Holding?*
***A**: Hold, with word, and song, and sound - it's very holding.*

We had a discussion, after a short break in lessons, which was particularly illuminating, both in terms of the relationship of singing to the rest of his life,

particularly Vipassana meditation, and of his own processing of the whole experience.

Interview, Birmingham, 15.8.16

T*: We've had quite a break , haven't we? –* **[...]** *So that's been quite interesting coming back to that after 3 weeks – So - what's your impression?*

A*: There was a gap where the singing is, definitely - there's an absence, definitely – and also I was reflecting on your last question like - what helps – what's helped the singing to come along. And I think you doing your PhD and actually having a little moment's reflection after the* lesson **[...].** *Just that reflection of - what are you - just stopping after a lesson. - What am I doing with my body? What's happening? What am I changing - just reflecting on whatever.*

T*: I do understand that.*

A*: (*insisting*) and that has helped - as opposed to getting on with the work – which is important – just that moment's reflection at the end of - everything helps, actually.* **[...] -** *it fits in beautifully with the meditation. Because at the end of a sit – at the end of a meditation– I* **[...]** *sit and think "Ok How was that?" That is supposed to be part of the practice - How was that sit? – not to labour on it too much -* **[...]**

T*: That's the same process as we're going through now, with the singing - that's very interesting.*

A*: What's going through my mind now is when you said* **[...] -** *breathe a luxurious breath – breath low – and I realise I was actually being quite anxious, but - that's the reasons I was breathing (up there).*

[...]

T*: So* [...] *the diaphragm works on its own* [...] *- it carries on even if you're* [...] *unconscious – doesn't it? Or when you're asleep* [...] *- so you can trust that – and you have to trust it* **[...]**

A*: Do you know what just occurred to me, listening to you? Is that there's that moment between controlling and trusting -*

T*: Yes. And that's crucial, isn't it?*

***A**: And that's happened to me - and that's - it's very pivotal – whereas what I'm doing in meditation is completely surrendering and not controlling – meditation is all about not controlling at all – yet in singing, there's a fine line between relaxing and trusting the body to do what it needs to do and the harder -* **[...]** *- there's making sure you're - singing breathing – and remembering – there's a lot going on - which then causes angst –*
***T**: Yes.*
***A**: And it affects my body - then it's difficult to control - then I'm trying to control the crazy horse. You know?* **[...]**
***T**: – but you can trust your body – actually – I've seen it and your body will produce the sound that you want it to. And - that you've just got to give it that moment of freedom before you start to give it a chance to respond – yea? Does that make sense?*
***A**: No!*
*(*laughter*)*
No, it doesn't – but I hear you -
What you're saying is to give it a moment's freedom – to let the rein off –
***T**: To let the rein off a lot – but – to take the responsibility for preparing – so you've got to breathe –you've got to use the sound –that' your responsibility. And the rest you can trust.*
***A**: Mmm. I always say to people, you manage to squeeze a good note out of me – when I'm describing a lesson so it's amazing sometimes "Gosh, did I just do that?"* **[...]**
***T**: Yes I can understand* [...] *– you're just letting it go – trusting it. Thanks!* (Clethero, 2016p).

Note that in this conversation there is a change in dynamic. A is urgently trying to tell me something, and I am only just listening! This underlines the philosophical immediacy of the situation. Nothing is fixed. There is, of course, a professional responsibility underlying the teacher/student relationship, but the dynamic of responsibility for the self is constantly changing and has to be very flexible.

It is clear from this discussion that this student is on a journey of being there – of authentic presence in his own life, of which singing, on his

own and in groups, is an integral part. No doubt this also has therapeutic and cultural implications. But the immediate and urgent need is for him to be present in his life. And this is not a one-way process, but a reciprocal process of realisation and discovery with the teacher.

Postscript

On 3rd October, after recordings for the purpose of this thesis had stopped, KP mentioned that he had a recording of his father singing. He was visibly moved by listening to this, and I was again reminded of the powerful significance for him of re-appropriating the opportunity to sing which was so fraught when he was a small boy. The recording was a tribute to an (unknown) teacher and was recorded in a private house in Small Heath, Birmingham in 1978.

Six Months Later

After six months, he is more and more confident, still singing with the university choir, and tackling more and more varied repertoire, with a new authority. He is more and more successful at letting the voice flow and resisting the impulse to push in the upper register, and is (by a process which I do not really understand) more and more accurate. He recently sang ‘La donna e mobile’ from *Rigoletto* and ‘Che gelida manina’ from *La Boheme* which virtually no major musical mistakes! He also supports other students more and more effectively, which seems to be an aspect of his increasing general confidence. He is singing Bill Withers’ Lean on me as a duo with another student who has neurological issues. He improvises effortlessly, and has very clear ideas of the song. This is a new aspect of the musicality of both men: to work together and support each other is enormously helpful for both of them, both musically and personally, as well as developing latent instincts for harmony and rhythmic variation which are otherwise untapped in conventional classical music. The words are very appropriate too, of course:

> *You just call on me brother, when you need a hand*
> *We all need somebody to lean on*

> *I just might have a problem that you'll understand*
>
> *We all need somebody to lean on*
>
> **[...]**
>
> (Withers, 1972).

He found a recent article I published in the magazine Philosophy Now and repeatedly and emphatically said how moving he found it

> *... mostly I'm moved by my first memory of "being there" through song it reminds me of my father's voice as he sung me to sleep and my mother's first thing in the morning* [...]

An interesting and unforeseen effect!

Conclusion

This thesis is a record of a journey - a journey to understand the nature of the experience and the process students go through when they learn to sing, and to what degree and in what way it is effective. Of course, an exploration which started from the time of writing this conclusion (2017) would have a different emphasis and selection of material, but it is interesting that the fundamental idea – that singing is an act of being-there in the world, and of courageous self-revelation, remains the over-riding focus. And the central contention remains, that this is a philosophical position. That is to say, it is bound up with our conception of who we are and how we conceive of our place in the world.

Issues related to the human voice have, in modern times, received very little academic attention, but there has been a recent surge of interest, often centred around the discipline of voice in theatre, or Voice Studies, including a new journal – the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Voice Studies*, (IJVS) described as providing, in the words of one of the contributors: 'a forum for scholarly and practice-based engagement with voice ... and ... draws on an interdisciplinary series of lenses,' (Karikis, 2016). Clearly this thesis shares this interdisciplinary focus, drawing on sociological, psychological, political, linguistic and literary sources as a contextualisation and supporting framework for the philosophical argument.

The core of the philosophical argument, however is that this is fundamentally a matter of existence – of authentic presence in the world, and that concentration on this perspective can set us free from extraneous and superficial distractions which divert energy and focus from the this. Another contributor to the IJVS discusses the existential contribution of Heidegger's thought to this field, suggesting

> a new way of ... importantly, of understanding voice, not as speech as such, but rather as that which is between what is said. The voice is a resonance that inclines each of us together, (Boddam-Whetham, 2016).

I also embrace, in chapter 1 above (in for example references to Derrida above), the post-modern refinements of existential approaches, and

share Boddam-Whetham's view that we should re-orientate to "authenticity as a relation of shared resonance". I hope it is clear that this is the direction of this thesis rather than a "totalitarian clamour of presence", which is another aspect of Heidegger's work, but the distinction is timely and well-made. "Authenticity as shared resonance" is very much the direction which emerges from the chapter on autism, for example.

Part of this project is to frame the idea of being-there in a modern, 21st century context and to embrace the insights which vocal sound, from a diverse range of sources, can bring to this project, in which we 'encounter the unique individuality of another embodied being,' (Cavarero, quoted in Thomaidis, 2017, p. 72). This means rethinking the philosophical frame, but maintaining a clarity of focus which helps to concentrate resources. That is to say, that this is a practice-based piece of work with an essentially practical aim – to clarify the underlying assumptions of voice teaching – and singing in particular. In order to support, rather than undermine, the best of the practice in this field, I have made the case for the need to embrace existentialist language and concepts over against other possible models. It is very much the case being made here, that if we fail to do this, we open the whole field up to a utilitarian model which easily morphs into closet capitalism: this is absolutely not, in my experience, what most of the leaders in this field, whose views are reported here, are concerned with, and to fail in this clarification is to betray their inspiration and commitment.

This is a position which is defined over against analytical philosophical ideas that our lives are determined by rules of logic or external structures, and also in contrast to the assumption described above that singing and music is part of an overall utilitarian equation which is based on a calculation of what delivers the greatest good to the greatest number.

Because the Alexander Technique is an immediate and well-established way of teaching the meticulous physical detail of being-there in conservatoires, and is also a method which I have incorporated consistently in singer training over the years, I have included a chapter of the background and ideas of this technique , and an overview of the forms it takes in the UK. In this context, it is the space made for being there – the

moment of “inhibition” in which the habitual responses are momentarily suspended and another mode of presence can be explored, which is the crucial factor. But it is, perhaps worth pointing out that the AT is not a substitute for singer training. People who have a lot of experience of AT may be able to produce an unforced vocal sound with a minimum of interference, but the will and the physical ability to fill a large auditorium with vocal sound will need a use of space and the flow of air which needs a further embracing of the physicality of voice. (see, for example, the session with Ingrid Surgenor in Chapter 5) In terms of the philosophical frame suggested here, this is another dimension of vocal presence, and a very intense one, capable of many different manifestations, as is suggested in Chapter 4.

The landscape of AT writing is very varied and often subjective and insular. I have given prominence to certain writings and an organisation, Alexander Technique International, which make a serious attempt to contextualise the AT in intellectual –and particularly in philosophical – thought. Nevertheless, it is certainly true that there is an enormous amount of work still to be done in this respect. In the intervening time, the insights of the AT are adjudicated by a landscape of “natural healthcare” regulation of unclear provenance and an equally unclear ethical position.

But where it is delivered with integrity, as in the case of Robert Lada described in the chapter on the singing summer school (Chapter 5) it is, in the words of those taking part, transformative. He interprets the AT in a much more exploratory way than, for example, in the case of the orthodox procedures prescribed by STAT. (Chapter 2). His effectiveness is quite extraordinary, but based on direct personal interaction and response to the person rather than organisational orthodoxy.

I have sought to demonstrate the hypothesis described above in relation to specific, and very varied groups of singers. So, I have included a chapter, including three academic papers previously published over a 15 year period, on groups for people with autism who live in residential care. – away from public gaze and, often from public interest. Many of these service-users are non-verbal, or more significantly, find sung sound (which is schematised and therefore predictable) a more conducive form of

expression than spoken words. The sense of community which is vibrant in these groups, and which appears to be created by the act of singing together, is counter to the dialogue of generalities on this subject. Here we have specificity, of voice and of personal expression, - ‘a paradoxical relationality’, in the words of Boddam-Whetham (2016), and of joyful collaboration with each other which flies in the face of the standard expectations of people in this situation. This is an area which needs further exploration, with which I hope to engage in the future. There is very little literature which takes seriously this constituency of vocal expression. But I suggest that this is also a function of the inadequacy of our conceptualisation of vocal sound. Vocal work with those with an ASD is seen as doing good, rather than learning to listen to an often neglected and ignored section of the community, who could teach us new ways of listening! Because these singers/vocalisers have a way of processing their vocality which is different from those of us who are “neurotypical”, this mode of expression has a directness which is much less processed than in other cases. This gives us an insightful, direct contact with the person making it which is rare in other cases.

Much of the music referred to in this thesis is opera or opera-related, and the singing style referred to is most often influenced by opera, so I have sought to find a way of addressing the professional side of this world. It is also a way of engaging with the theatrical element of singing, which is foregrounded, for example by Thomaidis and his colleagues as ‘... the body heard in the sound ... a convergence between individuality and community ... (2017, p. 71). This is a useful way of contextualising the different aspects of opera performance explored in this chapter.

I have begun Chapter 4 on this subject with a contemporary controversy in the (classical) opera world about the place of the voice in opera, and contextualised this in relation to my own experience as a singer, in Bayreuth and elsewhere. I have used this discussion as a kind of research telescope, gradually narrowing in on two smaller-scale performances – each innovative in a different way, by Birmingham Opera Company and by Music Theatre Wales Music Theatre Wales (MTW), whose formidable reputation is based on meticulous interpretations of new

works, and who are pushing out the boundaries of what can be written and sung/played.. Birmingham Opera Company expands the conventional boundaries of opera performance both in its setting (in otherwise disused buildings) and in the singers used (a genuinely mixed constituency of musical education, social background and race). Both are also interesting in that they cross over the boundaries between conventional voice studies and the study of voice in a theatre context.

Narrowing the focus further, I have included a discussion with Michael Rafferty, MBE, about the place of voice in his MTW interpretations and in theatre generally, including a fascinating and nuanced discussion about the place of the voice in the impact made by operatic performances. He makes it very clear that the theatrical impact of the voice is fundamental to the MTW project, in for example, his discussion of Maxwell Davies' Eight songs for a mad king and of Sciarrino on (Ch4 p133).

Finally in this chapter, I have narrowed the discussion down to one person, a young tenor working as an electrician with Tata steel in south Wales, with a charismatic voice and stage presence, but without any musical training. This is a fascinating case study in laying bare the essentials of the presence of the voice in opera repertoire. In this case, there is only the voice and the person in the voice – but the implications and provenance of this presence are potentially extraordinary.

The case made here is that opera is effective insofar as it represents the authentic presence of the singer, whether in romantic music, such as Wagner, or in more contemporary pieces using extended voice techniques. The effectiveness of the voice in opera, I would suggest, is entirely dependent on its success in reflecting this presence, more than musical accuracy (however important this obviously is –but it is a starting point, not an end in itself) or other preoccupations of voice training. It is the singer's/actor's courage and commitment in making sound which truly reflects who they are, and connects with the audience at that deep level which, I suggest, makes sung performances compelling, rather than the way they fit, or do not fit, with current ideas of what is beautiful or "good" singing. This is part of the rationale of the singers' summer school, described in Chapter 5.

In Chapter 5, I have included a detailed study of the experiences of staff and students on a summer school in the Italian Tyrol – a sort of singing laboratory in a geographically and culturally isolated setting with world-class teachers (from very diverse and prestigious backgrounds) and an extremely diverse group of students, including some with an autistic spectrum disorder who live and work in the community. This experience included some sessions with a narrative which appeared to be contradictory but were unified in the commitment to and focus on liberating the voice. One thing which was fascinating was that those giving the sessions were happy and relaxed working with a group of singers from very different backgrounds and levels of professional potential.

The aim of this chapter was to test out the hypothesis that the frame of authentic being in singing works across different genres of music and a very varied group of students, and that the audacious juxtaposition of prestigious staff and a very mixed student body is one which is possible and also highly effective. In other words, we need a vocal landscape which embraces all the strangeness of human diversity and variety!

There is detail in this chapter which may seem at first sight to be irrelevant, but which, in fact, underlines the specificity of the voice in any given situation. In the case of Robert Lada's class, it is the specificity of the human body and it's relation with the earth: in the case of Dane Preece it is the specific dramatic situation and its context which the singer must embody. In both cases, what might appear to be unnecessary extra detail is part of the specificity of embodiment. There are many different approaches to the issue of the voice on stage and in performance: I have tried to make the case here for judging these approaches, not by their "correctness" but by the authentic personal presence which they evoke.

There were two responses to this event which were unexpected and are inter-related. The first was the unanimously positive report of the experience of the project from the participants, underlined by the fact all of them re-attended the following year, with all the attendant difficulties of increased cost and complicated travel arrangements. The second was the stress they all placed on the mutual support which they experienced and

the importance of this communal experience. For instance, one participant sent this comment (on p.179) that she was:

‘entirely supported and encouraged by all the fellow students and by all the tutors, so that by the end my confidence had grown in leaps and bounds.’

For me, the collective aspect of the event was somewhat obscured by the fact that I was fully occupied with organisational matters for the whole week. So I had to unravel this (unexpected) development after the event. Following on Thomas Kuhn’s analysis (1965) of paradigm shifts in scientific research which happen when the existing paradigm becomes obviously inadequate, Nina Sun Eidsheim speaks of the ‘accumulation of anomalies’ and ‘state of crisis’ leading to a similar shift in the discipline of voice studies. She remarks further that ‘I apply the notion of sound ... that sound is sensed by the material, lived body,’ (Eidsheim, 2015, p. 51).

This last is an affirmation of existential presence, of course, and I suggest that this is crucial to the re-thinking which she quite rightly asserts is necessary. But it is important to be clear that this is not a primarily individual matter. The responses described above indicate that there is also a communal, reciprocal view of voicing sound which has been under-examined and which can be obscured by a quasi-romantic existential frame. This something which is drastically under-represented in conservatoire-style individual voice teaching. This suggestion would be borne out by the success of Robert Lada’s classes, on embodiment of the voice in a group, and of Dane Preece’s class on dramatic embodiment of singing as drama, in a group context. In the case of Ingrid Surgenor, on the other hand, she gives a very strong, consistent message with very little deviation and variation: this does , in fact seem to be the strength of her approach. She is very clear, on the basis of long experience, what she thinks and what works, and she has built a formidable international reputation on this direction of teaching.

Similarly, the insistence on the specifics of the Italian language (and other languages, by implication – he was talking specifically about *Cosi fan Tutte*) in David Miller’s classes puts the meaning of words in this context in question. And this highlights the whole issue of the function and meaning of the use of words in music, as related to Andrew Bowie’s statement that:

‘Music’s ‘meaning’ might lie precisely in the fact that we cannot say in words what it means,’ (2007, p. 105). This is a subject which needs to be addressed more widely, not least in the context of the wider significance of the connection between music and language.

And it may be that this whole issue is bound up with the extraordinary, unreasonable power of the human voice in opera, as described by Michel Poizat in *The Angel’s Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera*, in which he describes the function of the “cry” in opera which in Kundry’s voice in Parsifal, for example, is

> A literally unheard-of paroxysm which leaves the listener no option but flight, refusal or the emotional collapse that signifies the onset of jouissance (1992, p. 91).

It is, perhaps, unfortunate that the original title, “Le cri del’ange: Essai sur la Jouissance de l’amateur de l’opera” (originally published in 1986), with its clear reference to Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory, has been, in a sense, neutralised by the translator by the use of the much less layered word “pleasure.” This is particularly strange because, in the words of one reviewer,

> The translator leaves the word [jouissance] in French [in the text of the book] arguing that no English approximation – not “bliss”, not “ecstasy”, certainly not mere “enjoyment or “pleasure” – contains the sexual, outlaw connotations of jouissance ... (Denner, 1993, p. 522-526)

The aim of this thesis is to contribute some clarity to this un-nameable pleasure, and in particular, to be clear about what it is not – ie. a commodity or an easily quantified feeling which can be brought within, and defined in terms of, the confines of commercial activity. Whether or not we choose to embrace Lacanian categories, it seems clear that there is an experience here which needs a much more layered understanding than a merely utilitarian description. And the unforeseen benefits of this summer school described above, show how partial our understanding of this whole process is.

Finally, I have described the journey of two singers from non-UK backgrounds: one a jazz singer from Kingston, Jamaica, and the other a

Kenyan Asian (from a Gujarati family) who arrived in the UK as a seven-year-old in the 1970s. The purpose here is to examine the experience of singing of someone from another culture – in both cases with a relationship to UK culture with traumatic aspects- the associations of slavery in one case and the chaotic expulsion of those of Gujarati culture from Kenya in the other. These descriptions give a more nuanced picture of what the experience of singing –jazz standards in the one case, and learning western music from scratch in the other, mean in any individual life, and how they fit into the social and cultural life of an individual from another culture. . This helps, of course, to throw the experience of the native UK singers described in the summer school (chapter 4) thesis into relief, and to help identify the common factors which might belong to a common existential thread – what they have in common as human beings.

Perhaps I should make clear at this stage what a privilege it has been to accompany these two singers on their journey, and to have detailed and personal conversations with them about the experience. In both cases it was an extremely generous sharing of experience. But it was also clear, especially in the second case (the Kenyan Asian) that objectifying his singing experience in this way had a beneficial, and even a therapeutic effect. The detailed discussion in the interviews for this thesis confirmed that he was being taken seriously as a singer and a musician– something which seemed, until that point, to be in question and to add to the sense of being ill-at-ease and not accepted in the world. In addition, the collision of the two cultures in his voice and in his singing is fascinating in itself.

In the case of the Jamaican singer, he embraces Italianate, operatic singing not, I am suggesting, as an experience of a “higher” culture, but as an expression of a way of giving voice with which he is intimately familiar through his own jazz singing. And I reference resources suggesting that that the effect of the Bel canto approach to singing is well established in popular music singing (of Tony Bennett for example) of his formative period. His reaction to the direct experience of Italian opera is visceral and one of complete commitment. The sound absorbs him completely and this is an authentic, human experience of singing, all the more eloquent perhaps,

when viewed through the experience of someone from another culture and musical background.

I have tried in this thesis to do justice to some of the huge variety of experiences of voice and singing, experienced through the lenses of a wide variety of experiences, ranging from of a very varied body of students in Italy, those experiencing western singing from the viewpoint of another culture, and professionals engaged in mould-breaking operatic performances.

I am suggesting here that we need a philosophical frame of authentic presence to do justice to the intensity and integrity of these experiences. Although the starting point for identifying such a frame is existential philosophy, it is, I think, clear that we need to bring this frame up to date in a contemporary climate. References to Derrida and other post-modern thinkers go some way towards this, but this is clearly a major, separate, project.

But the assertion remains that how we think about, and conceptualise singing is crucial to this aspect of our being-in-the-world, and of how we give voice as we step into the future. Only this clarity can give space to express themselves to the coming generation, and to all those disenfranchised people whose voices go unheard, and whose personhood is undermined as a result. The future of the human race depends on us all – those with autism, people from all cultures and people of all ages. It is urgent to hear, with real attention and commitment, what each of us has to say/sing.

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Appendix 1

PAAT class, MAC, 30th April 2012

I had negotiated a taster session before committing myself to the course. I had also asked at the desk for the name of the teacher and looked up her web site (which was mostly adverts for other products) I had asked the PAAT office about her and about the statement on the PAAT website that they encourage research. The person in the enquiry office could not answer this question, and then rang me back to say I would have to email her to ask it again.

When I arrived for the class, it was being run by two women (not the named teacher for the class) whom I knew nothing about, and who gave only their first names. They were both pretty nervous and tense. They seemed to have some sort of prescribed procedure. Now and again they would read from a sheet some sort of explanation about the Alexander Technique. When asked for this as a hand-out, they refused in a very definite manner, explaining that we would listen better if we didn't have the material written down! There was no indication given of the authorship of this material.

The tone of the whole class was very detailed instruction from them about how to sit and even place one's feet and where to look. Standing up was a matter of putting one's head in the required place, determined by them beforehand. When it was my turn to try this manoeuvre, I was disturbed to find that one of the teachers was gripping my head so tightly that I could not keep my neck free, which is what I have learnt to do in the other (very extensive and varied) work I have done with the Alexander Technique. This I found extremely disturbing. When I looked around at other members of the group, many of them were performing the tasks set them by pulling their head down and back, which is identified by FM Alexander as the root cause of unhelpful use. Members of the group took quite an infantile role, asking how they should move different bits of their bodies and "confessing" that they were "rubbish" at different tasks. The teachers did say that class members didn't need to beat themselves up, but

the over-riding tone was of people being shown what to do with their bodies by people who knew more than they did. It was not clear to me that they did know better, and the marvellous thing about the Alexander Technique as I know it is that it gives people the tools to be themselves, to be more thoroughly in control of their own physical use. This class was quite the opposite and apparently profoundly disempowering to all present.

The atmosphere of control was increased by very frequent use of Christian names (I would have preferred to use my surname until I knew people better) and by the complete absence of asking permission to touch people or, indeed any acknowledgement of personal space or physical integrity.

It ran on 10 minutes after the advertised time. They said they had started late but, if so, it was only a very few minutes. They announced that they were going to embark on another piece of read text (meaning that the class was going to run 20 minutes over time), and at this point I had to leave.

The following Friday 4th May, I mentioned to a group of Autistic people that I run that I had been to this class. One of the service users remarked without prompting that he had been to a “taster” session at the MAC (presumably with PAAT teachers) and had felt that he was being criticised, which was not his previous experience of the Alexander Technique which was work we had done in the group with teachers from other AT disciplines.

Mon 7th May

I arrived for the class and was met outside the door by ”Michelle” who said that the teachers felt that I was too advanced for the class. She mentioned that I had made and enquiry to their office as though this was some kind of fault! She suggested that I could take private lessons with them. I pointed out that I had no experience of the PAAT and that I was best placed to judge whether the class was right for me. She said “No. We are the teachers.” At this point I contacted the duty manager and pointed out that I had had a wasted journey. She passes it on to her manager, who phoned me twice later in the week, for which I was very grateful.

Mon 14th May

Both teachers were very watchful and nervous, understandably! The class was better in some respects. The read text was about inhibition (in very everyday terms, and without using the word “inhibit” – strange when they claim FM’s books as their authority.

There was still the fussing about the exact angle of the feet and their distance apart, with minute adjustments triumphantly made! I would love to ask what is the justification in FM Alexander’s published work for that!

Mon 18th June

(I had to take some weeks off because of an Alexander Technique International course in Boston, and because of my father’s illness and death, see below).

I was very late because I had been away. I was pretty shocked that only two members of the course were there. “Jane” commented on my laughing and joking a lot and wondered whether I would show them the “real Sara”!! Sadly, I don’t think either she or her colleague would know the real person in any of the students if it stared them in the face! That was one of the most sad things – the absence of any sense of authentic personal presence either in the case of the two instructors/teachers, or what they elicited from their students.

Mon

I asked again about the authorship of the texts which they read out. It is against all my instincts academically to be expected to listen to text not attributed to any author, and for which no one takes any responsibility. “Michelle” said it was PAAT text and copyright to PAAT! Don’t know whether she thinks I want to steal it.

The texts do have the virtue that they put the technique as they understand it in the context of ordinary lives. Sometimes they are lucid expositions of an aspect of the technique, such as Jane’s explanation of inhibition (but see below).

Mon 9th July

I have learned to work with “Jane” (who is actually a very talented teacher in respect of her hands on work – it’s just what they say!) rather than “Michelle” , whom I have found to be quite coarse and over-directive in her hands on work!

There was a long session on sitting on a chair at a desk and how to pull the chair up closer to the desk, exactly where to put the feet, and then on writing at a desk = where to put the paper, what angle to have a raised writing desk etc etc. There was some work on holding the pen which was quite interesting – about not lengthening the fingers, I think. I need to ask Tim (my teacher in Cardiff, STAT and ITM qualified) to know how valid it is. But the rest was a complete smoke screen. They do, however, use examples (chosen by them) which are quite mundane, and that is a strength, I think.

There was a moment of truth when I asked, in relation to the sitting down “aren’t we supposed to be inhibiting” ie Should we not stop and think before going into a habitual pattern of response, and is this not fundamental to the Alexander Technique as understood by the overwhelming majority of its practitioners? Jane kindly explained that inhibition was stopping the bad use and letting the good use operate, but suggested that in this case it was better not to bother. Not kosher FM, I think!!

Next week they have questions. That would be fascinating, because the whole procedure is based on the idea that they know the answers and we are there to be instructed. There is very little input from the students. When I spoke to the other students after the class and told them about my father’s funeral, I felt as though I was meeting them for the first time.

Appendix 2

Paul Newham

The Psychology of Voice and the Founding of the Roy Hart Theatre

https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/F874E4FB197D6D89A1EC83F1202F3BC8/S0266464X00007478a.pdf/div-class-title-the-psychology-of-voice-and-the-founding-of-the-roy-hart-theatre-div.pdf

Following the departure of the Roy Hart Theatre for France in 1974, and the death of Hart in a car accident shortly afterwards, his pioneering work in exploring the theatrical potential of the human voice has tended to be neglected in the English-speaking world. In the following article, Paul Newham demonstrates that, despite Hart's undoubted importance in the application of his methods of vocal self-discovery to performance, those methods were firmly rooted not only in aspects of Freud's theory of abreaction and Jung's belief in the multi-aspected or 'polyvalent personality', but more specifically in the practical therapeutic work on the human voice conducted by Alfred Wolfsohn, first in Germany before the war, then in Britain from Wolfsohn's exile in 1938 until his death in 1962. The author, Paul Newham, is founder and director of the International Association for Voice Movement Therapy in London, and has worked therapeutically with a wide range of clients, including performing artists. His book The Singing Cure: an Introduction to Voice Movement Therapy, will be published by Random House in March.

http://2017.world-voice-day.org/wvd-events-2016/ireland2016/roy-hart-voice-workshop/
Roy Hart Voice Workshop

IRELAND, WVD EVENTS 2016
.entry-meta

Date & time 17/04/2016, 14:00 – 15:30
City/place: Dublin
Venue/address: Gaiety School of Acting – The National Theatre School of Ireland, Essex Street West, Temple Bar, Dublin 2
Country: IE
Performer/s: Russell Smith – Roy Hart Voice Coach
More info: Roy Hart Voicework is body-oriented, stimulating, and provocative. With emphasis on the uniqueness of each voice, the teaching seeks to inform and strengthen the 'normal' vocal range. It is a liberating and exciting experience as you work towards bringing life and vitality to your words.- This is a free workshop, however places must be pre-booked.
For further information: www.irishvoiceassociation.com
Website: www.irishvoiceassociation.com
Contact person/s: Helena Walsh, helenawalshvoiceandbodystudio@gmail.com

Nadine George

http://www.voicestudiointernational.com/files/3212/9638/9770/My_Life_with_the_Voice_article.pdf

Wolfsohn worked with the voice mainly in singing and psychology. Roy Hart worked with the voice with spoken text, singing and psychology combined. He met Alfred Wolfsohn in London while playing Othello at RADA. Roy was having difficulties playing the role: he felt he could act the killing of Desdemona but could not feel it in his body. A friend of Roy's at RADA recommended Wolfsohn to him, and so Roy went to talk with him about the difficulties he was having. Wolfsohn said to Roy, "So, you don't think you are capable of killing anyone?" And Roy said "Of course not." Wolfsohn worked with Roy on his voice continuously for two hours until Roy felt like killing him. Then Wolfsohn said quite calmly, "So, you don't think you are capable of killing anyone?" Roy then realised that he had been able to tap the source and energy of murder in his body through the voice, and that with further work he could do this consciously. This changed Roy's life forever. He carried on working with Wolfsohn while he was still training at

RADA, but then turned his back on acting to continue his research into the human voice, first with Wolfsohn and then with his own group.

When I first heard Roy working with his voice as a result of the work he had done with Wolfsohn, I was staggered. I had never heard an actor using his speaking voice like that. He was performing the poem “The Rock” by T S Eliot, using great power and a huge range in his speaking voice. He seemed to be linked to and exploring his male and female energy through the voice. His voice went very deeply into the feeling of the words he was speaking, and it touched me on a deep level. Also as I later discovered, Roy was able to repeat what he was doing. He would work on different lines many times, exploring the possibility that was in them through his voice. He was conscious of what he was doing, having worked over a period of years to develop his range and vocal artistry. It was then that I decided to leave the professional theatre and work with Roy. I was lucky enough to be taught by Roy himself for five years, and in total I worked with him for ten years in London. Then, in 1975, I went with him and the Roy Hart Theatre to France, where I stayed for 15 years.

My Work with Roy Hart

When I first started working with Roy I was already a trained actress. I had a very good speaking voice, and was experienced with both classic and modern text. Working with Roy, however, took me away from the word and into researching vocal sound – singing the sound with the whole body, mind and soul. Roy called this the work with the Human Voice. I also practised singing songs and speaking text, but the main emphasis was on developing the voice. In this work with Roy I realised that, previously, I had only been using a small part of my voice and myself, and had tried to perfect this. From Roy I learnt there was a much greater potential in my voice and myself than I had ever thought was possible.

Roy would work with me as one of a group of four or six, or individually. He used singing terminology for this work on the voice: Bass, Baritone, Tenor, Alto, and Soprano. He worked with me on my voice in all these qualities, but in the individual lessons he would concentrate on one quality of sound for an hour. He might also follow this with work on a poem

or song, but the main focus of the lesson was deep work on one quality of sound. So began my research into the male and female areas of my voice and, therefore, of my personality and energy. I realised in working with Roy that all of these qualities were linked to me as a human being. This was a big realisation for me. As an actress I had never seen the direct link between my voice and myself. When I met Roy I sensed there was a gap between what I did on the stage as an actress and my life. When I heard Roy work on his own voice, I knew deep down in myself this was a way for me to work artistically with myself in a whole way.

Roy's method was very physical. I remember very clearly two exercises that I did in a group:

In the first group exercise, Roy would choose one quality of sound – say Tenor. He would start from middle c of the piano for the women and the c below middle c for the men, going up the notes of the piano from the c. He would ask each person in the group to sing each sound one note at a time. As we were singing the sound we would have to fall onto a pile of foam rubber mats, one person after another, very fast. This went on for two hours without stopping. You had no time to think – you had to go directly to your body; and trust that and not the brain. I began to realise, from this exercise and others like it, that the voice really did come from the body and was physical and not cerebral.

In the second group exercise, each person in the group would sit down by the edge of a bench. Roy would again choose one sound quality – say Alto – and would start from middle c and the c below middle c, going up the notes on the piano. When Roy played the note, we would have to push ourselves up with our legs, so that the back of our neck and our head were resting on the edge of the bench, our feet flat on the floor to take the weight and the rest of our body lifted up horizontally off the floor; and we would be asked to sing the sound from our necks. Then we would rest, lower ourselves down again, and do the same thing on the next note. Sometimes this would be as a whole group together and sometimes individually one after the other. This went on for two hours without stopping. From this exercise I began to realise that my head and my body were disconnected

and that the neck was the bridge between the two. Again, this connection was physical and could be worked on through the voice.

These two exercises had a big influence on me at the time, as I realised I needed to work on getting into my body and out of my head, and to make the link between my head and my body. And I believe these two exercises continue to have a big influence on my approach to voice today. What I principally use is the work with the sung sound – not in such an extreme way, but in a simpler and more direct way, and I had created my own technique from this.

Appendix 3

THE KILLING FLOWER BY SALVATORE SCIARRINO: MUSIC THEATRE WALES

. http://www.walesartsreview.org/the-killing-flower-by-salvatore-sciarrino-music-theatre-wales/

Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff, 18 October 2013

Music – Salvatore Sciarrino

Libretto – Salvatore Sciarrino after C.A. Cigognini and C. Le Jeune

Director – Michael McCarthy

Conductor – Michael Rafferty

Designer – Simon Banham

Lighting – Ace McCarron

Cast – Amanda Forbes / William Towers / Michael Bennett / George Humphreys

The music of Salvatore Sciarrino hovers, flutters and breathes at the edge of silence, on the cusp of darkness and light. It has the hushed, colouristic intensity of a timeless dawn or twilight; held but not frozen; distant, yet intimately compelling. Speaking of silence – the ‘zero-sound’ which ‘also contains all sounds’ – the composer once asked, ‘how does one decide the frontier, the point of passage?’ And he offered a clue: ‘in my music … the sounds preserve traces of the silence from which they come and into which they return, a silence which itself is an infinite rumbling of microscopic sonorities.’ Sciarrino has spent many decades exploring those sonorities in exquisite depth and detail, and his music invites us to do nothing less than re-imagine the nature of expression itself.

Sciarrino’s sounds inhabit a netherworld between pitched notes and unpitched ‘noises’, all precisely conceived and meticulously notated; indeed, David Metzer has described him as a ‘master calligrapher of quiet’. Low dynamics inscribe the most vivid of articulative ranges. The whispers and whistlings of flute and muted trumpet, the unearthly, high harmonics of bowed strings and the percussive clacks and clicks of mechanical keys and tongued reed instruments create labyrinths in Sciarrino’s music as ethereal,

yet physically and aesthetically charged, as any story by Jorge Luis Borges. Each player forms part of a web, if you will, of natural and artificial sounds, continually trembling the surface and re-weaving the steel-strong, gossamer structure that typically lies beneath.

Traditional, full operatic singing would, of course, shatter such delicately quiet filigree, but Sciarrino's voices rather arise from and in tandem with his instrumental music, utilising a complementary, heightened style which also combines the natural and the artificial. Vocal phrases are pushed out; forcefully appearing from 'nothing', with crescendi that build and then veer between ppp and piano before falling back through short, fast repeated patterns and sighing glissandi that increase the intensity rather than dispel it. The result is a dramatic tapestry of paradoxically urgent stillness and relaxed tension that is breathtaking to experience – quite literally so, as the audience breathes with the music passed back and forth between singers and musicians from breath to breath as it were in close but distant contact.

In The Killing Flower (1996-8)*, as in Sciarrino's other concert and stage works, touch and timbre are everything. Indeed, in their richly suggestive layers, his sounds lend themselves ideally to his singular theatrical vision; a vision which was impeccably realised by Music Theatre Wales in this stunningly beautiful, first ever production of the opera – or of any opera by Sciarrino – in the UK. Sciarrino's softly sempiternal music is employed with real theatrical imperative in this extraordinary piece, within a quintessential operatic frame concerning love, betrayal, jealousy, rage and murder. Only appearing to utilise a conventional narrative development, the characters are rather propelled through their inner energy and external impulses towards the inevitable tragic denouement. Sciarrino's story is based on that of Gesualdo, his brilliant Italian Renaissance precursor, who famously murdered his wife and her lover in 1590 (and who, coincidentally, died 400 years ago this year), and his score is embued at key moments (especially the Intermezzi between scenes) with a Renaissance flavour; a period which Sciarrino also explores in Infinito Nero – 'An Ecstacy in One Act' for mezzo soprano and chamber ensemble – written around the same time (1998).

All four members of the cast and the MTW ensemble, brilliantly conducted by Michael Rafferty, were exemplary in their performance of this highly charged score. Amanda Forbes conjured the tormented dignity of an Ophelia or Desdemona as the Duchess, consummately 'caught between two dreams' of her husband and lover, both of whom she wants. Her desire-awakening duet with the anonymous Guest – the superb counter-tenor William Towers – was perhaps the most spellbinding passage of the evening in its sublime matching and contrasting of vocal timbres in unison, echo and counter-echo. But, equally, George Humphreys was magnificent as the devastated Duke whose murder of the Guest is the more powerful for its taking place off stage. The dismembered body's unveiling in the marital bed is as cruel a revenge on an unfaithful operatic heroine as any I have seen. Michael Bennett was superb as the tale-telling servant who too must die, as he has brought dishonour on the Duke in the revealing of his wife's infidelity: 'far better you had stabbed my heart'.

Indeed, integrity and honour are themes which are explored from a number of angles – not least through the Duchess's conundrum that, if she is to be true to herself, she has to admit the very feelings which will lead to her downfall and that of the men she loves. Such circular entrapments point to deeper ways in which Sciarrino traverses the mysterious realms between existential interrogation and the tracing of a story. The fragmentation of his characters is not merely psychological, but set against a pure, transient field of everything-nothing not unlike a Samuel Beckett play. The story and emotions are both fleeting and constant, immediate and afar. By unfolding the events of the plot in time through essentially static, 'timeless' means (albeit with distinctly historic Renaissance cues), Sciarrino calls into question the apparent opposition of deep human impulses such as surrender-resistance and suppression-expression. In this way, his unique, gestural language is used, not for deconstructivist ends, but to heighten the emotions we are simultaneously pulled into, and pushed back from, in his depiction of the characters' internal states.

These ideas are at once simple and complex and, in The Killing Flower, they lay bare the paradoxes underlying human behaviour. The whole made for a powerful operatic experience in the skilled hands of

Director Michael McCarthy, who placed the audience on the Millennium Centre main stage together with the cast and ensemble in a master-stroke of theatre. His production pulsed and shimmered with erotic tension and suppressed violence. Lit in gorgeous chiaroscuro, and cut through at points by sudden bright flashes, the set, costumes and stylised gestures of the singers mirrored the emotional intensity on all levels. Minimal props combined with Renaissance tunics and gowns in stark black and white helped to create an atmosphere of almost religious fervour. A white silk sheet, seductively dropped from the ceiling, made for both bed and shroud, whilst scattered petals, red roses and candles spoke eloquently of love, desire and death.

Sciarrino himself perhaps best summed up the apparent enigma of his art when he wrote in 1990:

> Beethoven seems more aggressive than Mozart, but … Mozart's music is sometimes more aggressive, for it succeeds in doing with a single sign what Beethoven achieves with all the energy of his fortissimos. To those who are used to modern life, my music may seem like an ant on the back of an elephant. I would rather see it as an erupting volcano seen from a distance.

His opera The Killing Flower conveys energy, quiet aggression and distant beauty in equal fascinating measure. Music Theatre Wales deserve thanks as well as huge congratulations for bringing it so exquisitely to life in the UK at last.

* The title was translated by Sciarrino from the Italian Luci mie traditrici – literally 'my betraying eyes'.

The Killing Flower can be seen at Venue Cymru, Llandudno tomorrow night, Saturday 2 November and at Swansea Grand Theatre on Tuesday 26 November.

Appendix 4
Performance History of Dido and Aeneas

The first performance seems to have taken place on 1 December 1687 (Price, 1988, pp. 260-267) at Josias Priest's girls' school in Chelsea, London no later than the summer of 1688 and probably again in 1689[34]

The plot is as follows: Dido, the widowed queen of Carthage, falls in love with the Trojan prince Aeneas, shipwrecked on the way to Italy, where he is destined to found a new Troy.

The destruction of their love and of Dido is plotted by witches, and one of them impersonates Mercury, and tells Aeneas must leave Dido and sail to Italy. Aeneas and his sailors prepare to leave, and Dido kills herself, lamented by mourning cupids.

It is thought that Dido and Aeneas was originally conceived of as a court masque, and a possible connection with the perceived deflection from duty of the catholic James II.

(The more comprehensive background to the story from Virgil's Aeneid, which highlights the opera's contemporary resonance, is as follows:

Dido is the queen of Carthage. Virgil portrays her as Aeneas's equal and feminine counterpart. She is an antagonist, a strong, determined, and independent woman who possesses heroic dimensions. Like Aeneas, Dido fled her homeland because of circumstances beyond her control. She leads her people out of Tyre and founds Carthage. She embodies the qualities of a leader that Aeneas respects and hopes to employ when he founds Rome. She rules the Carthaginians fairly and justly, thereby maintaining order. Like Aeneas's character, Dido's character represents the best of her race.

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[34] Several scholars have argued that the work was composed for the English court, either for Charles II (and perhaps as early as 1684)[4][5] or for James II.[15] Following the Chelsea performances, the opera was not staged again in Purcell's lifetime. Its next performance was in 1700 as a masque incorporated into an adapted version of Shakespeare's Measure for Measure at Thomas Betterton's theatre in London.

After 1705 it disappeared as a staged work, with only sporadic concert performances, until 1895 when the first staged version in modern times was performed by students of the Royal College of Music at London's Lyceum Theatre to mark the bicentenary of Purcell's death.[16] Dido and Aeneas received its first performance outside England on 14 December 1895 in a concert version at the University Society in Dublin, (Price, 1988, pp. 260-267).

Virgil compares Dido's uncontrolled passion to a consuming fire that can not be extinguished: "The queen, for her part, all that evening ached / With longing that her heart's blood fed, a wound / Or inward fire eating her away." Later, when she discovers that Aeneas plans to leave Carthage, she becomes "all aflame / With rage." Fittingly, Dido dies on a pyre used for burning corpses in funeral rites by committing suicide with Aeneas's sword. Her suicide, an act of courage, proves she is a tragic, as well as a romantic heroine,) (Cliff Notes, 2016).

Appendix 5

Music Theatre Wales

Music Theatre Wales

> is acknowledged as one of the UK's leading contemporary opera companies, dedicated to performing masterpieces of the recent past and to commissioning new works from the very best composers and writers -operas which we hope will enter the future repertoire of opera companies around the world (Arts Council of Wales, 2016).

The company says that they have

> an established programme to help nurture new opera composers and we have created productions with a wide range of partners including Opera National du Rhin in Strasbourg, the Berlin Festival, Opera Vest in Norway, Banff Centre in Canada, Theatr Brycheiniog in Brecon, Haarlem Theatre in The Netherlands, Treffpunkt in Stuttgart, Scottish Opera and the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.
>
> In 2002, Music Theatre Wales became the first Associate Company of the Royal Opera House. This partnership has given us a fabulous London home and opportunities to undertake projects we could not otherwise afford, through co-productions and co-commissions. In turn, we have brought contemporary opera of quality and artistic rigour into the very heart of the home of grand opera. (op. cit.)

Appendix 6
Michael Rafferty

Michael Rafferty was born in Carlisle, Cumbria and read physics and music at The University of Lancaster studying violin with Galina Solodchin and Nicholas Roth. During his period of postgraduate study in Cardiff, he developed an interest in theatre and co-founded Cardiff New Opera Group with the stage director Michael McCarthy. Michael Rafferty made his conducting debut with the company's first production of Peter Maxwell Davies' The Lighthouse. Further productions followed touring widely in Wales. At the same time, he was also active as violinist with several new music ensembles. In 1988 he co-founded Music Theatre Wales where he was Joint Artistic Director for more than 25 years, (Rafferty, n.d.).

Appendix 7
Ingber

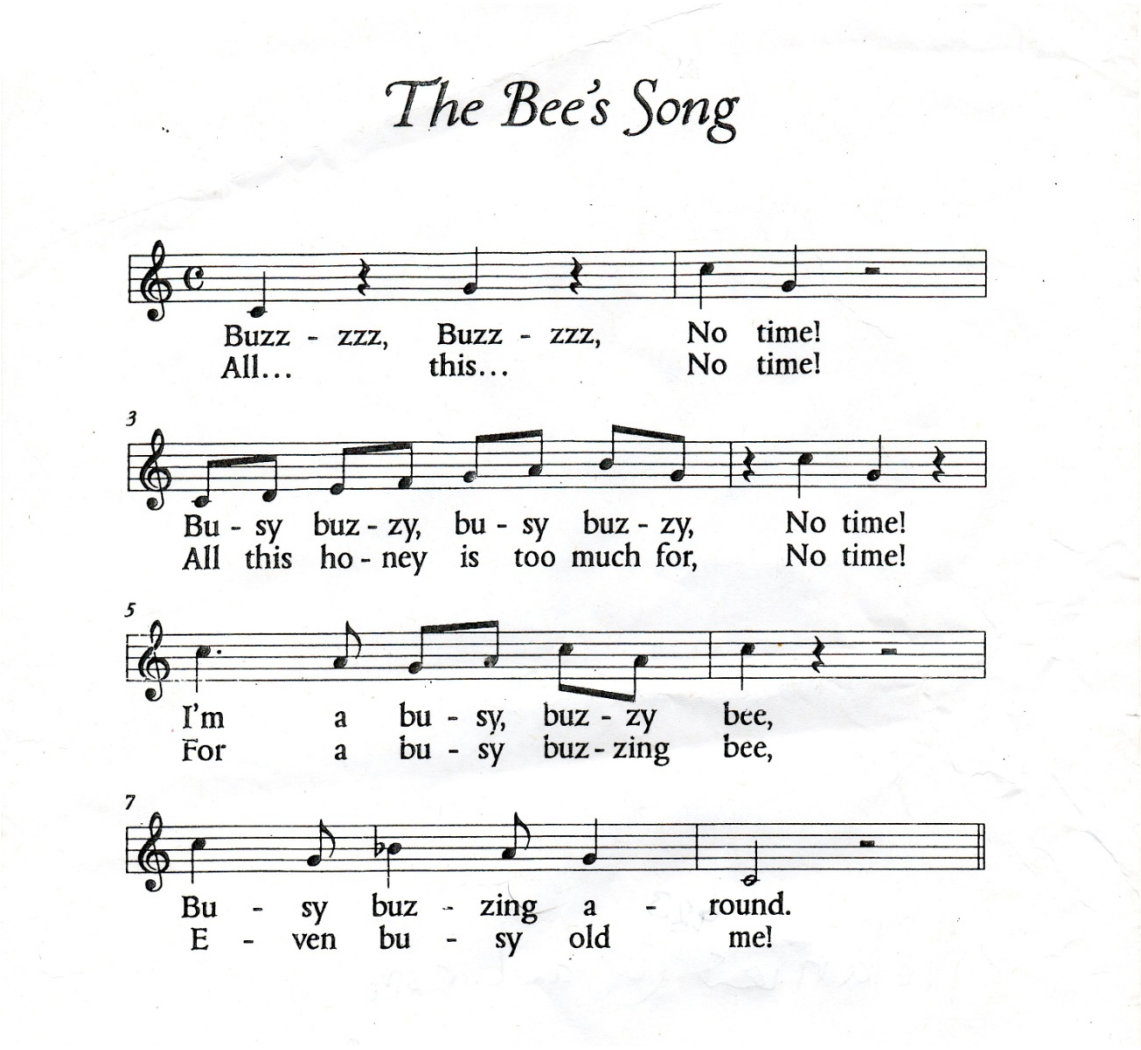
‘Life is the ultimate example of complexity at work. An organism, whether it is a bacterium or a baboon, develops through an incredibly complex series of interactions involving a vast number of different components. These components, or subsystems, are themselves made up of smaller molecular components, which independently exhibit their own dynamic behavior, such as the ability to catalyze chemical reactions. Yet when they are combined into some larger functioning unit--such as a cell or tissue--utterly new and unpredictable properties emerge, including the ability to move, to change shape and to grow,’ (Ingber, 1998).

And further –

‘That nature applies common assembly rules is implied by the recurrence--at scales from the molecular to the macroscopic--of certain patterns, such as spirals, pentagons and triangulated forms. These patterns appear in structures ranging from highly regular crystals to relatively irregular proteins and in organisms as diverse as viruses, plankton and humans. After all, both organic and inorganic matter are made of the same building blocks: atoms of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen and phosphorus. The only difference is how the atoms are arranged in three-dimensional space,’ (op. cit. See also Ingber, 1997).

Appendix 8

Song by Duncan Fielden



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