

UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

A Person-Centred Practice

Empowering musically disadvantaged adults
through singing

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Professional Doctorate by Contribution to Practice

August 2020

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for a postgraduate research degree of the University of Winchester.

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ABSTRACT

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This context statement is a narrative inquiry of practice. Through this methodology, the author explores the ways in which a conservatoire-trained singer drew upon his experience both as performer and teacher to adapt to the environment of adult education and specifically the teaching of so-called non-singers. Such people frequently describe themselves as ‘tone-deaf’ and feel excluded from music making. Using a person-centred approach, working with his own observations, sharing with other practitioners, and using input from voice research, the writer has found ways to enable such people to find their voices and take an active part in musical life. These pedagogical approaches challenged the paradigm of teaching, experienced by him as a student.

This statement is written in chapters, around a series of models, reflecting different teaching classes, seen as petals eventually making up a flower. It identifies the teaching and learning experiences involved, characterised by a metaphorical subtitle: *The Teacher as...* The statement seeks to highlight some issues in an area less studied than adult education as a whole. It highlights the personal achievements students make in ‘Learning for Life’ and the value such work has in the area of health and wellbeing.

Some ‘non-singers’ say that they are vulnerable due to that exclusion in childhood, while others question if they can learn singing techniques once they are adults. By means of making a ‘welcome space’, an atmosphere is created in which everyone is put at ease. The students are gently encouraged to sing, face their fears, and find ways of strengthening their voices and enjoying the whole experience. A particular point is made of the effectiveness of using a plurality and flexibility of teaching methods and encouraging the input of students themselves. This study coincided with an invitation to the author, as a specialist teacher, to be involved in a research project at the Guildhall School of Music, *Finding a Voice*, which explored enabling ‘non-singers’ to sing.

Through this study, the writer discovers himself too, as the ‘person’ of the person-centred approach, perceiving what inspired him to undertake this work and guides his educational approach.

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COMMON ABBREVIATIONS and ACRONYMS used in the thesis

ABRSM:	Associated Board of the Royals Schools of Music, one of the examining boards for instrumental and vocal music, at pre-conservatoire and diploma levels.
AGSM:	Associate of the Guildhall School of Music; performer's diploma, full-time course.
AHRC:	Arts and Humanities Research Council.
ArtsEd:	The Arts Educational School, one of the foremost stage schools, with a high educational reputation; based on two sites; I taught at the London school.
BVA:	British Voice Association; professional body, current Full Member.
ch.	Chapter reference with subsection (e.g. ch.9.4).
CSC:	<i>Can't Sing Choir</i> ; class at Morley College, one of three.
EB.	Evidence Box reference, (e.g. EB.9.4); appended to this thesis; see note on p.8
Equity:	British Actors' Equity Association; trade union, former Full Member.
FaV:	<i>Finding a Voice</i> , an AHRC-funded research project at GSMD.
FyV:	Find Your Voice; class at Morley College. Not to be confused with FaV (see above)
GSMD: or Guildhall:	Guildhall School of Music and Drama.
ISM:	Incorporated Society of Musicians; professional body, Fellow.
LSAM:	<i>Let's Sing a Musical</i> ; class at Morley College.
LTSIAD:	<i>Learn to Sing in a Day</i> ; class at Morley College.

- Morley: Morley College, London, a charity founded by Emma Cons and others for the education of working men and women.
- NVN: Natural Voice Network; also, NVPN: Natural Voice Practitioners Network.
- Queen’s: Queen’s College, London, a girls’ secondary school, founded 1848; the first institution to offer formal education with a certificate, for girls.
- SdH: Sydney de Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health, at Christchurch University, Canterbury.
- SfM: Singing for Men; class at Morley College.
- TDNW: *Tone Deaf? No Way!*; class at Morley College.

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Chapter 1: A POINT OF DEPARTURE: THE JOY OF SINGING

The Teacher as Singer and Fisherman

Since singing is so good a thing, I wish all men would learn to sing.

(Byrd, 1965 [1588]:vii)

Introduction: Methodology, Definitions and Structure

1.1 My practice

This context statement is a narrative inquiry into my teaching practice. Byrd's dictum at the head of this chapter encapsulates what I have tried to achieve in my working life: firstly to be an inspiration to others through my own performance, to entertain and to bring musical joy; secondly by precept and example to enable other people to enjoy singing themselves and get the most out of it, whether they are working musicians or singing for personal satisfaction.

Narrative inquiry is a term adopted from theories and methodologies in social sciences. Constantino, reviewing the original work of Clanninin and Connelly, lists characteristics of this approach, including questions of identity, challenges to traditional paradigms, making sense of the complexity of experience, and the voices of researcher and others (Constantino, 2001). It is a narrative of 'knowing' from which the means and process of change can be shown. It is, however, a subjective view, reflecting those complexities with provisional conclusions. These conclusions, for me, are based on solutions that have worked in my practice. In this thesis the emphasis is on my journey, though it does include the voices of fellow teachers and students whom I have taught. Also critical for my journey, has been understanding the musical identities of students and myself (2.6).

Through narrative inquiry, I explore my title subject through the experiences, conversations and observations I have made during both my professional life as singer teacher and choir-leader, as well as the earlier part of my life, before I became a music student. These are contrasted with the paradigms of teaching that I received as a student, which I increasingly questioned. I have placed the whole within the context of current pedagogic practice and academic research.

I studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama (Guildhall/GSMD) for five and half years; my principal subjects were singing and piano. As a teacher, my base position was therefore that of a conservatoire trained, one-to-one singing teacher. This was later modified by opportunities, circumstances and my own taste, to encompass a much wider set of styles than that training implied. In the thesis I explore my own development, and the realisation that person-centredness, (ch.2), is as much about me as my students. A separate Evidence Box contains details of my teaching, case studies, research, essays and a timeline of my musical career (EB.9.0).

My teaching experience took place in various places: a stage school, a girls' secondary school, a private 'pop'-singing studio, adult education colleges and my own private teaching studio (ch.2). The practice has included: voice teacher (of different age groups and at various levels), vocal coach assisting those preparing for performance, class teacher of singing technique and performance, general music theory and choir leading. From the outset I was curious about the phenomenon of apparent 'tone-deafness' but had little opportunity to study it. Eventually it became a major part of my practice, then a serious study and finally an involvement in research into musically disadvantaged singers (ch.9). I also show that 'musically-disadvantaged' may have a wider meaning than the issues of a person being a non-singer or being considered 'tone-deaf'.

1.2 A scientific approach

Before I changed to studying music at the age of 22 (ch.2.2-4), my secondary and university education had focused on the sciences. I had worked at the National Institute for Medical Research. I learned to make careful observations of empirical data and then apply conscientious scepticism to what I observed. The training involved formulating hypotheses and then rigorously testing them through experiment, so as to refine these hypotheses. This approach, evolved by scientists since the 17th century has come to be known as the 'scientific method' (Kuhn, 1962). It relates to singing teaching through an understanding of the physiological and psychological changes that occur in singing. In this thesis I will show how the 'scientific method' has influenced my teaching, and I shall refer to it as such. A 'scientific method' in singing teaching, is a pedagogical approach that embraces the learning of the anatomy, physiology, phonology, acoustics and, increasingly, the neurological aspects of voice production.

From *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Kuhn op.cit), I have also adopted the concept of **paradigms**, that underpins the structure of my study; on page 3 of the preface:

... these I take to be universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners.

1.3 Educational paradigms

Throughout this thesis I look at the groups of paradigms which I was presented with when I first set out to study music and singing, and how I found that these set me challenges which I needed to address, both as performer and later as a teacher.

I identify the essence of the first paradigm as the teacher being (or having been) a working musician. The relationship was that of 'master and apprentice'. There was no guarantee or even implication that that the 'professor' was trained as a teacher¹. It was accepted, as part of the paradigm, that learning depended on a satisfactory relationship, but it was generally accepted that not each student would suit each teacher and vice versa. A change might sometimes be needed, though, if it became necessary, this was not always easily accomplished. Part of the paradigm was that teaching was authoritarian, mostly in a sense of 'speaking with authority' but often in the dictatorial sense too. Secondly, starting at a conservatoire in the late 1960s, meant working with the Western Classical canon and a tradition that emphasised a particular beauty of tone. Within this paradigm there was some variation, including the styles and ways of singing associated with different languages and national cultures, with opera, with avant-garde techniques, as well as the recently introduced study of early music, all of which emphasised other styles of singing. Despite being broadly based in terms of period (a thousand years) and including many different national styles, the repertoire was exclusive: it was Euro-centric and did not include music theatre, jazz, especially not 'pop', nor African or Asian music.

Implicit within the paradigm were not only the methods and repertoire, but that people who embraced the paradigm believed these were inherently superior. This elitist, cultural attitude is an example of a 'dominant way of knowing', identified by Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1980).

The paradigm also included cultural memes (1.4), not formally taught, such as the axiom that a classically trained singer cannot successfully sing jazz. Another layer of the paradigm is expressed by my metaphor of 'Teacher as Fisherman': professors would catch the choicest fish: hooking the most promising would enhance their reputation, and that of the college. The negative consequence was

¹ 'Professor' is the courtesy title adopted by music schools for their teachers which does not imply high academic credentials but assumes a high-profile performing career. At Morley College and other adult education institutions, teachers are titled 'Lecturer'.

that sometimes those who did not meet their expectations were rejected, occasionally quite brutally.

1.4 Cultural memes

To an extent – which is no less important than the paradigm[s] of education that I received – our thoughts and behaviours are influenced by cultural memes, those ideas that disseminate through the popular consciousness. They are true in a culturally limited sense, but frequently have negative aspects which have an influence that is partly or wholly unjustified. This was originally proposed by Richard Dawkins (1989:192)

[meme] ... a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation.

Examples include the phrase 'Jack of all trades – master of none', an expression still used to denigrate the person who takes what is sometimes called 'the rounded view'; and 'You're a singer, not a musician' (p.24).

1.5 What is meant by the expressions *Amusia* and *Amusic*, 'Tone-deafness' and 'Non-singer'?

The condition of amusia (and amusic, a person with amusia), was widely recognised in the 19th century and particularly described by Henschen (Henschen, 1920) as an inability to sing, or to comprehend and perform music. However, the description of the condition was concerned with brain damage. Amusia is now subdivided into **congenital** and **acquired**. Congenital amusia was defined by Peretz and is the condition with which I might be concerned here, (Peretz, 2001).² However, a person identified with congenital amusia, as registered by tests she used, is said, anecdotally, to find music meaningless or even painful; but in my practice I have never encountered anyone describing music like this. Even those with most intractable difficulties with reproducing tune or pitching with any confidence, all declared that they enjoyed listening to music and derived pleasure from it. This shows that the fundamental characteristic of a so-called 'tone-deaf' person is not a hearing matter but one of reproducing tunes and matching pitches. One of the first academic papers on the condition, labelled the syndrome as 'note-deafness' (Allen, 1878). One of my own students described themselves as 'tone-dumb', an idea echoed by a number of writers including Charles Cleall (Cleall, 1969). Probably influenced by Allen's observations, the idea of 'tone-deafness'

² Only three of my students have had acquired issues of singing in pitch, one due to a spinal injury affecting breath control, one whose lowered voice resulted from a laryngeal operation, an altered physiology and one due to a stroke, a cognition issue.

was graphically established in the popular mind by George du Maurier by his contemporary novel *Trilby* (du Maurier, 1894:169). In it, Svengali's way of identifying Trilby's affliction also closely matches modern testing, (Falconer, 2017:ch.5):

Svengali would test her ear, as he called it, and strike the C in the middle and then the F just above and ask which was the highest; and she would declare they were both exactly the same. It was only when he struck a note in the bass and another in the treble that she could perceive any difference, ... She was quite tone-deaf and didn't know it.

Research has shown remarkable statistics for the incidence of *amusia* in the (Anglophone) population, of about 2-3%, while 17-18% percent describe themselves as 'tone-deaf' (Sloboda, Wise & Peretz, 2005 and Wise, 2009). My empirical observations of a broad range of causes are supported by this research, and that of others, referenced throughout the thesis. It seems that 'tone-deafness' describes something that has little or nothing to do with true *amusia* but is a syndrome caused by a variety of circumstances.

At first, I used 'musically disadvantaged', as in the title of this thesis, to refer to those people described as 'tone-deaf' and non-singers. Throughout, I have written 'tone-deafness' and 'tone-deaf' in single quotes to highlight their questionable status as terms. In common parlance, they are used in two different ways: firstly, as popular alternatives to *amusia* and *amusiac*, and secondly as derogatory labels for a wide syndrome of people who don't sing, 'can't hold a tune', 'sing out-of-tune' etc. They have been described thus in academic papers, e.g. Knight (2002). At various times academic researchers have claimed that there is no such thing as 'tone-deafness', that there is the rare condition of *amusia* but that everyone else can be taught to sing; they 'only' have a psychological block or lack proper technique, two broad groups of symptoms that are amenable to training. I have often found statements to this effect in singing teachers' blogs and talking to colleagues.

The other term I have used is 'non-singer'. This too has its detractors who dismiss the phrase, also saying there is no such thing. In academic papers, Louise Pascale twice used *Dispelling the Myth of the Non-Singer* in the title, but 'non-singer' has regularly been used as a non-pejorative, or less offensive alternative to 'tone-deaf', (Pascale, 2002 & 2005). It is still used, e.g. the 2014 Guildhall symposium entitled, *The Adult Non-Singer* and subsequently used in the *Finding a Voice project* (ch.9).

Another view is that the whole question of singing out of tune is driven by the elitism of the Western Classical musical culture and by the dominant paradigm of conservatoire training (p.11). I have heard

it said, 'does it actually matter these days?' Once aspiring singers have got over the feelings of rejection there is always a place for them to enjoy singing in community choirs.

1.6 Finding the social value of singing

The idea of 'Teacher as Fisherman' also recalls the quotation sometimes attributed to Einstein:

Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.³

This quotation has resonances in many situations, but I found it particularly apposite to teaching adults, some of whom were condemned as musically stupid or having a 'horrible' voice at school. Working at Morley College I recognised that there exists a substantial body of people, whom family or teachers have branded non-singers, or who identified themselves as such; nonetheless they now wanted to sing.⁴ There is a meme, intertwined with the initial teaching paradigm, an assumption, that some people are gifted singers and some cannot sing. Until my mid-twenties, I never came across a person excluded for not being able to sing in tune – some people simply did not sing, just as some did not like to play sport.

Working at Morley College, I realised that non-singers also had musical aspirations. Through the inherited ethos of Morley College (ch.3.3), I found ways of supporting them through adult education classes or through community music projects. I saw this had a huge influence on their lives, not just encouraging a fun and enjoyable hobby, but enhancing their lives, giving a sense of wellbeing and improving their health.⁵ This was recognised at least as early as Elizabethan times, when the composer William Byrd, wrote the line quoted in the chapter heading (ch.6).

1.7 Other forms of exclusion

As this study progressed, I realised that the work I am doing had not only been with non-singers but also a wider group of people who are musically disadvantaged in other ways. This included those who were interested in classical music but were not able to read the notation. Others were hampered by not understanding how music works. Conversations with colleagues teaching in other genres such as jazz and pop, showed me that this applied across the whole musical experience.

³ Attributed to Albert Einstein but probably much older.

⁴ This is attested by the enrolment statements of hundreds of Morley students, also those who applied for the *Finding a Voice* project (ch.9) and innumerable informal remarks made to me.

⁵ See the conclusions of the Guildhall FaV project (ch.9.6).

Another potentially disadvantaged group was of those who have begun to study voice late in life. Others were experienced but needed remedial work on their technique. Many of those people I encountered had not launched on their pet project until after retirement (Yinger, 2014). As we age, learning physical skills may be more difficult, due to loss of muscle-tone and, following the concept of plasticity in the brain, originally proposed by William James (James, 1890), learning new mental skills may also be difficult, due to a decrease of that plasticity. However, teaching students of all ages I found that difficulties in learning were not confined to older people.

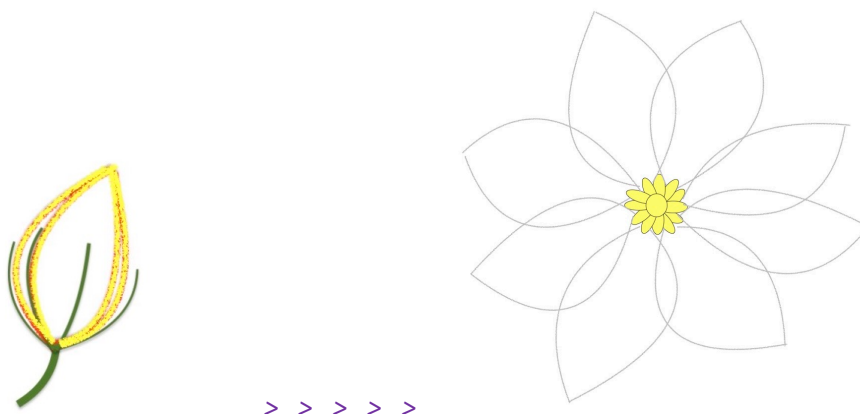
1.8 Ideas and Influences behind this study

The later part of my working life in adult education was influenced by some thirty years working mostly with school age students, whose enthusiasm I had to foster. The results were sometimes unpredictable, especially if their aims and interests had not been properly identified. At this stage of my teaching, part of the accepted paradigm was embodied in a progression of studies through the ABRSM grade examinations. One pupil, for example, whom I almost rejected at first, stayed with me for eight years, achieving a good Grade 8. However, I found these examinations were not always to the taste or aspiration of the pupils, and I had never taken them myself. To keep their interest, I needed to explore a much wider repertoire than my course at Guildhall had provided. There was a partial shift in attitude during the 1980s when exam boards started to introduce 'lighter' music and songs outside the Western Classical canon, leading eventually to the examination boards introducing separate modules.

Whilst the idea of 'Teacher as Fisherman' might suggest rejecting those fish that cannot climb trees, a paradigm I met in the conservatoire, a better model discovered for myself while working in schools, was one in which pupils were seen as buds and flowers to nurture.

Figure 1: Bud

... and flower



Logically, while they might have been late-developers, I felt that the nurturing model could equally well apply to adults. My botanical metaphor is like the idea of an 'agricultural approach' to cultivating managerial talent, 'growing it', proposed by Douglas McGregor:

... more emphasis on controlling the climate and fertility of the soil, and methods of cultivation. (McGregor, 1960:197)

In ch.2, I explore how I developed my ideas of teaching and what influenced me.

1.9 Metaphors and models

Each chapter of this thesis explores the paradigm of my teaching practice. Continuing the botanical theme, I have chosen to represent my work as a metaphorical flower: petals represent opportunities to teach and learn; colour and texture come from the different people and groups I worked with and the lessons I learned.

In ch.2, the first petal, I describe the initial paradigm I received, and I explore the way I adapted it, teaching singing in schools for nearly thirty years. Seven subsequent chapters, represented by seven more petals, are based around teaching I led at Morley College and in my private practice. A ninth petal describes the most recent phase of my work which has combined teaching with formal academic research. At various points in the narrative, related to the contexts in which they were developed, I have noted observations and interventions that I have made. Some of them are supported by reference to the literature, others I have not found described or even mentioned. Some of my practice includes adaptations of techniques from other disciplines or from the common experience of choir trainers and vocal tutors. What is notable in researching the literature, is the extreme scarcity of references to the teaching of non-singers. In contrast there is an extensive literature on community choirs. Many of these choirs have been set up specifically to include non-singers, such as Morley College *Can't Sing* Choir (CSC) (p.35 et seq.) and Nadine Cooper's network of *Tuneless Choirs*.

I use the image of a petal at the beginning of each chapter to indicate how new approaches were drawn out by different contexts and resulted from reconsidering the initial set of paradigms now I was working exclusively with adults. In the concluding chapter 10, these petals come together to form a whole flower, a visual metaphor for a plural and flexible approach to teaching that I advocate. Also, I have used verbal metaphors: 'The Teacher as ...', to identify how each situation encouraged me to take a particular pedagogical approach. These metaphors often subvert the

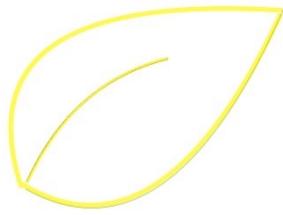
perceptions of what a teacher might be. Jorgensen extensively discusses the use of visual models and metaphors, as reflections on general musical pedagogy (Jorgensen, 2011), while my use has been a way of organising this review of my work.

1.10 Summary

This thesis describes not only observations and experiences in the past, but also my present pedagogical approach resulting from them. It outlines a personal journey: the influences which led me to challenge the paradigms in various ways and what resulted; what I may have contributed to paradigm shifts; and a new understanding of one aspect of musical education i.e. the teaching of musically disadvantaged adults. These challenges were the result of being presented with different sorts of students and the different issues they brought. My responses had beneficial effects for my students and reciprocal benefits to myself. However, it was not only the paradigms of education, of Teacher as Singer, that I was reacting to, but also the cultural memes and the 'dominant way of knowing'. These were often things that I had experienced myself and rejected. However, for many of my students the idea of 'tone-deafness' was a reality; it was something disparaging, promoted by those in authority and accepted by the victims of that meme, without question. It was something at best to be ignored and at worst, a shame to be hidden.

I have found that the use and meaning of 'tone-deafness', non-singer (and even the supposedly more precise term *amusia*), contain a number of paradoxes and exist as cultural memes. While agreeing that the terms may be problematic, to deny them completely I find is unhelpful. This is because they are terms that people use to speak of themselves; although they have caused great damage, they are still used. The musical identities of non-singing students are rarely the same and consequently empowering them required a particular flexibility of pedagogical approach (ch.10).

My practice has included people from many countries, world-wide, and from different ethnic communities within the UK. However, a limiting factor in the scope of this thesis is that I have lived and worked in London.



Chapter 2: TOWARDS A PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH TO TEACHING SINGING

The Teacher as Listener and Friend

We think we listen, but very rarely do we listen with real understanding, true empathy. Yet listening, of this very special kind, is one of the most potent forces for change that I know. (Rogers, 1995:116)

2.1 Introduction: Becoming a teacher

In this chapter, in which I explore a *listening* and *friendly* approach to teaching, I outline how I tried to challenge the received paradigm, and what resources I drew on. In the practical teaching-of-singing exam at GSMD, 1972 (p.21), I followed my instinct, that the first thing I would do in a lesson is listen to what students had to say about themselves. Surprisingly, thirty years later it was still possible for Terry Pratchett to say:

Susan did an unusual thing and listened. That's no easy task for a teacher.
(Pratchett, 2002:110)

Even though Pratchett intends us to understand that he is speaking ironically, the idea that it is difficult for teachers to listen is a cultural meme, and still a popular belief; *Thief of Time* is a work of fantasy, but that does not alter the power of that meme. I discovered, when starting this thesis, that the approach I had taken was a person-centred one; I was referred to the work of Carl Rogers.

Rogers first used the phrase 'person-centred approach', in relation to the therapist-client relationship (Rogers, 1951:83-522). He reinterpreted his original precepts and applied them to education. Listed on the home page of BAPCA, these include:⁶

A person can only facilitate another's learning.

⁶ BAPCA, the British Association for Person-Centred Approach, now The Person-Centred Association (TPCA).

The educational situation which most effectively promotes significant learning is one in which (a) threat to the self of the learner is reduced to a minimum and (b) differentiated perception of the field is facilitated.⁷

The structure and organization of self appears to become more rigid under threats and to relax its boundaries when completely free from threat.

(The Person Centred Association, 2018:1)

He continued to work on these theories throughout his life and they are summed up in a book containing his last, previously unpublished writings on education (Rogers, Lyon & Tausch, 2013).

These ideas confirm my own attitudes that to be an effective teacher one must draw out understanding from the student, that one cannot impose ideas or seek to 'fill their minds'; in part, this is because that imposition may create a resistance and appear threatening, as Rogers suggests. Listening may be part of the current learning paradigm, but I feel the need to be constantly reminded of Roger's ideas.

2.2 What are the influences on my teaching and modes of thought that have led to my practice?

I did not experience any teacher training until 2005, but I believe that I assimilated the paradigm expressed in Rogers' ideas from my schoolteachers. I had a habit of observing them. For example, I remember, aged about fourteen, being taught the literal meaning of 'education' – a 'leading-out', and that *scio* - 'I know', related to all branches of knowledge, not just 'science'. Thinking about education was reinforced by studying Plato's *The Republic* (Plato, 1955) in school.

I was a serious, reflective child. Some memories were very early: at the age of three, for example standing in a farmyard, having just learned how to bounce a beach-ball and wondering where I would be in a year's time, and what I might be doing.

I realised in retrospect, that one influence was through military training, as a senior cadet; we were told what Field Marshall Slim had said about the spirit of absolute service demanded of a leader. He addressed the officer cadets of The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in 1952:

The quality you have got to have is integrity... If you want that described, it really is the old-fashioned Christian virtue of self-sacrifice. You have got to put somebody before

⁷ The learner is enabled to view the subject (field) from different viewpoints, not just learning the fact(s) but understanding the context how it impacts or relates other subjects and vice versa; this follows de Bono's 'lateral thinking' vs 'vertical thinking' process and my own idea of a net versus linear acquisition of knowledge, (de Bono, 1967).

yourself. You have got to love your neighbour more than you love yourself... The security, comfort, and wellbeing of the men under your command after that... last all the time, you have got to put your own ... (Slim, 1952:3).

This statement was especially memorable to me because of the unexpected juxtaposition of military and spiritual thought. One of his pre-war military students, Charles Dunphie, outlined what made him a brilliant, respected teacher:

He tackled every subject in a down-to-earth manner and presented it in a simple, straightforward language. He also had the knack of making any lecture interesting enough of the personal side and by including a sufficient degree of humor ... he was always natural, affable and tremendously interesting on all kinds of subjects other than the military. I don't think I have ever learned more from anybody. (Baillergeon, 2005:8)

Through Slim, I was introduced to the idea of using **personal anecdote**, of **humour** and **leader as Servant**.⁸

As a student, I only read a single manual on singing technique⁹, and read none on pedagogy. My understanding of knowledge and knowledge acquisition was formed by wide and eclectic reading, encouraged by my father and teachers. This included the following, which are referred to in this thesis:

- abstract thinking & philosophy (pp.19,21, 35,46,47): Buzan, 1974; de Bono, 1967; Plato, 1955; Yates, 1970.
- science & scientific thought (pp.10,12,20): Dawkins, 1976; Kuhn, 1962.
- listening & the nature of sound (pp.45,47): Schafer, 1967; Paynter, 1972; Bartolozzi, 1967.
- theatrical improvisation (pp.21,33,48,70): Johnstone, 1981.
- relaxation & embodying (pp.32,45,47, 50,83,):¹⁰ Alexander, 1932; Barlow, 1973; Herrigel, 1953; Ristad, 1982.
- 'authenticity' & style in music: Vaughan Williams, & Lloyd, 1959.
- music, performing & learning: Scholes, 1955; Moore, 1966; Rose, 1969.¹¹

From my mother, who was a natural teacher, I learned to be sceptical of accepting things at face value. From my father, I learned the love of books, and a moral compass concerning respect for my fellow humans. My great-uncle Leigh Crutchley was a subliminal influence; my parents often reminded me that he was the only musician in my family. In the 1920s and 1930s he had worked in

⁸ For 'leader' read teacher.

⁹ Rose's book was the only one on vocal technique I owned.

¹⁰ We would now speak of 'mindfulness' which was not part of the zeitgeist when I was at school but the principles of which were being used in movement classes at GSMD.

¹¹ These, with the exception of Kuhn are all books in my personal library still.

the community singing movement and promoted children's choirs.

2.3 My personal views, in my teens and early 20s

I developed my own ideas about thinking. I believed in a net versus linear approach, i.e. using the literal meaning of 'trawling' i.e. reading, researching and thinking around a subject. I think I drew on de Bono's ideas of lateral versus vertical thinking (de Bono, 1967), together with Crick and Watson's description of discovering the structure of DNA (Watson, 1968).

I discovered acting aged 16 and developed my own version of method acting, long before studying Stanislavsky at Guildhall. Drama has remained important to me and influenced my teaching ideas (pp.33,48,70), reinforced by studying Johnstone (Johnstone, 1981) in *Operation* classes (EB.5.3).

2.4 Being taught to sing and reflecting on my experience

Singing teaching might seem to be the epitome of a person-centred style of teaching. Typically, it is one-to-one, so I drew on my own experience of individual lessons. It seemed to me that I went through three pedagogic stages: at school, the process was mostly imitative; aged from 18-24, my learning was through imaginative metaphor, and emphasis on 'feeling' and listening. Finally, in my last years at Guildhall, after my diploma, I was taught, additionally, through the 'scientific method'. This approach was reinforced by lectures in a *Teaching of Singing* module.¹² These methods are discussed in ch.2.14. In my memory, most teachers 'taught down' to their students, and expected obedience.

As a teenager my rare, but internal complaint about a few teachers was that they had not tried to understand me. Even before starting to teach myself, I believed that I should get to know the student, finding out what they really wanted and above all trying to guide them to discover the techniques for themselves. I demonstrated this belief in my practical teaching exam at GSMD. This consisted of giving a short lesson to an unknown person. As I discovered from feedback afterwards, I had been expected to make improvements in that person's technique instantly. I was marked down for spending too much time talking to her, trying to understand and relate to her needs. Despite being criticized for this, I still disagreed with the attitude implied. I had also been failed in the written exam, although my written answers, perhaps poorly expressed, were correct as statements

¹² This optional module, leading to a separate class of award in the diploma, consisted mostly of learning about anatomy and physiology, repertoire and voice types but had little to do with the pedagogy of teaching.

of fact. Although set answers had been expected, an enlightened administration took my objections into consideration and I was passed.

2.5 Leaving Guildhall and teaching in schools

At the beginning of my 28 years of teaching youngsters, just after leaving Guildhall, I embarked on the profession with no more than basic theory classes in teaching solo singing, and the experience of my own lessons from the previous nine years. I found this challenge exciting and appreciated the trust and belief in my skills that my appointments implied. However, my knowledge was purely about practical singing, not about theory of teaching. This was reinforced by the Principal's interview after I had been awarded my diploma. His opinion was that there were three choices for my next step: I could enter the profession, "but you are too young and inexperienced"; or I could go to a teacher training college, which he quite firmly discouraged me from doing as it was "a waste of time; if you really want to teach, you can always find a job in the private sector"; or I could continue with courses at GSMD and gain a Certificate of Advanced Studies.

I took the last option. However, I had been already invited to teach a pupil at Queen's College, London, a girls' secondary school (i.e. the private sector, see previous paragraph). That led to being appointed as singing teacher and occasional class teacher. Shortly afterwards, ironically, the outside-work panel of GSMD itself recommended me to interview for teaching jobs at the Arts Educational School (ArtsEd) and a private teaching practice, *Studio 9*, run by a famous pop singer, Eve Boswell.^{13 14} Teaching did not replace my performing which has run in parallel throughout my career; the performing has always been a source of inspiration for the teaching, into which it feeds.

I largely had a free hand in these three jobs, although Eve Boswell insisted that I used her style of exercises and she introduced me to a new repertoire of popular music. At that time, a pop-singer offering private lessons was something new and I was privileged to work with her.¹⁵ As her assistant, I met a number of promising young professionals and aspiring teen-aged singers. This helped to broaden my experience of commercial music and music theatre, so different from what I had studied at Guildhall; we were not taught music theatre and one fellow student, who wanted to work in that field, left during the first year. These teaching placements had launched me into a career that I had not anticipated.

¹³ ArtsEd was considered one of the foremost stage schools and had a good reputation for balancing the conventional educational needs of pupils with practical dance and stage work.

¹⁴ Eve Boswell recorded *Sugarbush*, which, I was told, was the first 'pop-song' (Boswell,1952).

¹⁵ Personal email exchange with Nick Ingman, conductor, arranger and record producer, November 2018.

I soon found that having fun needs to be part of the learning process. I vividly remember one of the first lessons I took at ArtsEd, when the class laughed at something I said. It gave me satisfaction to realise that my pupils had relaxed and were listening. I had re-discovered for myself that an old habit of mine, 'Being a cod's head of my own dressing' (p.40) - making fun of myself - that I used as a teenager to deflect unwanted attention, could, vice versa, be a valuable tool in class, to engage attention or fix an idea. Paul Armstrong in a paper *You're Having a Laugh* (Armstrong, 2002:1), reported that 'There is a lack of literature on the use of humour in adult learning or the process of making adult learning fun'. I found only one reference to this, *Humor in the Classroom* (Hill, 1988). However, in 1971, Jenny Rogers had written:

Laughter and Fun are good ideas. A good laugh is essential to reduce tension and to defuse embarrassment. (Rogers, 2001:144)

Her book was recommended reading for the teaching course I took.¹⁶ There is a literature around play and creativity, but this is beyond the scope of my thesis.

For nearly thirty years, mostly at Queen's College, I was a typical part-time, peripatetic music teacher, though actually fixed in one place after I left ArtsEd. I gave singing lessons, individually or occasionally in small groups, and achieved some real successes: I trained three girls right through to Grade 8 of the ABRSM syllabuses and I was able to support an aspiring young actress, in the face of opposition from her teachers. One advantage of working in this rather unconventional school was being accepted into a community of high-powered teachers from whom I learnt a great deal about the profession. This contrasted with schools in which some of my friends worked, where the music staff were not always welcomed, and their work considered a distraction from the important matter of 'academic' study. I was also encouraged to present lectures on subjects of my own choosing, and not necessarily on music either.¹⁷ An unusual feature of school life there, was the musical-theatrical extravaganzas that were an influence on my own music theatre projects, (ch.8).

2.6 Musical Identities

At this time, I read the autobiography of the Elizabethan composer, Thomas Wythorne, (Whythorne, 1961). It focused my thoughts on my musical identity: I felt discouraged by his view of a musical hierarchy, in which the teacher was at the bottom. Could I consider myself a real musician at all since I was primarily a teacher and did not even compose?¹⁸ He wrote four hundred years ago, but

¹⁶ City and Guilds 7407 Stage 1, Certificate in Further Education Teaching.

¹⁷E.g. I was invited to give a lecture on myth, for a Classical studies module, which I chose to be on the effects of classical myth on modern literature and public sculpture.

¹⁸ At this stage I had written some poetry, a few lyric verses but only a handful of 'occasional' musical.

there are still resonances today, for example in the proverbial meme ‘Those who can, do; those who can’t, teach’. Another of these negative clichés is that ‘singers are not musicians’. Applying for my provisional Equity card, I remarked to an actor that it was strange that I was obliged (at that time) to join Actors’ Equity rather than the Musician’s Union. He replied, “But you’re not a musician”.

Considering these negative thoughts has been valuable to my work as a teacher of adults. The idea of musical identities (MacDonald, 2017) is useful to help understand their needs. It has enabled me to empathise with the put-downs that non-singers receive: “you’re tone deaf”, “just mime” and similar remarks. I found I could use my negative experiences as anecdotes to lighten the mood of a class. These observations highlight the importance of one’s personal identity, which in the 1970s I was trying to establish; in my case, there has always been two contrasting identities, as performer of Western Classical music but teacher in a variety of genres.

2.7 Choosing songs - The songs I learnt in my childhood

The repertoire of my early childhood was folksongs, counting songs and nursery rhymes, reinforced by *Listen with Mother* on the radio; I can see myself listening to it after lunch, sitting on the arm of the sofa.

In Brittany just before my third birthday, I can picture the *salon* with French windows looking out to sea and a French girl teaching me *Sur Le Pont d’Avignon* and *Frère Jacques*. In my primary school, our music teacher tried to teach us these same songs. She heard me singing above the others (I always had a strong singing voice) and wanted to know who it was. I was ashamed; I did not want to admit I was making the ‘row’ and showing off. Although this was not serious, like the verbal abuse non-singers experience from their childhood, I can, in a small way, identify with them.

My singing continued with the addition of a proper songbook at the next school, while my brother tried to widen my tastes to the more popular, especially to jazz; my favourites were Lonnie Donegan, the *Modern Jazz Quartet* and the revolutionary *Les Structures Sonores*. My uncle in America periodically sent over the latest Broadway hits, feeding my early taste for musicals.

The great staples of school music singing of the 1950s to 1970s, were the BBC *Singing Together* programmes, as described by Jarvis Cocker in *Singing Together*, a radio history (Cocker, 2014). We

compositions including two memorial songs, some fragments for classes and a short aleatoric piece for a student ballet group *Dancer’s Anonymous*.

did not use them at my schools, but when I started to teach, I was also employed by BBC Schools Radio on the programmes, for one year. I performed as assistant to the main singer-presenter, and this provided more material, mostly folk and traditional songs.

2.8 Learning a conservatoire repertoire

As a music student I learned a classical repertoire attending specialist classes: German *lieder*, French *mélodies* and Italian *arie antique*. My musical education at Guildhall had an effective but narrow focus: I was trained to sing to the best of my natural talent, to embrace and understand a wide historical repertoire. Though encouraged not to specialize, this repertoire did not include jazz, or any popular style later than the Victorian ballad. It did include material from the folksong repertoire but in arranged versions such as those of Holst and Warlock.

I had already attended, and greatly enjoyed, traditional folksong at a club in Bangor, while at university. The *Penguin Book of English Folksongs* (Vaughan Williams & Lloyd 1968 [1959]), was ear-opening and a favourite songbook of mine, purchased just before I went to Guildhall. It emphasized the importance of the irregular metre and the un-bowdlerised words; it had unfamiliar modal melodies and lacked those strongly harmonic, pianistic, accompaniments that often smoothed over irregularities, in older 'classical' collections.

Once I started teaching however, I needed to look outside that familiar body of music. Eve Boswell's *Studio 9* required repertoire was a range of popular songs and jazz standards, (p.22). These popular songs, together with music theatre, became more of a staple for my teaching than a Western Classical repertoire.

2.9 Beyond the Western Classical canon

At GSMD, I found myself type-cast by the outside-jobs board as a person who would only be suitable if 'serious' and 'classical' songs were required for an event. This was against my natural inclinations, established when I was three years old: my uncle asked me my favourite pieces for him to play on the gramophone he had built. My choices were *The Trumpet Voluntary* and *Old Man River* sung by Paul Robeson. These set out my tastes for life. In 1959, at the age of 11, three new experiences helped to extend those tastes: the first London performance of *West Side Story*; hearing the *tra-la-leri* in Genoa (fishermen's traditional close harmony); and a concert of *The Renaissance Singers*

including the novel sound of counter-tenors.¹⁹ As a young choirboy I was electrified by these very different performances.

I discovered that it was essential to be able to draw on a wide choice, as I realised that singing students' taste in music can be quite different from instrumental students. I first noticed this teaching a pupil who was also a pianist. She was perfectly happy to study Beethoven or Mozart on the piano, but was not in the least interested in songs by them, even (perhaps especially!) in English. I believed this was due to the words: if the individual could not relate to them, then the song was of no interest. Part of this attitude seemed due to poor, stilted translations, so I started to make translations of my own (EB.3).

My work in schools allowed me to explore and broaden my tastes in music, and mostly the pupils were not those 'classically' oriented ones that GSMD apparently had expected me to teach. I now see that wider influences and my natural inclination to explore, were a necessary pre-requisite to teaching adults; it allowed me to cope with the variety of students and styles I found at Morley. Nonetheless, my performing remained mostly in a Western Classical idiom,

2.10 The Millennium - a change of direction

At this point there was a hiatus. Around 1998, having taught singing for 25 years, I started to withdraw from singing teaching because of: a fall in the number of pupils due to financial pressures on parents; my losing touch with the musical interests of the pupils; and a loss of self-esteem through an apparent failure of both singing and singing teaching. I took the job of running the general office. After two years, I abruptly left the school due to workplace bullying, quite literally running away to sea.

What might have been a serious mid-life crisis had already channeled into a new activity. This was tall ship-sailing with the Jubilee Sailing Trust, which gave me a renewed sense of personal fulfilment. Appointed in 1997 as a volunteer Watch Leader, I gained much experience in leading small, mixed-ability groups, teaching sailing skills and the disciplines needed for being at sea safely. This depended on understanding the dynamics and needs of the members of the group, some of whom were physically disabled, including wheel-chair users. It was an effective training in the managing of small groups of adults. Sometimes we made interesting historical experiments using the power of

¹⁹ A pioneering a capella chamber choir led by Michael Howard.

sea-chanties to help us raise the yards: teams of around twenty hauling ropes, organized by the rhythmic singing.²⁰ On my return, I realised, despite my crisis, that I did still want to teach. I drew up a plan: I would advertise for private adult students, apply to the Southbank Centre to become a steward to gain a small regular income and apply for an appropriate job at Morley College, when one became vacant. This plan unfolded in due course. As part of it, I reviewed my work as a teacher so far.

2.11 Reviewing my practice

My first new students were all highly motivated with good technical skill. In terms of my musical upbringing and training, there was nothing unusual about teaching them. However, after about a year three new students presented me with interesting challenges and from them, I learnt hard lessons. One seemed 'tone-deaf', one was recovering from throat cancer and the third had cerebral palsy and sang from a wheelchair (EB.1.7).

At first, however, I did not change my style or approach, except perhaps to try to be more flexible and responsive to what the students themselves wanted. I did not impose, for example, the format of working through ABRSM grade exams; in the next 18 years only two students wanted to work on grade exams. I did look at one or two books, but I had a strong feeling that I wanted to record my own ideas and experience (EB.1.1:7-8). At that stage I did not want those ideas to be modified by another's. I found one key example of this feeling, reading *Bodymind and Voice* (Thurman & Welch, 2000:781). A section on vocal classification suggested that voices have fixed natural ranges and that women should never be allowed to sing tenor, implying the discouragement of singing in chest voice. This appeared to me to be an unhelpful, authoritarian attitude, going against my burgeoning understanding of inclusivity and diversity. The subject of vocal classification had first come up in conversations with Charles Cleall, whom I met singing in a university chamber choir in 1967.²¹ He was a mature student who had run choirs with Benjamin Britten (Cleall, 1960). He spoke passionately of allowing women to sing tenor, even bass, if that suited (Cleall, 1967-68). I had recently met women who chose to sing tenor.

This conflicting advice confirmed a feeling that it might be better to avoid books on singing for a time, while consolidating my own ideas; it was a belief fostered by my former teacher, John Carol

²⁰ I have often used this experience in class, combining song and movement -

²¹ Personal conversations with the author in 1967.

Case, who told us that he disliked “methods”.²² My notes eventually became my *Singing Teacher’s Manual* (EB.1.1).

2.12 Unexpected, non-academic influences

When I first saw the film of *My Fair Lady* (1964) I was struck by the scene when Professor Higgins used an analogue device to visualise the vowel shapes that Eliza used. I thought it must be possible to devise an electronic equivalent of this, as a feedback for learning. For some years, this remained just a concept, not having the practical electronic knowledge myself to put it into practice.

Eventually, I found a new computer application, *Sing and See*, had achieved precisely this and has proved a valuable aid (EB.6.1).²³ I found it useful to prove to non-singers that they can sing in tune, sustain tone, and vary the timbre of their voice. I had also predicted that this would be a way for people with a poor sense of pitch to work at home, giving visual feedback when there is no teacher to listen.

Another of my favourite musicals was *The King and I*. In it one of the most memorable of Anna’s songs included the lines (Rodgers & Hammerstein, 1951:1.3):

‘It’s a very ancient saying, but a true and honest thought,
That if you become a teacher,
By your pupils you’ll be taught’.

This receptivity to your own students was already in my thoughts, right back to my time working at ArtsEd. It was a positive meme, not something that I had been taught as a pedagogic principle, but of which I increasingly recognised the truth, as I taught adults.

2.13 By your pupils you’ll be taught

Let us examine this famous maxim in more detail. I find the idea works in three ways: one may learn from the difficulties that the student encounters. I asked myself on one occasion, why did my student plead with me not to change the key of the song, “I won’t be able to read my music”? The statement astounded me. This person, who struggled occasionally with intervals and tuning, characteristics of those who are considered ‘tone-deaf’, exhibited, by this statement, the radically opposite characteristics of a person with perfect pitch (absolute pitch). Such people become aurally confused when they hear notes different from the ones notated on the page.

²² A distinguished baritone and teacher who taught me and many of my friends during the 1970s and 1980s.

²³ An app. for laptop and desktop computers, *Sing and See* devised by William Thorpe.

Secondly the adult may actually teach you, being far more knowledgeable about a particular aspect of what you might be trying to teach; for example, I have twice come across physicists whose grasp of the concepts of tones and frequencies was much greater than my own, although they were neither capable of distinguishing intervals, nor of keeping constant pitch. Other experts I met in classes included psychologists and speech practitioners, to whom I appealed for help when I needed an authoritative comment.

A third way in which the student may teach the teacher is simply that they may have their own insights into a particular problem. Younger people, in my earlier experience in school, did not usually challenge their teacher, at least not until they reached a conservatoire level. Working with adults, I learnt that I had to listen. My own education was improved by a couple in the CSC, who gave me a copy of *The Singing Neanderthals*. This included references to the issues of 'tone-deafness', the only useful ones in my library then (Mithen, 2006:58-59).

My students also taught me that it can be just as rewarding to teach someone who only wants to learn for fun or who considers themselves a non-singer, as to teach someone to pass grade exams or to coach an aspiring professional.

2.14 The pedagogical approaches in the first paradigm - and the drawbacks

As outlined above in 2.4, the singing teaching methods that I experienced when young, were broadly divided into three pedagogic approaches; here I explain these in greater detail.

The first pedagogic approach was imitative and didactic, plain and simple: 'this is what I want you to learn/what you need to learn'; 'here are some precepts that you must embrace and here are examples [i.e. from the teacher] to follow'.²⁴ Imitation is akin to the natural learning instinct of a baby; it was how I first learnt. I originally found it suitable for teaching younger people at school; aged 11-17, who had no experience on which to base anything and often lacked self-motivation beyond the enthusiasm to start. Simple imitation proved to be most effective with adults too, but I found they are more likely to ask questions.

Secondly, for teaching more seriously aspiring singers, an imitative approach was still practised when I was a student - and with many teachers it remained the predominant way. Added to a top-down approach, an attempt was made in this approach to impart some technical explanation of

²⁴ Didactic, In the authoritarian, secondary meaning it acquired since the 1970s.

what lies behind exercises, but mostly by metaphor. Some teachers did have a deeper technical understanding, but this was, I believe, tempered by the idea exemplified by Percy Scholes, who advised 'great singing teachers say that the less you know about the physiology of singing the better' (Scholes, 1955, 12(2):960, col.1).

Thirdly, there was the teaching of more (musically) experienced students who have reached the stage of needing a deeper understanding, or alternatively who might need rehabilitation as a result of faulty technique, or damage. After I took my AGSM diploma my teachers generally used aspects of the 'scientific method' (p.10).

When I was a child, I can remember lessons were sometimes reinforced by bullying, even a rap over the knuckles. At conservatoires, strict criticism was sometimes used, and I have been told still is, justified by the dictum that this is a tough profession and that you must be 'hardened up'. More than once I have comforted friends, reduced to tears by inappropriate harsh criticism. This attitude may be appropriate occasionally but should be used with care, since the student may not actually aspire to be a professional. The student may indeed be an aspiring professional but still vulnerable. These are consequences of not using a person-centred approach. I vividly remember a lesson, aged 20, when a teacher pushed me, not unkindly, but too hard and I lost my voice. I looked this up and found that my emotional conflict had caused a temporary loss of physical function - *dysphonia*;²⁵

I found there were disadvantages and even risks in all three of these modes of teaching, setting aside any question of inappropriate coercion.

The first thing to say is that these are teaching methods and not ways of learning; there is the possibility of the teacher neither relating to the learner, nor speaking to their learning style (p.35). Also, I noted the well-known risk, applying to all teacher-student relations, is that there is a gender, or voice-type mismatch, so there can be difficulties pitch-matching, for example, across the octave difference. Surprisingly, I have found this does not always seem to matter but, in a group, I often invited a confident voice to choose the pitch, rather than give it myself. Another thing I have learnt from students is not to rely on their being able to pitch from a keyboard or other instrument. I have often observed fellow teachers, conservatoire trained, assume that taking a note from a piano is easy, a universal skill. This phenomenon has been researched by Sean Hutchins who calls it a

²⁵ It is now labelled *psychogenic or conversion dysphonia* (Harris & Howard, 2018).

‘timbre translation problem’ (Hutchins & Peretz, 2012) (p.75).

The first pedagogic approach holds a particular risk: the student copies the professor and becomes an imitation of them. I once heard a singer with a strange, unnatural delivery; it seemed like the voice of an old man - and indeed his teacher was elderly. Something similar happened to me. In 1998, I changed teacher, reverting to baritone, after eighteen years. I chose to study Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*, which I had studied with Richard Standen at Guildhall. My new teacher laughed; he explained that what he heard was quite a different voice, one ‘from the past’: it resembled one of Standen’s own recordings.

A dangerous risk with the second approach, is the one that I encountered in schools. A teacher’s hands can be an aid to encouraging good posture, finding and showing where there is excessive, or not enough, tension in muscle groups. This must always be done sensitively, only at need, but such a practice was quite inappropriate, especially for a man who was working with girls. I found it very difficult to unlearn this taboo when I changed to teaching adults.

I find that the rational methods of the third pedagogic approach are most effectively used with an experienced singer. ‘Scientific method’ is thought to be modern, but I found that it was well established by the late 19th century, e.g. in the work of Emil Behnke (Behnke, 1881). However, when teaching children, and adults who were beginners, I sometimes met with considerable resistance, even blank non-understanding, when I tried to use a technical explanation or an anatomical description of the processes.

One of my later teachers, who professed the importance of a totally ‘rational’ approach, undermined their own message with an unscientific insistence on using a listening tape that was part of the ‘method’. It was a tape with examples of various famous singers. The problem was not that they were not good examples to emulate, but that the recording quality was very poor; the nuances of vocal character had been lost, like trying to recognize someone speaking on the telephone. This taught me that using ‘scientific method’ requires consistency and must be appropriate. It also reinforced my belief that the imitative process is valuable, but only person-to-person in a lesson.

These pedagogical approaches in my initial experience, tended to be used with three stages of student, as I have shown, but I was to meet other types of student in adult education who needed a

more nuanced pedagogy. The three approaches, I realised, are really a single paradigm of teaching and I could use them as required or suggested in relation to the needs of the singers.

There is a fourth teaching approach commonly used, of which I have had little experience, until two years ago when sharing a workshop with other teachers. In this method, singing is taken right back to feeling and primal articulation of sound, the rooting or 'grounding' of it in the body. This technique had its roots in the work of Paul Newham, quoted in *Constructing Musical Healing* (Boyce-Tillman, 2000). There is a risk however, as I heard in conversation at a workshop for *Finding a Voice* (FaV), that the use of 'baby' and 'animal' sounds left some participants feeling alienated and infantilised (ch.9). This again reinforced for me the need to be flexible and to understand students' needs.

However, I have occasionally found this 'primal' method to be effective when working with adults who are especially inhibited or when it is necessary to establish a new 'habit'; this is the concept established by Alexander as part of the 'Principle' (Alexander, 1932). A student is likely to have a particular 'habit' of vocal delivery which may be limited to one particular range. For example, a woman who sang in a high thin treble voice like a girl (or a boy, since the dominant culture was so prone to regarding the choir-boy sound as the 'best') and felt that anything else was 'wrong'; I tried to explore the possibilities of a chest voice with her. Sometimes this 'habit' may be rooted in a faulty technique, a lack of 'support', of suitable breath-pressure, or it may be psychologically rooted, a fear of doing something 'different'. In a gentle, Alexander-like way, the student will, hopefully, learn to 'like' a new 'habit', through a combination of sound and feeling.

I reduce my ideas to simple principles: try to understand by observation, and listening to what the student's own experience is; how and what do they want to learn? Then allow them to discover for themselves the feelings and sounds of good technique. This needs patience and time on both sides and is a very different process to producing the instant and brilliant solutions that a good teacher can produce in a master class with experienced students. Although I may use much the same material, basic exercises for example, with everyone, the approach must be tailored to the individual.²⁶ Different approaches bring different insights and it is important to choose appropriately and according to the needs of the student, but It is also useful, I found, to 'ring the changes' with each student. This is the essence of the person-centered approach

²⁶ A typical lesson showing the general principles and practice that I followed, up to this time and which still forms the basis of my lessons (and classes) is given in the Evidence Box:1.5.

2.15 Summary

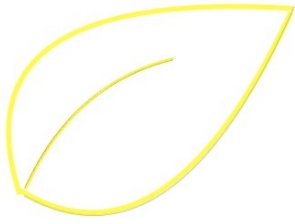
Without formal teacher training, except in some aspects of teaching singing, I developed methods and theory from habits of observation. At all stages of my teaching career, I was given a free hand in devising and delivering classes and individual lessons, a challenge I enjoyed, although I was once told “You are just a dilettante” ... “you are not trained”. This was not, however, said by a person for, (or with whom) I worked. I was not directly exposed to the ideas of Carl Rogers but, developed my own ways of teaching as I worked, assimilating ideas from writing mostly unrelated to music teaching. I depended on lessons I had learnt by observation, both good and bad, as child and student.

Changing from predominantly teaching children to teaching adults, I was to find these ideas fitted well with the ethos of Morley College. I benefitted from watching Joan Taylor²⁷, especially treating the members of a group as individuals. I also had experiences unconnected with music, in particular, working as a tall-ship Watch Leader with the Jubilee Sailing Trust. Being chosen for this position gave me opportunities for developing skills with mixed age, mixed ability groups. It required authority, since the sea is a dangerous place, but authority tempered with care and friendship, since for the participants this was a working holiday.

Reflection on my own singing lessons informed my ideas and the opportunities of different types of teaching employment took me away from a conventional classical singing path; a natural breadth of musical interest allowed me to grow better skills in popular genres. The end result of this was that embarking on adult education I found myself, unwittingly, quite well-prepared for the flexibility of approach needed. Rather than a remote, even dictatorial person, who does not make the attempt to understand or relate to their student, I see a teacher as being a Friend.

Another lesson, as John Dewey says (Dewey, 1938), is that a teacher must be prepared for failure. While I learnt this from my own failures, the risk of dwelling on it, was planted in my mind by reading Keith Johnstone’s *Impro* (Johnstone, 1981 [1979]:29-30), in the early 1980s. *Impro* reinforced the practical acting training I received at Guildhall, that taught me to listen and relate to the others on stage. Johnstone also speaks of the importance of using eye-contact when teaching. As a result, I found a direct interaction with students easier; I had developed a role as Teacher as Friend.

²⁷ ch.3 passim and ch.5.1-5.3.



Chapter 3: ADULTS LEARNING

The Teacher as Host

Beginners Please!²⁸

3.1 First steps at Morley College

After leaving Queen's College and about two years of teaching adults in one-to-one lessons, a new pedagogy was expected of me: the teaching of small groups of mixed ability adults, mostly absolute beginners, in one-day short courses. In this chapter, I look at how I approached teaching these classes, in which the teacher cannot have such a personal interaction as a Friend but does have the task of welcoming their students as Host.

Joan Taylor invited me to share two of her classes, *Singing for Men* (SfM) and *Learn to Sing in a Day* (LTSIAD). Although she is a sympathetic and experienced vocal coach, she felt that having an experienced male teacher would be an added bonus for these classes. Each was a four-hour class at a weekend, with a mixture of information, practical exercises and (mostly) unison singing.

3.2 My first experience of adult education

From about 1980, I had been a student in various Morley College classes, chamber choir, opera course and renaissance wind band, but none of these were typical of adult education. The students mostly had a high level of technical skill and musicality. In none of them were there people of the type described in the title of this thesis as 'musically-disadvantaged'. I was to discover later that adult classes are typically very mixed in age and in ethnic origin, consequently in first language and culture. Although series of classes forming a natural progression of skills were provided, individual

²⁸ Traditional announcement from the assistant stage manager at the beginning of a play.

classes might contain people of a wide range of ability and, most importantly, of different learning styles. 'Learning style' is not used at Morley in the specific and narrow sense, for categorising individuals, as given by David Kolb (Kolb, 1984) and Peter Honey (Honey, & Mumford, 1982) but as an aspect of diversity: it acknowledges the different skills and ways in which students approach a new subject.

Before I joined the staff, my first introduction to non-singers in adult education was through *The Can't Sing Choir* (CSC) at Morley College in the 1990s.²⁹ Joan Taylor invited me to support the choir when it gave concerts, to help the men, who are usually weaker (and rarer in all choral societies) and to fill out the programmes with short solos. The CSC as run by Joan Taylor, formed a number of years before I first was introduced to it, had a reputation as being the first choir designed for people who could not sing, and was attracting attention outside the college. Joan and members of the choir had been interviewed for BBC Radio (p.50) and the CSC was also the subject of a master's dissertation by Helen Richards which formed the basis for an article (Richards & Durrant, 2003 and Richards, 2002). Anecdotally, it was inspiring similar groups elsewhere in the UK. Some years later I succeeded to Joan and led the class myself (ch.5).

3.3 Holst, the ethos of Morley College and the origin of the *Can't Sing Choir*

In 1908, Gustav Holst was appointed as Director of Music at Morley College. Although I found no evidence that CSC was started by Holst, he did run several choirs. It is interesting, looking back at this time, to see recorded evidence of the ideas on which Holst founded his music teaching at Morley College. He actively encouraged those who had little or no musical skills and his students worshipped him as a result. 'C', an 'old pupil of Morley College' wrote:

In general, anybody was welcome to join in his music, because it was good for the individual to help in music making even if he contributed little or to some extent hampered the more efficient. So long as the party was happy and strove together for perfection, Holst was not daunted by indifferent results or even a complete breakdown in public. (Morley College Magazine, 1934:28)

Imogen Holst wrote in the biography of her father:

To the Morleyites themselves he had said: 'Morley exists for the training of amateurs.³⁰ A little knowledge is not dangerous as long as you remember that is only a little. The test of success is the amount of artistic enjoyment you can get from performing, writing or

²⁹ Morley College is one of the four 'Special Designated Institutes', with CityLit, The Working Men's College and The Mary Ward Centre, charities set up in London for the education of working men and women. Morley was started in the 1880s, has a substantial music department with a good reputation, and has included many distinguished composers among its directors and staff.

³⁰ The Holsts frequently used this expression.

listening to music. ... On the other hand, he believed that 'if a thing is worth doing at all it is worth doing badly'. (Holst, 1938:92)

While perhaps he did not explicitly address those who considered themselves 'tone-deaf', or use the expression 'can't sing', Holst was adamant that everyone could not only enjoy music but enjoy practising and performing it, whatever their skills. Imogen Holst also wrote:

... people have sometimes referred to his work among amateurs as "self-sacrificing", but he himself would never have thought of it as anything but a necessary part of life as a composer." (Morley College Magazine, 1952:9)

These ideas and precepts are both explicit and implicit in teaching at Morley College. There is also the germ of Christopher Small's ideas, here (Small, 1998), that making music is far more than the sum of composition and performance but must be seen to include the listeners and facilitators as well.

Joan Taylor was not the originator of CSC, but she renewed and developed it following an idea proposed in the 1980s, by the then Director of Music, Michael Graubart (Taylor, 2019). As he told me, by Joan Taylor's time the student base was musically and socially more diverse (Graubart, 2019).

Although at the time I had not heard of her, Frankie Armstrong had come up with a similar idea, though presented differently. She started leading voice workshops in the 1970s and drew on a musical culture of folk and world music. Her principles, set out in the NVN website (Natural Voice Network 2017), have many parallels with Joan's and my mine (ch.5.2 & EB.2.3.1), such as being non-judgmental, performing in a circle and engaging everyone regardless of experience or skill.

3.4 Choosing songs for adults

During the transition phase in my new life as a teacher of adults (ch.2.10), before being appointed at Morley College, my students came to me mostly as a result of an advertisement, under the tagline 'Find Your Inner Diva'. I rarely had to advise on choosing material to sing,³¹ since the students mostly knew what they want to learn.

I was given a completely free hand in how and what I taught, so, before the first SfM class, I considered what might be different about teaching adults in a group; what songs and exercises might be appropriate? These are set out in my original 2004 class handouts: *Aspects of Singing* (a mind-map using Tony Buzan's model (Buzan, 1974) and *Songs for a Day* (EB.2.1). Having worked

³¹ These questions of repertoire, ranges and non-singers are addressed in later chapters.

with Joan Taylor I wondered if a somewhat broader, more up-to-date collection of songs, might be useful, but I found that the choice of material was not simple to make. I soon realised it is critical to the success of the classes because of the mixed profile of the participants.

For SfM and LTSIAD, and later on for the CSC and *Tone Deaf? No Way!* (TDNW) when I took over, I needed to have chosen music for the students, who could be of all ages, ethnicities and national cultures, and musical backgrounds. Since the lecturers did not have advance notice of the nature of those enrolled, until recently, it was neither easy, nor even possible, to make informed guesses. I over-provided the amount of material and made judgements as the class progressed. There was also the question of what ranges the voices might have, the gender of the students and consequently what keys might be suitable. The corollary to this was that a teacher must be able to transpose or, if they are lucky to have one, use an accompanist. One thing I had acquired by this time, by constant application, was the ability to do the simpler sorts of transposition of popular songs and jazz classics, using key chords.

This issue of keys and of the *tessitura*, the working compass of any one voice, as I soon discovered was especially important working with 'non-singers' who very often, I found, sing in unexpected ranges.³² I found I needed to think about my piano playing, so I could be especially focused on them. Accompanying those who are already liable to tonal confusion, meant simplifying the accompaniment and emphasising the melody. I owed the beginning of this skill to my GSMD piano teacher who encouraged me to learn to improvise and to accompany song. An effective alternative, was to dispense with accompaniment but this made it all the more important to choose well-known songs, even, perhaps especially, nursery songs. However, when I chose primary school songs, that sometimes meant that non-British nationals were excluded; besides this, the idea that schools teach a familiar set of songs is a thing of the past, with many schools having no singing classes at all. The result is that younger adults might be excluded by a song-choice based on 'traditional' repertoire.

3.5 Reviewing my earlier pedagogic approaches

I believed that teaching adults would need a rethink of my older approaches in schools. Through my initial training, I had perceived three stages of student (chs.2.4 and 2.14) but in adult education I was now meeting other types of student; there were people who were musically interested, with extensive life-experiences, including singing regularly but who lacked any formal vocal training; there

³² That is, unexpected by compilers of 'traditional' songbooks who were usually conservatoire trained.

were those who had been put off completely, for example when at school, or by their parents, as I heard so often; others decided late in life to explore this gap in their life. Another category comprised those who in middle age decided to resume singing, at which they had been quite experienced when young, re-visiting skills that needed refreshing or perhaps some rehabilitation. Teaching such people, has continuously encouraged me to re-evaluate my ideas and adopt what I now recognise as a person-centred approach.

3.6 Learning to accommodate a range of abilities and backgrounds

In my first year at Morley, I began to recognise more difficulties posed by teaching adults. For beginners' classes there were usually no restrictions on enrolling. From the point of view of the student this was fine but for the tutor this sometimes made difficulties as students often did not enrol at the right level; a class was advertised as being for 'beginners who like to sing', but some enrolled who were not really beginners in the sense I expected; they had come along for a 'sing-song' and chafed at the idea of learning techniques, exercises and discussing. Sometimes it was the opposite: their skills were not just basic, but they really could not sing in tune (and knew it) but they had ignored the absolutely basic class *Tone Deaf no Way* that had been devised especially for them (ch.4). Here I see the principle of 'musical identity' (MacDonald, 2017:passim) having been an important factor, as well as more general psychological issues (pp.23,24,59,84). Yet another sort of person that I encountered was the type who expected instant solutions; one student in a beginners' class demanded their money back because I could not instantly solve the cause of the tension in the voice.

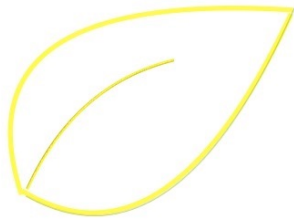
3.7 Summary

The subtitle of this chapter 'Beginners Please!', the traditional announcement of the stage ASM, contains a pun – a truth that I discovered for myself some years into my work at Morley: that teaching beginners can be a great pleasure, in addition to its being satisfying as an end in itself. It is a task that requires the set of skills that I have already alluded to in chapter 1: good-humour, lightly-worn knowledge and patience. These are what will achieve the overall aim of any adult education college. Morley College's motto, 'Learning for Life', embodies another pun: education is not something that stops after school or university but is a lifelong goal; conversely, learning and being in classes and the social groups that these imply, are a means of getting the most out of life. For some people it is even a way of coping with life (ch.6).

These first classes I taught also confounded one aspect of the paradigm: that learning to sing is usually a long-drawn-out process. Here was a paradoxical situation of a class for learning to sing lasting just a day. It was especially important that I was welcoming, and inspirational, to open up the possibilities of a wider, longer study.

My journey of teaching and learning with adults, started by reviewing my original paradigm and adapting my experience of teaching children. This intersected with understanding the ethos of an adult education institute, specifically Morley College, which included: working with a wide range of interest and abilities in a single class; selecting a different sort of repertoire being sensitive to student-led own choices; being sensitive to the social aspects of working there. This was exemplified, in my department, by the work of Holst, the first Director of Music.

A critical need in teaching adults is to be receptive to the choices they themselves make and not to 'spoon-feed' them. As E.M. Forster said in a broadcast: 'Spoon feeding in the long run teaches us nothing but the shape of the spoon' (Forster, 2008 [1951]:412). The Teacher needs to be a receptive Host to a diverse group of students.



Chapter 4: A BEGINNER'S MASTERCLASS?

The Teacher as Conjuror and Showman

Being a cod's head of my own dressing.

(Dekker & Middleton, 1976 [1611]:102)³³

4.1 What is a masterclass?

In this chapter I examine the paradigm of the masterclass adapted for *Use Your Voice Better 2-3* (UYVB), later called *Solo Singing3*, a weekly class for nearly 14 years. A person-centred approach for this class stretched me in a new direction.

UYVB took the form of a weekly masterclass of 1.5 to 3 hours in length, for up to twenty, typically averaging a dozen, and with a regular accompanist. It was aimed at beginning performers who might not have had any formal training but were keen, self-motivated and had some experience of solo singing. It addressed the aims of improving their singing technique, confidence, presentation, expressive skills, and also aims to help with performance nerves. I found that I must make it fun, be able to produce seemingly magical results and, drawing on my performing skills, give lively demonstrations i.e. be a 'showman'.

It was a very specific case of the masterclass format and I needed to adjust the paradigm to suit this class. In the classical paradigm, the masterclass includes the presentation of participants' songs, chosen by themselves. The teacher comments on each individual performance, guiding by specific advice and by example.³⁴ Students would be expected to be experienced and have a sound (and

³³ A colourful, but obscure expression from a line in the play, *The Roaring Girl*. It implies 'playing the fool' – self-deprecating humour - a valuable teaching tool.

³⁴ A conventional master class is a public or semi-public class in which the active participants will perform one or more songs to an audience and a master teacher, usually a distinguished singer. The latter will give critical help and guidance. I attended several of these during the 1970s as a student.

learned) technique, and the classes are usually public. However, for this class, instead, the basic criteria for enrolling were only that the person could sing in tune and had the enthusiasm to try singing a solo song in front of a class. It was not as paradoxical an idea as it might seem. It is the structure of the class that was the same and it could be applied to any level of student who is sufficiently experienced and – hopefully – self-motivating. Unlike a conventional, public masterclass, in my practice I presented this class in a ‘safe’ environment, one that was more supportive than critical, in which I provided standard ‘warm-ups’ both physical and vocal, and also taught elements of technique and musicality. These were related to the comments on the songs, one informing the other and vice versa.

An added challenge in UYVB was that the singer was quite likely not to have worked with a pianist; therefore, time was allowed for preparation and for students to learn how to work with an accompanist. They also needed to learn a number of self-disciplines. These included being prepared for the class, knowing the song, the words, the speed they would like and being able to provide a workable score for the accompanist. As I discovered, for some coming to this class, these skills presented real difficulties. As the ability to read music was not a prerequisite, scores were often presented by a student who was unaware that they might be unsuitable: they could be in the wrong key; maybe just be a melody line from which it is assumed the accompanist would be able to busk a piano part; or the score was simply rather unplayable on the piano, a bad realisation of an instrumental accompaniment. Consequently, I added an overt aim of improving students’ understanding of what the singer-accompanist relationship is. Formulating this idea, I was partly inspired by an incident 14 years ago when a student so badly disrespected the accompanist that I was forced to threaten them with expulsion from the class for their disruptive behaviour.

I encouraged input from the accompanist, if they were willing to involve themselves in the teaching process as well. Although, conventionally, class accompanists are not regarded as teachers, increasingly I reckoned that it was not just my duty to encourage the students to honour and respect their work, but that it was valuable to hear the accompanist’s input.³⁵ They provided another voice and different insights. I also encouraged the students to understand that even the best accompanists could hardly be expected to play everything at sight, nor necessarily improvise or transpose an accompaniment; they often believed that the accompanist would know all the repertoire. I have found that many professional singers also grew up with this attitude. Gerald

³⁵ Asking my colleagues, I find this is not usual practice in singing classes, in their experience.

Moore in his classic book had much to say about this issue of respecting accompanists (Moore, 1966).

It was a relief rather late in my performing career to meet pianists who were prepared to learn the music at the same time as the performer, a practice that helped to create a better performance. I found that this encouraged me to take more responsibility, instead of my expecting to be coached. In a similar way, I found that students could be encouraged to think for themselves.

One of the skills needed for the teacher of a masterclass, is managing time; the time I spent with each individual was necessarily rather short. The students expected me to plan for everyone to have an equal share of the limited time available for personal attention and I was firmly reminded by some students when I failed to do this. I therefore needed to be able to make quick and effective changes to a person's technique or performance, ones that were memorable. I supported this, as appropriate, with a quick vocal demonstration; this needed steady nerves on my part and, to be memorable, I tried to make the demonstrations unabashedly 'showy'. I needed to be a showman who could also conjure beautiful sounds from their students. The prerequisites I reckoned to be a wide experience, sympathy, and knowledge.

The original Course Outline for this class specified that the choice of student's songs should not be limited, except that 'pop' and jazz improvisation, both of which had designated classes of their own, were not to be encouraged.³⁶ This allowed for music theatre, folk, ballads and traditional songs as well as Western classical song, lieder, opera etc. This meant that different types of people could be accommodated in the same class. There was the added advantage that I was able to encourage people to move out of their comfort zone and try an unfamiliar style, having heard someone else conjure up a different sound. While most people liked to specialize, this occasional exploration proved to be valuable, accessing unexpected possibilities (ch.10.2).³⁷

Further developing this scheme, I identified another purpose, one not contained in the course outline nor in my job description: not only would we help and guide a person's singing and performance but would provide a framework and advice for further development. I encouraged students to learn the skills that would enable them not just to give a more compelling performance, but to learn the basic disciplines of how to make expression marks and write memos in their scores.

³⁶ In the printed or online course-guide.

³⁷ I note a tendency for this wider, mixed repertoire to be limited to absolute beginner's classes, so those classes, in masterclass style, are becoming genre-specific, a reversion to the classical paradigm.

I demonstrated the possible benefits of learning extra skills of sight reading. These would help them to be prepared to move up a level, when ready.

4.2 Discovering good teaching practice

Observing my students, I grew to realise that they had much to learn from each other, that they could be encouraged to express positive criticism of their peers – in a strictly monitored, positive and friendly way; this had usually been at a later stage in the year when the members of the class were beginning to know each other well. They too could become conjurers.

A good teacher is likely to use any of these ideas, but within an adult-education milieu, they are actively encouraged and even monitored by departmental ‘observations of teaching and learning’.³⁸ Students and tutors alike often find the requirements of feedback – RARPA – cumbersome.³⁹ However, these systems allow the tutors to improve through self-examination, through feed-back from students and responding to them.⁴⁰ Increasingly, from the time I started work at Morley College, I had conversations with fellow singing tutors and classes, that helped expand my understanding of pedagogy. Tutors were required to develop their skills through appropriate in-service training, both within the college as part of CPD, and through external teacher training courses, at a level commensurate with the amount of teaching the tutor was involved in.^{41, 42} There had also been peer-observation.

4.3 Discovering elements and issues:

Over a number of years working with this class I have identified a number of elements and issues, common to most of the students, that I wanted them to address. I found there were issues for me too.

Issues for students:

People not surprisingly wanted to perform whole songs and I wanted to encourage them to do so. However, with a limited allocation of a certain number of minutes of performance and added time for commentary, I sometimes found it better to work thoroughly on a section rather than a whole

³⁸ These could be by one’s peers, but more commonly, at Morley College, by one’s line manager.

³⁹ Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement.

⁴⁰ Teachers are called **tutors** at Morley College.

⁴¹ CPD, Continuous Professional Development.

⁴² Morley College in-service workshops; ISM seminar workshops; in my case, City and Guilds 7407 Stage 1 Certificate in Further Education Teaching.

song, especially if the song was long, leaving no time to review it; but it also was a question of how well the student knew it and if they had the energy to get right through it. Students often needed persuading about these constraints.

I noticed that certain people found it awkward to stop in the middle of a song and then restart at that place. A skill which many found quite difficult to learn was concentrating on the small details, which might be spoiling a performance, such as an unclear word or note that persistently did not sound right or was strained. I found that students usually perceived and learnt songs as a whole and sometimes an individual became confused when they were asked to stop and start again.

Beginners frequently did not understand, or even hear the accompaniment properly. An important new skill for many, was really perceiving what it is doing. Sometimes, the student had to be encouraged to listen to the piano when it has its own 'moment' – it might be an echo of the melody, or a tune of its own. Often students did not realise that the piano has interludes and introductions which they must wait for.

I noticed that students often did not hear or understand the relationship between the key of a song and their own *tessitura*. Related to this, the student needed to choose suitable role models to listen to. A student might have a favourite singer who was so different in quality that they struggled to emulate them. Beginners needed help finding the right music, not just a suitable song, but the right key for themselves and finding a good edition of it, especially one that matches what they had heard.

Beginners were often not good at keeping time or knowing how fast a song should be. I encouraged them to experiment and find the right pace, rather than slavishly imitating a favourite artist.

A fundamental need for all beginners is engaging the body, grounding the voice and realising that singing is a physical activity, which I characterised as 'micro-athletics'. Part of the process involves a switching-off of higher-brain controlling faculties, I used the mantra 'Let the force be with you' (*Star Wars*, 1977), also illustrated by Ernst Herrigel's experience of learning Japanese archery (Herrigel, 1953).

Since singing is largely about communicating to the audience, I wanted students to focus on words, on how to learn them and if possible, 'get away' from the page (p.46).

I frequently have encountered one particular type in these classes: the person who wanted to have a 'good sing'. Impatient of what others do in the class, they waited for the opportunity to perform a favourite song, usually from a limited, well-known personal repertoire. One person found it difficult to concentrate on my attempts to improve the performance, however small, and was liable constantly to repeat errors. I encouraged them to remain in the class, partly because of positive qualities they had, that could be used as examples of good technique to the others. That did not, however, make it any easier for everyone concerned. Sometimes this was complicated by the self-deprecatory cries of "rubbish" which needed gently deflecting; luckily the atmosphere of the class, the fellow feeling, allowed other members of the class to 'jolly them along'. It was often a question of belief and trust in self, so I found that persuading students that the audience is not there to criticise, boosted their confidence.

An overarching need, that I encouraged, was for students to listen carefully, to themselves, to others and to the world generally, exemplified by R Murray Schafer (Schafer, 1976), lessons I had learnt as a student from his earlier book, *Ear Cleaning* (Schafer, 1967). Other influential writers for me included John Paynter (Paynter, 1972) and Bruno Bartolozzi (Bartolozzi, 1967), from whom I learnt the use of experimenting with unconventional ideas and techniques.

Issues for myself as teacher:

My first aim was to create a 'welcoming space'.⁴³ My students, giving written feedback on the question 'What is good about the class?', frequently commented that I had created a good atmosphere, allowing students to relax and forget their fears; that a "family feeling" was created, and that the teacher was friendly and knowledgeable.⁴⁴ This reinforced the idea of a Teacher being a Host. Eleanor Ristad has some useful thoughts about confronting one's inner critics which also help to dispel very real fears of performing and also uses quirky practices such as is implied in the title of her book *A Soprano on Her Head* (Ristad, 1982), although it is actually about piano students. Once a relaxed atmosphere had been created I was able to invite students to do 'strange' things to distract them: among my own devices I sometimes asked students who were awkward performing, to sit on a high stool, near the audience and sing as though telling a story, even perhaps sitting on their hands; hands can be a problem, for some, holding a water-bottle as though it was a

⁴³ This important concept is a thread throughout this thesis and is covered in greater detail in chapter 5.

⁴⁴ From student evaluations.

microphone I found highly effective; it was not enough to say “stop twitching” ... “unclench your hands”.

With the background of a conservatoire trained singer/teacher, I found I needed to get into the head of inexperienced singers. I remembered what it was like approaching something the first time. I found it useful occasionally to admit my own failings; my own weakness in memorising songs, except on stage, encouraged me to show how to engage with the audience even with a score in hand. I made a point of suggesting ways of learning and memorising based partly on Frances Yates’ *Art of Memory* (Yates, 1970). The corollary to this was teaching how reading music and words while performing is a mental distraction; without going too much in the science of cognition, I found it valuable to encourage a singer at a certain stage to do even a small section from memory and allowed the feedback from the student audience to let them see how the performance had become more focussed. This was another example of introducing elements of scientific analysis to inform what might be considered simply a performance issue (ch.9).

Sometimes, to make a point, I tried to demonstrate the ‘wrong way’. As a professional singer, it can be a contrary thing to do, so that I have found it useful, instead, to demonstrate some points by using a wind instrument, e.g. a recorder. I have some instrumental skill, but I can also make mistakes very easily. I used the vulnerability of my technique to demonstrate issues of breath control, tone and pitch, both in consistency and in pitch-bending.⁴⁵ This is part of being a Teacher as Showman.

It was important to find the right level and way to communicate, avoiding jargon and explaining everything. I found the question of which pedagogic approach to use, to be vital (ch.1:13), by ‘academic’ or ‘scientific method’ or teaching by instinct. Telling anecdotes, sparingly, I found useful, but only effective if they were personal or relating my own direct observation.⁴⁶ One aspect of respecting one’s students was understanding the needs of those who are not speakers of standard English either by culture or first language (Creber, 1972) but often I was able to use this variety of nationalities and their associated languages. For example, I would ask one student to give us a lesson on pronunciation, another to give us a tongue twister in their language while a third might explain how the musical terms are different.

⁴⁵ I believe this to be an original idea, having not yet found any reference to such a practice in the literature.

⁴⁶ See an earlier remark about ‘owning’ the techniques and ideas one is using; if they are not truly your own or properly assimilated, they will not be effective.

After experiencing Alexander's principles in the late 1970s, as physical therapy for my disabilities, I realised their value for singing. Alexander's ideas can be used directly in the physical sense: many of the principles are to do with efficiency and economy of movement, and avoiding extraneous, redundant movement.⁴⁷ There is a philosophical and psychological dimension too (Alexander, 2001[1932] and Barlow, 1973). For example: not *end-gaining* but concentrating on the means of achieving a result; recognising *habit*, those familiar (but inefficient) ways of doing a physical action, in this case, singing involving tension or inappropriate muscular use.

On a number of occasions, students became emotionally distressed. During my own theatre training,⁴⁸ I was used to people becoming upset as they work – this is in the nature of any performance study; emotions can be stirred and the stress of working in front of others can cause a person to 'snap', however 'controlled' and friendly that environment may be. Once, I even heard a professional singer break down completely in a real public performance, when a painful memory had been triggered by the song. Performance is a risky business and it is the duty of an educator to minimise the chances of such things happening.

Above all, the experience must be enjoyable, but as a teacher, I still wanted to engage the students in developing, as well as using the opportunity to have a 'good sing'. I recognise that is itself of value, indeed for some students it was their reason for being there.

4.4 Summary

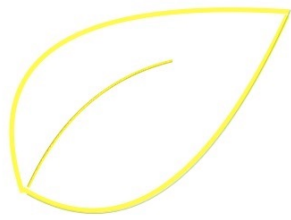
Teaching mixed ability classes and being 'even-handed' meant applying a person-centred approach very carefully. I found the class itself taught me how to teach it and discovered three important things for myself. Firstly, there was the value of encouraging different styles – beginning with the students' own preferences, but then using them to broaden the taste of all, each person having to explore beyond their familiar repertoire; secondly, the importance of the accompanist and the use of their different insights; thirdly, the encouraging of the students' own critical faculties. Some of the most valuable advice on skills for students to acquire I found through writings not specifically intended for singers, including R. Murray Schafer, Ernst Herrigel, Frances Yates and F.M. Alexander (ops. cit.).

⁴⁷ For example, the nervous clenching of a hand or using it to beat time; one often observes redundant raising of shoulders when breathing or rising on tip toe to achieve high notes.

⁴⁸ At Guildhall and *with Operation*.

For some of the techniques I used to put people at ease, for casting the accompanist as a teacher and for my use of instruments to demonstrate breath pressure I have found no precedents in the literature of singing pedagogy. My lateral-thinking approach owed something to the spontaneity engendered by my training in theatre improvisation, especially through the ideas of Keith Johnstone (Johnstone, 1981) and Alastair Ramsay the founder of *Operation* (EB.5.3).

Being a 'cod's head' (pp.23,40), did not mean playing the fool the whole time but I found it important to keep a light touch and also to curb my own inclination to lecture, instead drawing lessons from the students themselves. It also encompassed the idea of explaining my own skill weaknesses and how I dealt with them. I needed to share myself as Showman, as well as to Conjure up new sounds from the students.



Chapter 5: THE CAN'T SING CHOIR & THE QUESTION of 'TONE-DEAFNESS'

The Teacher as Servant and Community Leader

“... can't sing! – are you serious?”

5.1 Engaging with non-singers

In this chapter, I look at what I have learnt about leading choirs and classes of non-singers, absolute beginners and those who believe they are 'tone-deaf'. I wanted to know why so many have been put off singing and what caused this disempowerment.

The paradigm of the conductor that I received, in my early experience, was the person who directed the choir, a strict person and often humourless; they demanded and expected obedience, a uniformity of tone and clarity of words and worked within the Western Classical canon. I realised I could not adopt this dictatorial role with the CSC but instead tried gently 'leading them from behind'. As Rogers says, 'A leader is best when people hardly notice him' (Rogers, Lyon, & Tausch, 2013:25). The other part of the paradigm that had to be challenged was the idea of not even trying to teach people who cannot sing.

In 2005, Joan Taylor needed a deputy, my first opportunity to lead the CSC at Morley College. For the first time I worked with a body of 'non-singers', resulting in new challenges and new observations. I took over in Spring 2006, in her continued absence.

5.2 The Can't Sing Choir under Joan Taylor

Joan Taylor's ideas for the CSC were ground-breaking but simple, as she outlined in a BBC radio interview with the Rev. Richard Coles, (*The I Can't Sing Choir*, 2000):

- There comes a time when a thoughtless teacher says “you're not singing in tune” – it's enough to make you stop.
- The first thing...if I am running a choir... is that we do warm-up exercises; ... remember that the voice is connected to the body.
- People begin to do it without actually realising they are doing it.
- I like to try to set a relaxed atmosphere.
- I try to set the scene that I love singing and that I am really interested in helping other people to sing.
- We realise that everybody is in the same boat; it is an enormous comfort; if you are feeling nervous, so is the person sitting next to you.
- I do not give them a note to pitch – then they can't be wrong [The choir sings a rich 'discordant' chord].
- We're trying to give people pleasure in their singing and just to see what's there.

Watching Joan Taylor working, I noticed that like most successful music-makers, someone leading an adult music class needs to have the qualities of charisma, musical skill, unfailing enthusiasm and a good-natured, light-hearted approach. Though this was by no means my universal experience when I was growing up, when I studied at GSMD these qualities were all to be found in the person of John Alldis, a man who influenced a generation of choir conductors and teachers.⁴⁹ Millington writing in *The Guardian* stated he had:

... the ability to draw the best from his singers. Inspired by his affability and charisma on the one hand, and his seriousness of purpose and dedication on the other. (*The Guardian*, 2010)

Alldis was quoted, in another obituary, saying: 'I don't think there is such a thing as a chorister, one of a flock of sheep to do one's bidding' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 2010). These qualities are of value at any level of music making, but, I realised, are specifically what made Joan's work a success. The people she wanted to work with, who in the terms of my thesis

⁴⁹ One of these was Margaret Hopkins, a founding conductor of the CSC.

title were 'musically disadvantaged', those who think they cannot sing, were terrified of the idea of auditions, and not really sure if they could sing in tune at all. They just loved the idea of singing out of a joy of performing.

Such is the power of the idea and the skill that was shown, that when they sang together the first time I depped, I thought, as many other have done, "Why do they call them *The Can't Sing Choir*".

5.3 Repertoire: teacher-led

Again, I realised that choosing music was another of the key teaching skills. Joan Taylor had carefully selected music that she thought would work and appeal. Despite a persistent belief that the CSC was intended for those aspiring to sing *Messiah*, for her (Taylor, 2019), that was the aim of other choirs at Morley, which were conventional choral societies (see Graubart's comments p.36). She used popular styles, which probably would have been looked down upon by conservatively-minded teachers, an eclectic mix: light classical, nursery, light pop, music theatre etc.⁵⁰ For me that pattern was made familiar by collections that I had used when young, by the BBC programme *Singing Together* (pp.24,25), and community songbooks of the 1920s that I owned (Giraud, n.d. and Roscoe, n.d.).

I had also observed Joan's skill as a pianist, in being able to accompany very easily, without it compromising her choir-leading efforts; the combination of those two activities is, of course, quite difficult and when I took over the class, I realised that my relative lack of technical piano skills did put me at a disadvantage, something on which I had to work hard.

When I took over the CSC, I first issued a set of lyrics without music notation and a set of 'short working-songs', (p.52). To my surprise, considering that music reading was not a requirement for the course, I was told firmly by most of the class that they wanted the music in notated form. I complied, but with the reservation (to myself) that I felt that results would be better if their eyes were not distracted by the notation. A typical response, when I questioned students later on, was that they could at least use it to remind them of the 'up-and-down'. I was not expected to teach them notation; it was not a long class, but it was useful to teach some of the easier aspects: the geography of a score, (repeat signs etc.); the abbreviations for expression, speed, volume and their changes.

⁵⁰ Joan's own printed CSC songbook included: 21 popular, 15 folk and traditional, 11 musicals ... and 1 'light' classical song

5.4 Repertoire: student-Led

The more vocal members of the class soon made suggestions of new repertoire, some of which I complied with, while some I felt were unsuitable. So, an important addition to my own choices was incorporating students' requests. I readily concurred, because it was in the spirit of inclusivity that we were encouraged to foster.⁵¹ However, sometimes I had to gently deflect certain choices which were not in my opinion suitable; sometimes it was something that I thought few would relate to or it was unsuitable to the facilities of such a class, that just had a piano accompaniment. These reasons were often practical – what worked effectively with a group singing in unison, with a piano; I also had to consider what I could easily accompany and direct simultaneously. Remembering the charismatic conducting of John Alldis, I knew the importance of eye contact; if I was head-down in the piano, it would break that spell.

A reasonable guess was that most of the students did not have any experience of being led, let alone conducted, so I introduced a few simple lessons on what conducting gestures meant, and later on asked the students to practise the gestures themselves. I used short songs or fragments of songs, which I called my 'short working-songs', rather than abstract exercises as vocal warm-ups (EB.2.3.4).⁵² By constant repetition of these, I was able to persuade everyone to keep eye contact and respond accurately to my instructions. As a start, I particularly stressed ending words together, progressing to pace and volume. Then I invited students to try leading the ensemble.

5.5 Finding the right key

With 'tone-deaf', 'Can't Sing singers' I noticed that the majority (but not all) of the members of choirs and classes wanted to sing in lower keys than I was used to in standard songbooks. I would choose what seemed a suitable starting note; but it has been my constant experience that the preferred starting note was lower than I expected and rarely corresponded to printed keys.

This begs the question of what is expected and why school and adult songbooks, not to mention hymn books, have songs in what, for many, are impractically high keys. There seems to have been a tendency, for years, to force children to sing in ranges that they would not choose themselves. Researching the literature, I found something like this was observed in children, as early as the 1930s (Jersild & Bienstock, 1934). In this study children were found to prefer singing the songs they

⁵¹ Equality and Diversity became fundamental principles in colleges like Morley, following the UK Equality Act of 2010. The understanding of them has been regularly reinforced by workshops for tutors.

⁵² A practice I learned from Paul Webster, a Morley colleague.

learnt in school, in lower keys, when at home. Anyone observing a typical congregation in a church will hear the members struggle with the given keys; or listen to a group singing, say, *Auld Lang Syne* at a party; hear that either a large percentage of the people groan tunelessly or if they are able, collectively drop the key by a significant interval, up to a fifth.⁵³ That research was not completely forgotten for it was noted by Graham Welch (Welch, 1979) and earlier by Charles Cleall (Cleall, 1969 [1955]). However, apparently the conclusion has never entered general teaching practice, which may explain why so many children were condemned as ‘growlers’, just because they had lower voices than the teaching paradigm suggested was normal. It is significant that Cleall advocated the use of lower women’s’ voices on tenor and even bass lines (Cleall, op cit. and conversations, 1967/1968).

My solution was simple: I transposed most songs into keys that were collectively found comfortable or chose songs that were lower in *tessitura*. In addition to my use of lower keys, I realised it was better, at first, to use songs with limited compass. Quite often I found a gradual raising of the key was possible, consistent with the view that non-singers will respond to an improved technique, but this does not greatly change the overall question.

5.6 Challenging the repertoire

Another idea that I tried, was to use music like *Carmina Burana*, that might have seemed overambitious for such a group; but many of the melodies are essentially simple and some had become familiar through their use as theme music and advertising jingles on the television. Also, my logic was that it was part of Orff’s own project to teach singing to everyone. The obvious drawback, the complication of having to sing in strange, foreign languages, was overcome when I found a good singing translation.

5.7 Tuning up: working with people who self-identified as ‘tone-deaf’

Despite my best efforts, individual choir members used to tell me, in class feedback, that they still did not know whether they were singing the same notes as their neighbours; or they confessed to miming! I was seconded to the ‘*Tone Deaf? No Way!*’ (TDNW) class and soon took it over completely. This class was intended to help those who describe themselves as ‘tone-deaf’. Limited to about a dozen, it lent itself naturally to a personal approach and this was one way to help those ‘lost’ and worried individuals. I now identify this as a person-centred way.

⁵³ This is not the same as ‘ordinary’ out-of-tune singing, a bit flat or sharp; nor is it my opinion an attempt to sing in harmony, which when I have tried deliberately to introduce it, has failed as an experiment.

With this one-day class, I was able to observe and work closely with a group of subjects in a way that was not possible with the choir. I started to look more closely at what this syndrome might be, what the subjects had in common, and how I might help such people to sing effectively. These questions, tests and a variety of conventional singing exercises and simple songs helped participants to realise that, in reality, they could sing and, as they often said, “There is hope for me!”. For a short, one-day course, that was a successful result, so I continued to use all these ideas and exercises (EB.2.4). I also realised that there was a possibility of making some statistical observations of possible causes of the syndrome, as well as the interventions (ch.9.2).

Working with a similar class that was weekly, *Find your Voice* (FyV), during 2016-2019, enabled me further to develop the ideas gained from TDNW, since I was able to get to know the participants even better and work with them over a number of weeks. I made further observations and interventions (ch.9 and EB.2.9).

5.8 Renewing my private practice

I found myself being asked with increasing frequency, by students of all types and abilities, if I could offer private one-to-one lessons. This became an important part of my overall practice. It gave me new insights that I was able to feed back into the classes. In 2008, I was able to set up a studio at home. My practice became more varied: some of the more experienced singers wanted coaching; some had a particular problem to be sorted out; and a small but significant number of people who claimed they were ‘tone-deaf’ decided to take the initial class a step further. As a result, I was able to start studying ‘tone-deafness’ in even greater detail. I could afford to have a sliding scale of charges and accommodate anyone regardless of their means.

5.9 Re-empowering

What I learned about the issue of non-singers, the so-called ‘tone-deaf’ and empowerment

Them that’s got shall get,
Them that’s not shall lose;
So the Bible said,
And it still is news.

Billie Holiday's words (Holiday, 1942:1-4), cover a multitude of sins, our own as well as our forefathers'. The first couplet is like the common meme about 'natural ability' and the corollary that certain people simply "do not have it in them", that talents are "God-given", that it is "all a matter of genetics".

However, it does not seem so: I have proved this to my own satisfaction, having questioned many dozens of students in the TDNW classes, who have shown no obvious inherited connection in their 'tone-deafness'. Similar observations were made during the initial interview stages of the FaV project (EB.4.1); indeed, subjects frequently were found to have a sibling or close family member who was particularly good at music, even, professional. This does not match observations (Peretz, Cummings & Dubé, 2007:582) that, concluded: 'The same [cognitive] disorder is expressed in 39% of first-degree relatives in *amusic* families'.⁵⁴ They also reported (ibid.): 'For these individuals, listening to a musical performance is like listening to a foreign speech'. In contrast, my findings, backed up by the observations in the FaV project, are that our subjects all listened to a wide variety of musics, from which they derived much enjoyment. This tends to confirm a distinction between 'true' *amusiacs* and non-singers who describe themselves as 'tone-deaf' and suggests that 'true' *amusiacs* never present themselves in beginners' singing classes. This also reinforces my belief that 'tone-deaf' is an unhelpful term.

My thesis seeks to present several means of empowerment: a singing teacher can improve an individual's sense of pitch and use voice training methods specially targeted towards non-singers; a class teacher can use similar methods with a group, which has the advantage of the individual not being so exposed; a community music leader can lead singing groups for non-singers, and educators can encourage people to run such groups; educators can also address the root causes of disempowerment: the lack of understanding and the attitudes that give rise to labelling and exclusion of children.

When I first started teaching the CSC and beginners' classes at Morley College, I regularly heard a number of comments when I asked the question: "What holds you back?". I started collecting these together into a discussion worksheet for the TDNW class from 2008: *What is stopping you getting pleasure from singing?* (EB.2.4.2). Some students had told me about avoiding situations where they might have to sing. They even suggested to me that this makes them feel excluded, like a functionally illiterate person having to hide their inability to read. While these two conditions are

⁵⁴ Used as both noun and adjective, *amusic* and *amusiac* are variously found in the literature.

not strictly comparable, I believe it is useful to approach issues of non-singing, with the care that is given to mild learning difficulties. As Richard Gulliford, speaking of children with mild learning difficulty, says: 'many require persistent personal support and encouragement if they are to make progress' (Gulliford, 1985:33). This is precisely how I have tried to help some of my adult students.

Among primary causes of disempowerment, reported by students, have been: the decline in primary-school singing classes as a norm, the arbitrary and ignorant labelling of children as 'groaners' or 'non-singers', their resulting exclusion from choirs and the idea that young singers must all sing in the same register. Since I have never taught children younger than eleven and my work concerns adults, these topics are beyond the scope of this thesis.

5.10 Summary

There is a general need in singing pedagogy to understand these disempowering forces and how the whole ethos of learning and practice in singing may be changed. I have found myself increasingly involved in this one area of singing teaching, culminating in this doctoral study.

Joan Taylor challenged the original paradigm and memes that promoted the idea that non-singers and 'tone-deaf' people were unteachable; part of this approach was to ignore the negatives and say, "you can do it" and have fun. My emerging approach was to directly confront the negative memes, the personal 'demons', to convince people that they are mirages, then get on with enjoying a newly-found skill. One way of avoiding the old paradigms of leading and conducting, as Jorgensen says, is not to be an authoritarian (Jorgensen, 2011:151), but be with the choir, gently leading them with respect.

Through observations of classes for non-singers, my personal project and the Guildhall research project itself, I have been convinced of the importance of empowering that 17% of the population people who self-identify as 'tone-deaf'. Although there are other ways in which people are disempowered in relation to music, the issues behind non-singing and the stigma of being labelled 'tone-deaf' remain largely unaddressed in music education, as Karen Wise and others showed when the Guildhall FaV project was set up, only four years ago. It was felt that these disempowering processes needed further attention. Sometimes, happily, childhood criticism was simply ignored, as I heard from David Eagle, member of a folk ensemble.⁵⁵ He recounts:

⁵⁵ In conversation 15/09/2018.

I had sung in choirs at school – comparatively stale environments where the boys were still encouraged to sing like castrates, even though our voices had broken ... we also got into trouble ... if we dared to sing in our own accents. (Eagle, Cooney & Hughes, 2017:11)

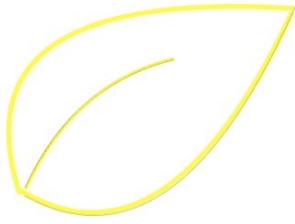
When I started this research, I found journal articles and papers, explaining the science behind the label ‘non-singer’ (e.g. Knight, 2002). There were some teachers’ blogs; but these either dismissed the issue or maintained that the solution was simply through the patient application and repetition of conventional singing-teaching techniques. However, I did not find any advice in printed books about how to teach non-singers.^{56 57} Through my observations, I was able to build an understanding of what led to the negative memes which I could feed back into my teaching practice. Then I was able to try solutions to address the issues (EB.1.4.2-1.4.4).

It was inevitable that conservatoires were focussed on ‘hooking’ the best singers, since their principal purpose was to train professional singers. However, the perception of who were the most suitable fish (pp.11,14,15,80) seemed to me, as a student, to be unresearched and even the result of prejudice. I believe this was largely through a lack of person-centredness in the teaching paradigms. If, in the past, there was an institutional focus only on singers with obvious potential, it is unsurprising that attention was not given to non-singers at all; but I feel that new ideas need to be more widely disseminated now. Among many pertinent comments on singing pedagogy, Estelle Jorgensen writes:

Teachers do not always act in the best interests of their students, and it is hard to see how students will have much freedom to diverge from what and how their teachers have planned for them to learn. (Jorgensen, 2011:226)

⁵⁶ However, see ch.9 for recent publications, coinciding with my involvement with the Guildhall research project and this doctoral study.

⁵⁷ Of some eighty books on vocal technique I consulted, only three even mention the phrase ‘tone-deafness’ in the index, and none offer any advice.



CHAPTER 6: SINGING FOR WELLBEING

THERAPEUTIC ASPECTS OF SINGING AS MUSIC MAKING

The Teacher as Carer and Counsellor

- ❖ The exercise of singing is delightful to nature, and good to preserve the health of man.
 - ❖ It doth strengthen all the parts of the breath & open the pipes.
-

(Byrd, 1965 [1588]:vii)

6.1 Wellbeing

This chapter identifies the need for the teacher to be, literally, a carer or counsellor and being aware of the potential wellbeing effects of singing.

William Byrd included these precepts in 'Reasons for persuading everyone to learne to sing' [sic]; out of eight precepts these two in particular stand out. They are particularly apt in the current climate and bring to mind topics that have repeatedly arisen in the press, in talks, academic papers and in public policy during recent years: how can we improve people's health and wellbeing through the medium of the arts? This is partly what adult education and community music is about.

Music Therapy was a separate course at Guildhall and was neither part of my experience or training. However, drawing on the experiences of the classes I have taught at Morley College, and from my private practice, I can perceive a thread running through my work, connecting it to wellbeing and therapy. Much singing teaching is a form of physical therapy but singing, as William Byrd says, is itself good for you, in a physical, mental and a spiritual sense.

6.2 My own experience of singing and wellbeing

For me, singing, up to the age of about 20, was something one just did, pleasurable for its own sake. As I began this research, I noted several stages in my life where wellbeing and a sense of identity had been imparted through music. When I was twelve, I was selected for the post of 'Chapel Prefect', with responsibility for organising the choir and the music, and being an altar boy. This boosted my confidence, giving me a sense of identity.

At puberty I lost my voice for about a year. Once my voice had settled however, I built a new identity – with a strong, promising baritone voice; by my mid-teens, I was in demand as a soloist. Having been rather lonely when changing to my secondary school, I had gained a social position and it opened up other possibilities like acting and speaking poetry, which had terrified me before. Arriving at university, I again felt quite lonely, but I helped found a new choir, a small ensemble of young highly motivated students led by a lecturer. I became adopted by the music department. Like my experience as a teenager, music helped me to extend my horizons. In that choir, I noticed for the first time the therapeutic effect of wellbeing and relaxation after a rehearsal – that feeling of shedding the stresses of the day.

6.3 Undergoing therapy

Aged 22, I needed therapy myself: I was advised by GSMD to have speech therapy to overcome a lisp – an issue I had not really thought about since the age of twelve. Also, before entering the full-time course, I had a serious operation on my foot, and this meant re-learning to walk. Both experiences gave me valuable learning insights.

Lacking any post-operative help, I taught myself to walk, aided by an extensive series of classes in physical (callisthenic) and stage movement, part of the curriculum. I felt that my recovery was accelerated by being within a musical and performing milieu. The experiences were valuable too, because my own vulnerabilities encouraged me to be careful when dealing with other people's disabilities.

One unfortunate and lasting effect of my disability was the remark, forceful but obviously kindly meant, at a masterclass. The famous opera singer noticed that my foot had 'gone to sleep' after sitting and, naively, I explained the exact cause; he warned me that I would never be able to act on the professional stage. It was not until years later, observing the actor John Thaw, who had a similar

disability, that I fully understood how wrong he was. The belief and trust in a teacher were still for me an absolute, brought up, as I was, to accept authority.

Another, personal, example of music aiding recovery, was when I started to work at Morley College after my appointment in summer 2004. At my interview I had to admit that I had to go to hospital on the first day of term. The response, that this would make no difference to their choice, was a huge boost to my confidence. I soon acquired five other courses, with all the planning and practical preparation that implied. I now realise, that this activity was part of the way in which I coped with the mental and physical effects of cancer.

Not being qualified in the field, I have never sought music therapy work. However, my professional bodies ISM and BVA list me as someone who welcomes voice 'rehabilitation' work and I have often taken on cases that are therapeutic in nature (EB.1.8).

6.5 A class in crisis

A serious situation arose in one class, that was related to therapy. An unusually high proportion of the students had a level of need that was causing concern to myself and the accompanist because of the effect on everyone; it started to seem like a special needs class (EB.2.8). For these students, however, being in a solo singing class was clearly a huge benefit to them, just as much as their artistry enriched the class as a whole. They received personal attention, to find or develop their technique without the cost of individual coaching; and above all it was an opportunity to perform in a friendly environment.

6.6 Singing on prescription

What was particularly interesting, in relation to this thesis, and in the light of recent observations (ch.6.7), two, who had issues of lung-function, were advised by their GP to enroll in a class such as mine and were publicly funded.⁵⁸

I mention these two in particular because it supported the observations made by a GP at an Arts and Health Project Group meeting at the University of Winchester in July 2017, who spoke about the arts being prescribed; I was interested to see how extensive this might be. I heard that it has also been

⁵⁸ See comments on *Singing on Prescription* on following page.

explored in the context of schoolchildren (Walker & Boyce-Tillman, 2002). Then in January 2018, I heard a lecture *And Why Not Singing on Prescription?*^{59 60}

6.7 Quandaries

I would not wish to belong to a club that accepts me as a member.⁶¹

To turn Groucho's statement on its head, one might say: 'I do not want to belong to a group that someone else thinks I should belong to'.

In my one-to-one practice and in class, as I have shown, I encountered a number of students who came because of a specific health and/or wellbeing issue, such as the two 'prescribed' a course of singing lessons. However, there were 'ordinary' singing students who happen to have a serious underlying health issue e.g. a person recovering from a stroke. Having heard Prof. Hancox talk about the work that the SdH Centre is doing with people with dementia, Parkinson's etc., I identify a quandary that is a bit like the 'care-in-the-community' argument: ought we to isolate members of issue-groups and organise singing around them? or might greater effort be made to promote the opportunities, at least for some of them, to integrate into 'normal' classes? By this integration they may feel less threatened. If someone tries to make them join a special-needs class or a special-interest class⁶², this may only increase their fear and isolation, leaving the person feeling institutionalized. It is a sense of independence and self-motivation which keeps many people fit and active in old age, (and earlier too). However, being placed in a special group could have the effect of a loss of self-esteem.

6.8 Creating the right atmosphere and the right opportunities

For five years I was involved in an annual conference in Switzerland, and I led it for three. It included arts-based workshops and group discussion sessions, as a means to address ethical matters such as forgiveness and building bridges in communities (EB.5.2). It took place in a peaceful place and in a 'safe' environment, following the principle expressed by the Dutch theologian, Henri Nouwen, when he spoke of hospitality:

⁵⁹ Morley College, 25 January 2018, Prof. Grenville Hancox.

⁶⁰ Choirs have been formed for those with COPD (Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease).

⁶¹ attributed to Groucho Marx.

⁶² The question of such choirs and classes properly belongs in a different study but I cannot ignore the fact that there were students in my classes who fell into this category.

Hospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place (Nouwen, 1991:68-69).

Nouwen's words form an admirable way to work with any group of people – a community; and a class must be a community. This point is frequently made in education training⁶³ and in community work; Lee Higgins wrote a chapter specifically on hospitality (Higgins, 2012:133-143). Although he does not cite Nouwen, Higgins' use of the idea closely echoes him.

Another factor is creating equality in the group, allowing everyone to participate. So often, as Susan Cain (Cain, 2012) says, the 'quiet' person literally has no voice. This may be through sensitivity, shyness or being shouted down by the more confident, extrovert people in a group. The widely used solution found in classes, group therapy sessions, prayer meetings and even in performance, is the use of a circle arrangement. I have three times sung in performances in which the audience were placed in the centre of the space with singers in a huge ring around them.

A class must be fun too, with humour an important element (pp.23,40n). Humour can be a useful tool for relaxing people and can create a memorable link for remembering particular learning points (Weimer, 2013).

At Morley College, detailed evaluation was expected from the students. In all classes that I took, the most frequent positive comments concerned the creation of a welcoming atmosphere by the students and teachers. This spirit was encapsulated in the original aims of the college: making education available for the working woman and man; giving opportunities to make up for deficiencies in education or just learning something new; and the provision of training without taking time off work. It is expressed by Morley College with the tag 'Learning for Life', in both senses of the pun.

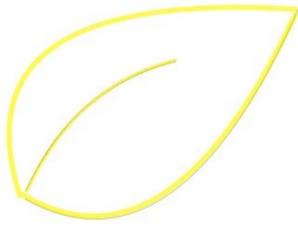
6.9 Summary

William Byrd and many others have identified the enormous benefits that music and specifically singing can bring to us. I have drawn on standard teaching practice and my own feeling of wellbeing through singing. I have experienced specific instances of singing being used therapeutically, within ordinary classes and lessons that I have led.

⁶³ Such as the City & Guilds course I attended, and staff workshops at Morley College.

There is growing movement for wellbeing in music and therapeutic classes, such as a choir for people recovering from strokes, as reported on the BBC by Phil Mackie (Mackie, 2015). However, I have identified quandaries that arise from the separation of people into these special-interest or special-issue groups.

The setting up of a group or class, both in ethos and physical arrangement, can be made more effective and welcoming. In my work at Morley, I have seen the way an adult education or a community college model, offering 'Learning for Life', can address all of these issues effectively.



Chapter 7: CHORAL SINGING FOR FUN – THE THEORY

The Teacher as Interpreter - or just a Guide?

“Of course, I can read music, I know the names of the notes.”⁶⁴

7.1 Why amateur choral singers may be regarded as musically disadvantaged

After working at Morley College for some years, I found myself being invited to support one or other of the choirs, either to boost the bass line or to provide solos - or both. Since the 1990s, I had already been involved occasionally with the chamber choir. Working with these groups started me thinking about other ‘disadvantaged’ adults. I frequently met quite experienced singers who are hampered by a lack of musical skills, including understanding notation, which they found difficult to learn in middle age. Others were hampered by the fear that they had poor vocal stamina or a “weedy” tone. Such matters are rarely dealt with by conductors and choir leaders. Often, students did not even perceive a need. In this chapter, I explore the ways I tried to challenge these attitudes. I realised that, as with non-singers, I need to recognise the causes of their disempowerment; then I can guide them to develop their skills.

7.2 Working with choral singers – singing for fun

A lifetime’s experience of singing with amateur singers, as soloist or as a professional ‘filler’, allowed me to develop ideas of how such groups, especially non-auditioned choirs, work, and understand the issues of individuals within them. I learnt how to conduct and lead them and what the singers might need to learn. I was struck by the mismatch between the enthusiasm for the experience of singing and the competence as singers, that members show, compared with their general musical knowledge, especially in the matters of understanding rudiments and sight-reading. The basic

⁶⁴ Overheard at a choral workshop (on Schoenberg); because of the complexity of the music, applicants were required to be able to sight-read.

problem I perceived was that, for many, the only mode of learning a piece was by ear and by rote, during rehearsals. This is changing with the availability of recordings; but listening to a full choral ensemble and trying to pick out your part is not easy. More recently, with the availability of single-line recordings on the internet, singers can hear their part alone. I often observed that ‘note-bashing’, a limited basic musical vocabulary, and a lack of choral skills like concentration and watching the conductor, caused much time-wasting during rehearsals.

A further striking observation, I have made, was the difference in skills and even musical aspirations, between amateur singers and amateur instrumentalists. This was reinforced by the old meme that singers are not musicians. I referred in chapter 1 to the story of being told by an actor, without any apparent irony: “You’re not a musician”. The American composer David von Kampen, in a personal blog, speaking of this stereotype, says that:

Teaching undergraduate composition, theory, and ear training instrumentalists do better generally... I believe it’s because many music programs, especially ensemble offerings at the high school level, put more focus on teaching singers to become performers than on developing their overall musicianship (von Kampen, 2016.1).

This is just what I had experienced at Guildhall; despite my previous university background, I was placed on a performer’s course (AGSM). Although the course now awards a BMus, my diploma is still perceived as academically worthless.

7.3 Notation and sight-reading skills for beginners

My experience singing with various Morley choirs and having been observed teaching in a variety of classes, led to an invitation to take over *Vocal Training for Choral Singers (VTfCS)*.⁶⁵ This lasted for a year, but through it I was able to try out some of the ideas I used, a few years later, for the *Music Reading and Sight Singing* class. Having a free hand, I remoulded this class, mainly aiming it at amateur choral singers. One or two pianists always applied, needing to comply with the ABRSM requirement to sing ear-training exercises. This tended to complicate matters because they were usually good at the basic theory and notation work that was covered in the first term. Eventually, I encouraged these people to join a different class. I also was invited around the same time to give private classes for a group of three choral singers. To facilitate these classes, I asked some singers what they felt they might need to learn, and what some choral conductors of my acquaintance hoped that I would teach.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ See my ‘mindmaps’ comparing the needs of choral and solo singers (Evidence Box:2.6).

⁶⁶ Conversations with Robert Hanson (Borough Chamber Choir), Patricia Williams (Blackheath Choir) and Janet Lincé (Choros).

One of my own ideas was to encourage students to learn their music in the mind, silently and away from a keyboard, for example on the underground, which I personally found effective. I recently met Andrea Halpern who is involved in the second phase of the Guildhall FaV project (ch.9.4). I heard how she is using a related idea, described as ‘auditory imagery’, to aid non-singers. This is developed from her earlier research (Halpern, 1988), (see also Kleber & Zarate 2014).

Together with musicianship skills, I also worked on aural ones and basic vocal technique, especially breathing, tone and stamina. I have spent time working out ways to explain the facts of music and technique, keeping the essential truths, without ‘blinding them with science’ or unnecessary jargon. Understanding music often involves what I call the *Humpty Dumpty Principle*:

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.” “The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things” (Carroll, 1872: ch.6).

I asked students to consider how many meanings there were for ‘tone’ in music (at least seven) or why the interval of a ‘fourth’ had nothing to do with fractions (EB.2.5).

7.4 Choral diversity

It was not in my remit, in the course descriptions for the various classes I led at Morley, to work in a purely orate way; even with the CSC. However, I listened in admiration to the *Gospel Choir*, which followed after the CSC timeslot. I heard the complex music their leader drew from what was a real community choir. They worked without sheet music and rarely used word-sheets either. I recognised that such a model might be a better way to empower the musically disadvantaged singer, since there was no distracting musical score; the community choir does not perpetuate or involve elitist models of performing and learning, according to Lee Higgins (Higgins, 2012), and Anthony Everitt (Everitt, 1997). J.T. Bavin’s notes on training community leaders (Bavin, 1924) show that far from being a late 20th century idea, a rejection of the classical or ‘Aesthetic A’ model in favour of ‘Aesthetic B’,⁶⁷ as identified by Louise Pascale, was not new (Pascale, 2005:171). While acknowledging that singers in a community choir might develop skills to tackle more complex music, Bavin said: ‘Community Singing is only a singsong on a larger scale, ... everybody singing and singing because they cannot help it’ (Bavin, 1924:8-9); see also my study on the history of community singing (EB.4.1). Not using sheet music, being a difficult skill to learn, has advantages: the singers

⁶⁷ Pascale described ‘Aesthetic B’ as: ‘... based primarily in a community singing model... emphasises participation, fun and recreation... in vernacular song.’

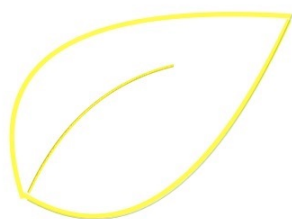
can concentrate on listening - hearing the harmonies - and in performance they are not physically distracted by holding something, nor mentally distracted by reading notation (p.51).

The paradox remains that, despite the challenges of learning and understanding more complex music, many people still want to try singing operas and elaborate choral works. As Bavin also suggests, there is a place for both the simple joy of singing in company, as well as the satisfying aesthetic of more complex harmony, not forgetting that that harmony may be popular just as well as 'classical' in style. In the community model the Teacher is 'invisible' and becomes a Guide.

7.5 Summary

The challenge to one of the existing negative memes is to say, instead, singers can be, musicians. To achieve this, I developed a pedagogical approach to address it.

Towards the end of the time that I led both VTfCS and the sight-reading class, numbers dwindled, despite efforts by the College to recruit interested students from the large body of choral singers in college choirs and beyond. While fully recognising the wish to sing for fun that draws so many people to join community choirs, I do not understand why those who wanted to belong to a classical choral society apparently, as I had observed by poor enrolment, did not want to improve their skills. If they did so, they might learn music faster, help to make the choir more effective and gain more from the whole experience. In July 2016, I withdrew from the sight-reading class believing that a fresh approach might be needed; although a new teacher was appointed, it was cancelled soon after. In 2019, it is to be revived under a new name, as *Learn to Sing from a Music Score*. There is a need for pedagogical development here.



Chapter 8: *LET'S SING A MUSICAL* [LSAM]

The Teacher as Puppeteer and Performer?

Another openin'! Another show!

(Porter, 1948,1.1)

8.1 Introduction: working with non-singers - a community project

Part of the original paradigm I experienced, was the concept of unquestioned efficacy of a teacher's 'method'.⁶⁸ Implied in this, is that a student may fail by a lack of faith in the 'method', making the failure the student's fault. A contrary meme is that there are as many methods as there are teachers. I believe from practical experience that there is no one solution to teaching someone to sing. J.T. Bavin stated the same idea in his handbook for community singing leaders:

Nobody more than the writer has a greater dread of the narrowing tendency of special methods in the hands of many of those who slavishly follow them without regard to their own particular problems, especially with regard to music. (Bavin op.cit.:7)

The alternative is to dispense with learning technique and simply engage people in singing.

My emerging pedagogical approach challenged another part of the elitist paradigm: the separation of amateur and professional performance. The only mixing that normally occurs is when professional soloists are employed – partly to attract audiences. I feel that there are not such separate things as 'professional singer', 'amateur singer', 'non-singer' or 'tone-deaf person' but different people all on a sliding scale of lyric ability.

In this chapter, I show how drawing together a number of different approaches, and working with that full range of abilities, I created a single endeavour, in which the teacher too, became a fully

⁶⁸ John Carol Case, probably my most influential teacher from a pedagogical point of view, was very against 'methods' in singing teaching.

integrated player, not a puppeteer. With my background of training drawn from Stanislavsky and cooperative theatre, I found that improvisation under the guidance of the director had been conducive to effective theatre, in operas in which I had taken part. Therefore, I have tried introducing the idea in an amateur context. I show how several ideas came together developing a class which started out in one format but evolved into another. I found I had created something very inclusive which allowed everyone to benefit from working together, each able to work to the best of their ability or skill.

8.2 Philosophy and rationale

In January 2005 I was appointed to take a one-term class called *Let's Sing A Musical*, the concluding performance of which was simply a medley of music theatre songs, with scraps of costumes, no staging, minimal (static) movement, or simple tableaux.

I considered how to develop this class. Some of the students favoured putting on the whole or part of a single musical; but I knew that there were likely to be copyright and performance rights issues doing a single musical. It would be difficult to choose appropriate pieces. Alternatively, the original model might be enhanced with linking dialogue. This would not be very dramatic, and I decided that it would be good to make the class an entry level experience of what real music theatre is about.

I considered various ideas. To write a whole musical would have involved a lot of work and denied the students the chance to work with familiar material. Even using extracts of musicals would be dependent on having the right mix of people - quality and quantity.

The evolving solution was a scenario written by me, with outline dialogue and a medley of pre-existing songs. There would be no performance rights problems, so long as the songs were in their original form; individual songs could be copied under copyright rules for teaching establishments. I described the resulting form as a 'micro-musical'.

8.3 Summary

Drawing on my beliefs and my practical experience as a performer, I devised a solution for creating performing opportunities with and for the widest possible collection of participants. Like the CSC and similar choirs, this was a community music solution to the question of how to empower non-singers through joy of performing.

In this class, I was able to explore ideas of inclusiveness and a structure which maximised the interaction, involvement and interest of the group:

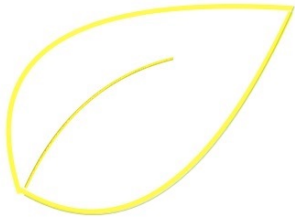
- Experienced and non-experienced
- Professional and complete beginners
- Young and old
- Orate and literate
- Singers, dancers, actors and visual artists costume & set designers, writers
- Able bodied and disabled
- Performing-averse and extroverts
- People from all spectra of musical taste

It could therefore be seen as the epitome of a community project, in which I was not so much a puppet-master as an interactive performer, demonstrating to and working with my equals. It was, above all, a co-operative effort with the facilitator 'leading from behind' (ch.4).

I believe this can be a useful model for a created community, such as Morley College or an actual community, such as a village. Many communities do indeed practise some sort of similar enterprise.⁶⁹ I have proposed a modified format in EB.4.4.

Looking to the future, one element seems to me to be missing: something that will draw in those people of a cerebral type, who are performance averse. Several people, like that, have told me they would prefer a lecture or a debate. Keith Johnstone describes them as 'conceptualisers' in contrast to 'visualisers' (Johnstone, 1981 [1979]:32,1). Of course, I acknowledge that we also participate in music and theatre by being in the audience, as Christopher Small asserted (Small, 1998), but I feel they are missing something valuable by not joining in. Though often rationalized away, this avoidance of 'doing' can be confronted. Through singing, I overcame a childhood block that made me fear reciting poetry and acting. My hope is that such people may be drawn into the experience and move on from the fear of exposure that I once had. Further information and details have been moved to the Evidence Box because of the word-count restrictions (EB.4.4).

⁶⁹ Such as the community pageants devised by June Boyce-Tillman in 2012 and 2013.



Chapter 9: THE FINDING A VOICE PROJECT

The Teacher as Scientist

Svengali would test her ear... She was quite tone-deaf and didn't know it

(du Maurier 1894: Kindle ed. Loc.1140)

9.1 Introduction – my *Tone-deaf Project* and what happened next

In this chapter I look at the latest phase of my work. Again, confronting my initial paradigm of teaching and learning, I chose to explore issues surrounding ‘tone-deafness’ in more detail, especially having the opportunity to work with individual non-singers, and in a more rigorous and systematic way. I started my own *Tone-deaf Project* (ch.9.2) and the Guildhall project (ch.9.3) enabled me to continue reflecting on this study.

As stated in ch.1, I did not at first perceive an issue of ‘tone-deafness’ to be part of the teaching paradigms into which I was enculturated. However, working at Morley College and on the GSMD project I recognised that there really was an issue for a large body of people; they were excluded from singing by parents or teachers, and some even excluded themselves. In the earlier part of my career, work on pitching issues was confined to actors who needed to learn to sing better, and one individual who came to me, out of intellectual curiosity. An alternative approach to the issue has always been simply to ignore it, under the premise that singing is fun and good for you and that the question of so-called ‘tone-deafness’ was part of the ‘dominant way of knowing’ (pp.11,17), and no longer relevant (pp.66,67).

Apart from exploring ‘tone-deafness’ through the project there was also another question that I wanted to address: for the benefit of non-singers and singers alike, how can I convey the technical

aspects of singing in a way that is neither simplistic nor off-putting? (ch.9.5.). I found that many of my students really did want to understand, not just learn by imitation. This was also true of ‘non-singers’.

During the research project described below two enduring examples of the old paradigm were given in remarks by fellow teachers: when we shared the results of our one-to-one lessons, I talked of using and demonstrating constant breath pressure; one person said “ you should never mention breath pressure with such students”. Another, when I suggested using a well-known singing-impro game for our group sessions, expressed horror at the idea, as it made this teacher feel inhibited and embarrassed. I feel these meetings reinforced the importance of sharing sessions for teachers, who are too often isolated in their teaching practices.

9.2 Starting ‘tone-deafness research - my ‘Tone-Deaf’ Project

Around 2008-09, I re-designed the Morley College TDNW class with more technical explanations and incorporating a short questionnaire which challenged some of the memes and supposed facts behind the syndrome.

A number of things ‘non-singers’ believed about themselves, were popular misconceptions - memes; some were supported by ‘science’, but often in a garbled version. I started collecting the data from these classes, to ascertain if any statistically significant results might be obtained. I hoped that in time these observations would provide some simple evidence to feed into a theory of what causes the issues of ‘tone-deafness’ and, importantly, what does not, despite popular understanding. Over the years that I led this course I have talked to 300-400 people. Apart from possible conclusions the data might bring, this gave reassurance to the students.

I have found no precedents in pedagogical practice, for using these analytical elements in class, but I recognise that such methods may only be appropriate in an adult education milieu. Equally satisfactory results, empowering non-singers, can be found for example in the practice of the *Tuneless Choirs* in which teaching, and discussion are rigorously excluded, in favour of doing and enjoying. For details of my observations see EB.2.4.

Soon after starting this class, I decided to start to compile my own ‘*Tone-Deaf*’ Project, combining reading and citations with my own observations of case-studies (EB.1.2). Examples of these observations are found on pp.28,53,54 and in ch.9.5, passim. In 2010, an MMus student from Trinity College, whose thesis was on ‘tone-deafness’, sought me out because of my work at Morley. This

spurred me to bring the record of my project up to date. In 2013, I met Karen Wise at a BVA seminar.⁷⁰ As a result of a conversation about my interest in issues of ‘tone-deafness’, she invited me to take part in a conference at GSMD.

9.3 *The Adult Non-Singer*

My involvement in research at Guildhall, began with this international one-day conference in 2014, drawing together researchers and teachers under the banner *The Adult Non-Singer* (EB.1.3).

I was invited to give a short paper and be on a panel, with one of my own students together with Graham Welch. This was at a public seminar, a Guildhall *ResearchWorks* event, that concluded the day.⁷¹ One of the aims of conference, which brought together people from many countries, was to explore the possibilities of setting up a research project, if funds could be raised. It was not intended to investigate the science behind non-singing and ‘tone-deafness’ further, but to explore the question of how to work with non-singers, so as to draw out their vocal potential.

9.4 *The Finding a Voice* project and some observations

Two years later, this project came to fruition, having received funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). I was again invited to take part. Karen Wise stated a number of reasons why the project was set up, in a report from the GSM *ResearchWorks* Seminar 19 June 2017:

Lack of an evidence base detailing the needs of non-singers, or effective practice in working with them.

Lack of dialogue and integration across relevant areas of psychology research, music education research, and practice.

These matched my own observations (pp.16,77).

The participants had been chosen from 356 people who had responded to an advertisement, of whom 254 then completed a questionnaire. The full details of the selection process, the criteria used, and the way the project proceeded are given in the powerpoint of that report (EB.1.4.1).

The project was to have several phases, the first of which was to observe and record the result of a series of one-to-one lessons given to twenty people, allocated, two each, to one of ten teachers chosen by Karen Wise. This phase consisted of two terms of eight lessons and some in a third term.

⁷⁰ Referred to on p.75; Dr Wise is Research Fellow at GSMD.

⁷¹ Prof. Graham Welch holds the UCL Institute of Education Established Chair of Music Education and has particular interest in this field of research.

There had been no ideas imposed on us; we were to use our usual, personal, approaches. Both teacher and student participants recorded the whole process in writing, including pre-project statements and feedback on each lesson; by agreement at least two lessons were recorded by static videocam. Results were discussed in feedback sessions and all participants, students and teachers were interviewed by Karen Wise at the end of the year.

Lessons were interspersed by group meetings, group workshops (two per term) led by those of the teachers who had experience of class work. These workshops included some improvisatory and creative sessions. At the end of one year an open demonstration of the student participants' progress was given. There have also been public research seminars on the project (EB.1.4), a seminar/workshop day for practitioners and a conference rounding off the first phase of the project in July 2019.

9.5 'Scientific method': a final aspect of the paradigm

When I first studied there was a view, summed up by Percy Scholes, (Scholes, *op.cit.*), that the student had best not know too much about the actual physiology of singing (p.30), although this was not universally accepted by all professors. However, teaching amateur singers I still often found that they were squeamish about knowing "what goes on inside" or resisted an analytical approach. Traditionally such subjects were approached in metaphorical ways, such as "to approach a high note one must think of a black snore".⁷² As this example suggests such methods may seem unintentionally humorous. This third pedagogical approach tries to go beyond an imitation or metaphor-based one. If I felt that a detailed explanation was needed it must be expressed in a way that was easy to understand without losing the essential underlying facts. However, whichever approach is used, it needs to be appropriate for a particular student. An example of my practice, regarding demonstrating breath-pressure with a recorder, is given on p.46.

Here are some case studies where I have made specific observations and interventions and compared with reports in academic papers. The first two are from my private practice. The following ones were made during the Guildhall Project or directly influenced by the observations I made during it.

⁷² Teachers' sayings about 'high-notes', collected by E. Herbert-Caesari; the point he made, is that, if a metaphor seems absurd or obscure it may lose its value as a tool.

One individual, when asked to choose a suitable instrument to pitch-match to, when working by themselves, asked me what I meant by the 'C'-ness of the notes. I had said that the notes I was playing on different instruments, were all the same pitch. He replied that each of those various sounds seemed as different to him as the notes of a major scale (which he had just successfully sung): it was an inability to distinguish between pitch and timbre, again (p.31), the 'timbre translation problem', noted by Hutchins, (Hutchins & Peretz, 2012).

My solutions were to offer a recording of my voice to match and demonstrate the visual feedback available from the *Sing and See* app. which he could use for practising by himself.⁷³ Hutchins also noted the natural ability for voice to match to voice. The use of *Sing and See* has proved very useful for non-singers. They struggle to work at home because they cannot be sure they are singing in tune, being unable to trust their ear.

Another student (p.28), who had distinct issues of poor pitching, nonetheless exhibited the apparently impossible, contrary symptoms of absolute (perfect) pitch. Was it possible I asked myself that a 'tone-deaf' person could have a sense of absolute pitch? At that time, I was not aware of this being investigated, but talking to Graham Welch and Karen Wise,⁷⁴ I found that they agreed that there might be such a possibility. Both have been working on 'tone-deafness', (Welch, 2001 and Wise, 2009). Might this explain those curious incidences of concert pianists and conductors who hum along tunelessly?

Working with several of my non-singing subjects I made another intriguing observation. Asked to sing familiar melodies, which they thought they were singing 'correctly', they produced something that at first seemed unrecognizable. Then I remembered Eric Morecambe's riposte to Previn "... all the right notes, but not necessarily in the right order!" (*The Morecambe and Wise Show* (1971)). My revelation was that notes were not only in the wrong order but at the wrong octave, and apparently an unconscious way of accommodating the tune to a limited vocal range. I have used this observation to enable individual students to reconstruct their songs correctly, by gently increasing the range of the voice and analyzing the song structure. This is a gradual process requiring patience from student, and myself. I have found that this phenomenon was researched by Diana Deutsch and published in a recent book (Deutsch, 2019:4).

⁷³ Details of the *Sing and See* app. are given in EB.6.1.

⁷⁴ Personal conversation at a BVA seminar, 2013.

During the FaV project, I met a middle-aged man who told me that he was ‘tone-deaf’ and could not hold a tune. However, exploring his history, I heard that he had won prizes as a choir boy. Using ordinary singing exercises and visual feedback provided by *Sing and See*, I easily demonstrated that his negative belief was untrue (EB.1.4.4:64 and 6.1).⁷⁵ The subject’s comment and my observation reminded me of reading about ‘elective mutism’.⁷⁶ This condition may not be exactly analogous, but two main points are relevant - that there had been some mental block and that the ability to sing was apparently lost to his conscious mind. He agreed when I suggested this, attributing it to a way of avoiding attention as an early teenager. In his case it was not simply a suppressed or forgotten skill, but that others characterised him as tone-deaf when they heard him. I discovered another similar case recently. I have not found any reference to this sort of condition in the literature.

Another interesting case was the result of a conversation with Karen Wise, during the FaV project. She told me about a student who self-accompanied her singing. When Karen asked her to sing without self-accompaniment, the performance ‘fell apart’. Interested in this result, I related the anecdote to a private student of mine, who was at the most-challenged end of the spectrum of non-singers, but who happened also to be taking piano lessons with me. Being intellectually curious and keen to experiment he asked if he could try accompanying himself: playing a simple diatonic scale (which he was already good at) he sang the scale simultaneously. It was the first time he had sung a full octave scale.

9.6 Summary

Considering the original paradigm of the teacher-singer and whether there was any point in trying to teach the ‘tone-deaf’, I have come to the conclusion, through my own work and the FaV project, that it is a worthwhile effort, which non-singers welcome and from which they have benefited.

Various conclusions were made through the FaV project, but relating to this study, these can be broadly summarised in two ways, represented by the two main groups of presenters in the one-day conference which concluded the first part of the research.

Firstly, the Community Choir approach, which is non-judgmental, avoids any form of criticism, often rejects a repertoire based on the Western Classical canon, rejects the received norm of perfect tone, timbre, and purity of pitch and essentially does not accept such a thing as ‘tone-deafness’ believing

⁷⁵ The application described on p.28.

⁷⁶ Now referred to as *selective mutism*

it to be an elitist construct. This was exemplified by Frankie Armstrong and her followers (Natural Voice Network) and Nadine Cooper with the more recent *Tuneless Choir* franchise. Choir leaders working with special needs and ‘wellbeing’ choirs were also represented. In these cases, the phrase ‘pedagogic approach’ does not seem appropriate since their purpose is explicitly not pedagogic. In my practice, I had experienced and embraced this way too, but within the form of adult education, continuing the *Can’t Sing Choir* concept and making a pedagogic approach as invisible as possible.

The second approach was represented by teachers who had been involved in the initial project, who had adapted the approach of the classically trained performer-teacher to this issue, together with other independent contributors. From my own observations and through the answers to questionnaires that started the FaV project (EB.1.4.1) this project has been empowering for many of the student participants, though not all.⁷⁷ For some it was simply liberating, something for their own satisfaction but for others it had a practical outcome: they felt able to pursue choir singing for their own pleasure, free of the inhibitions and embarrassment that had haunted them in their adult lives. Two years on from the inception of the research project, many of the subjects attested to persevering with their new-found hobby.

Also, during the conference, a group of the original participants gave two performances and everyone including observers joined in a variety of vocal exercises, creative singing games and special compositions. The conference also included contributors from related fields, scientists and choir leaders working with special needs and ‘wellbeing’ choirs as well as community choirs.

The final assessment and conclusions, to be drawn from our written and videoed records, are still being carried out by the research team.

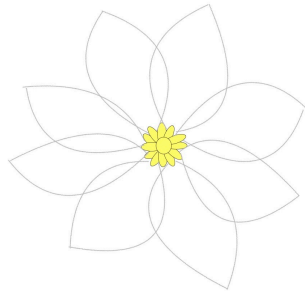
Recent Publications

In ch.5 I referred to a lack of references about teaching ‘tone-deafness’ or non-singers in printed books but this changed around the time of the FaV project (ch.9.3) and my commencing this doctoral thesis. In particular, there are two OUP Handbooks, *of Musical Identities* (MacDonald, 2017) and *of Singing* (Welch, Howard & Nix, 2019) and *Musical Illusions and Phantom Words* (Deutsch, 2019). Also recent, is Falconer’s *Bad Singer*, a writer’s lucid and honest account of subjecting himself to voice scientists, including Isabelle Peretz and Psyche Loui, as well as trying to learn to sing with a patient, non-singer specialist (Falconer, 2017).

⁷⁷ Some dropped out of the project as they apparently couldn’t cope with the process.

In 2019, I managed to find a copy of Charles Cleall's book on vocal technique (Cleall, 1969 [1955]). I was looking to find if he mentioned the topics of any of our conversations (pp.27,53). It was a revised edition, published in the year I started at Guildhall, and I regret that this concise and clear guide had not been our textbook. It also describes much that I needed to know when I started this work, including the only practical advice on working with 'tone-deafness', printed in a textbook, that I have found. Graham Welch included it in his review of the known facts about 'tone-deafness' ten years later (Welch, 1979). Cleall outlined many of the same ideas I have developed for myself and found some of the same sources, such as the work of Jersild & Bienstock, (1934).

It is not only the questions of disempowerment and technical issues that need addressing, but also a wider dissemination of this new (and old) body of knowledge. This has rarely been brought into the general paradigm of teaching, even when teachers are sympathetic to the needs of the non-singer.



Chapter 10: CONCLUSIONS

The Teacher as Gardener

What is a weed? A plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered.

(Emerson, 1878:1)

10.1 Drawing the petals together: The Flower and the Garden

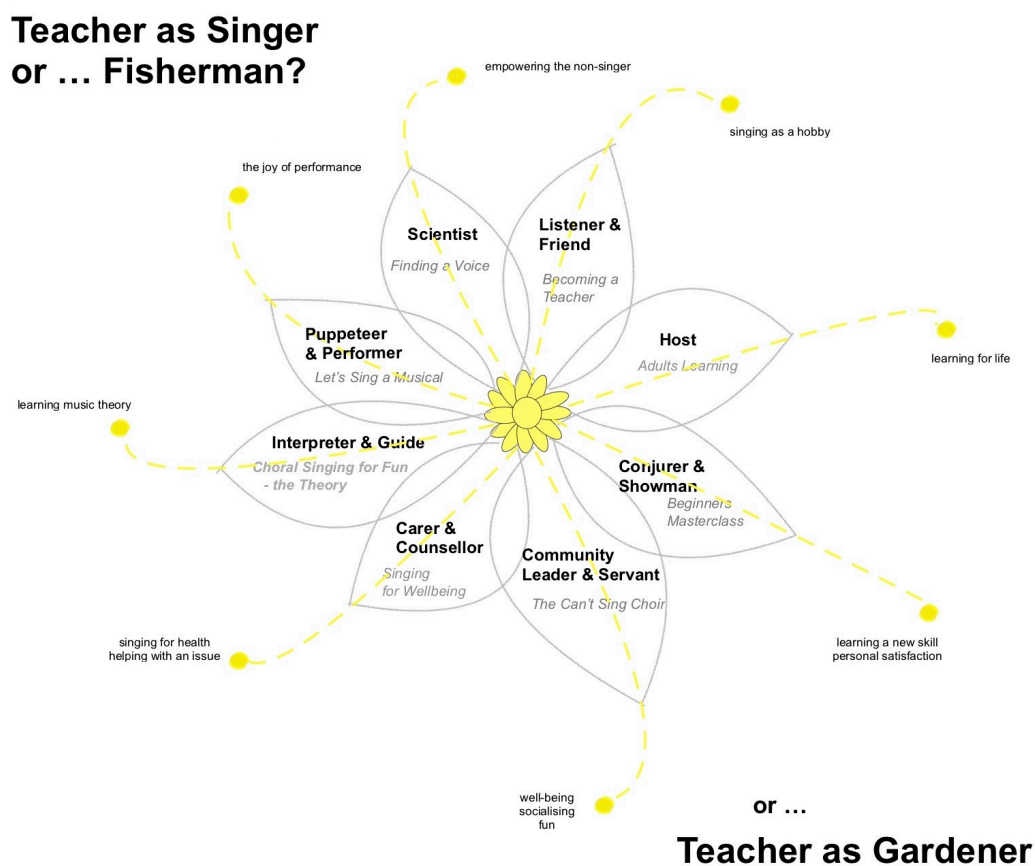
Each chapter has been headed with the image of a petal which together make a stylized flower, a model that reflects the diversity within my teaching practice. Each petal represents a specific class, or category of lesson. The way they overlap reflects the way that, in reality, the teaching and the aims overlap. The whole flower becomes a visual metaphor for my pedagogical practice involving the plurality and flexibility of my approach, which challenged my original learned paradigm. It also shows many different interests and aspects of learning, and for the students, various possible outcomes.

There is an element of chronology in the whole flower with a petal at 1-o'clock, representing my early teaching career, followed by my introduction to adult learning leading clockwise to the final petal, my most recent explorations in conjunction with the Guildhall project outlined in chapter 9. However, there was not a strict linear development of ideas due to the overlapping teaching activities. Similar activities were to be found in different classes, but, for example, the amount and detail of instruction, especially theoretical, found in a solo-singing class is necessarily reduced in a choir, as is the attention the teacher can give to the individual. Another example of differences is that the aim and outcome of the CSC was not primarily a performance in public, although it sometimes was, while the aim and outcome of *Morley Chamber Choir* or the *Morley Choir* was primarily the performance. It should be noted, perhaps surprisingly, that some students may have a different agenda: I often was told by members that they would much rather not have to perform. This again emphasized for me that a teacher or conductor needs to be flexible and understanding of individual needs.

Also overlapping in the petals are the personae I adopted as teacher, the different pedagogical approaches; ‘Teacher as...’, sub-headings are metaphors of the different aspects of my work that I observe in myself. The metaphors started with the paradigm of the Teacher as Singer; it included the rather negative paradigm ‘...as Fisherman’ that suggests, as I often saw to be the case, that a professor took on a student specifically because their perceived potential would enhance the teacher’s reputation. I found that I liked the challenge of teaching fish to climb trees. In my work, as I have shown, I follow Byrd’s precept and ‘wish that all ... would ... sing’, and by means of the various strategies implied in those metaphors, I have achieved a measure of success. However, listening to the person was vital; sometimes people requested robust criticism, instead of my usual gentle encouragement.

Throughout this thesis I have tried to express, through metaphor and my experiences, the stages of an educational journey; the bud has now opened to reveal the complete flower:

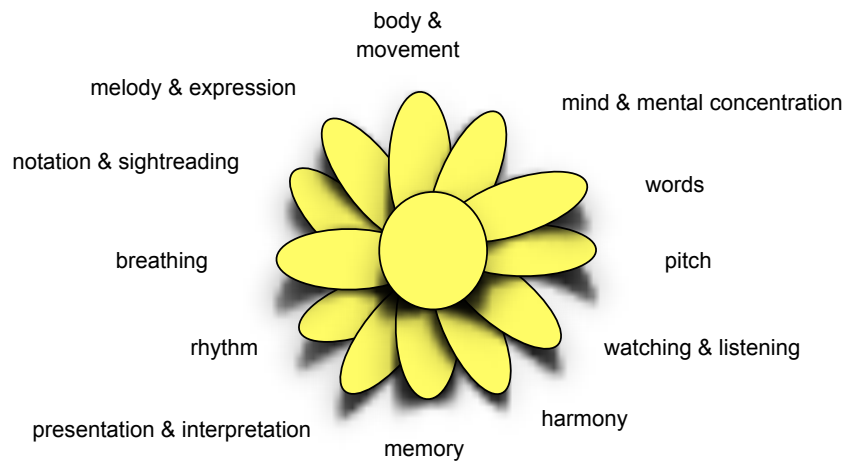
Figure 2: The full flower with ‘petals’, and ‘seeds’, a model to visualise my teaching work



The 'seeds' flying off the flower represent some of the possible outcomes for the students; they are not linked solely to the petal from which they appear to spring.⁷⁸

When enlarged, in Fig.4 below, the centre of my flower, reveals some of the other aspects of my practice as singing teacher; the inner florets represent the different sets of skills that go towards singing technique, and are the learning aims for my classes.

Figure 3: The inner florets



This set of skills apply, in my experience, to all teaching and all types of student. Necessarily at different times in the individual's learning curve and for different people there will be a varying emphasis on particular aspects, according to need. At the *Finding a Voice* closing event Linda Balliro made a significant remark: everything that she had heard that day, as ways of approaching the teaching of non-singers, could equally be applied to aspiring professionals (Balliro, 2019).⁷⁹

In nature, petals are supported by a single stem; so, you might think that my visual metaphor breaks down because there are too many unrelated musics and a Babel-like variety of musical interests, represented here by leaves, branches and blossoms. Many hear these musics as antagonistic towards one another, according to the aesthetic to which they adhere, but I feel everyone can be the richer by recognising that you do not have to choose: jazz, brass bands, 'classical' chamber music, symphonies and heavy metal are all rich sources of music – like the different elements in a natural garden.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ An idea drawn from the *Seeds of Inspiration* conferences that I led in Switzerland in the summers of 2014, 2015 and 2016 (Evidence Box:5.2).

⁷⁹ Linda Balliro, a contributor to the conference, is a teacher at the Berklee College of Music

⁸⁰ My university course was Botany Hons.

Figure 4: a natural garden



Achadh an Tàlaidh, Isle of Colonsay

W H Leigh Knight

10.2 A new paradigm: The Teacher as Gardener

My contention is that, both in my teaching and in a wider context, there is one indivisible stream of music, comprising different elements, and that, while one may not be an expert in, or drawn to all styles, trying them out can be a great benefit. This metaphor exemplifies my attitude to how music may be taught, disseminated, and thought of in a wider context. Like the cycle of nature, one's experience must continually be renewed.

One of the particular characteristics of my work is bringing the experience of a conservatoire-trained singer and applying it to those who identify more with Pascale's 'Aesthetic B', (p.66). I make a plea for a plural approach to teaching generally; it need not be either/or. Different techniques involved in various musical styles or languages can be used as a means of retraining a person's technique away from a fixed 'habit' in Alexander's sense (pp.32,47). A specific example was my study of French song at Guildhall; it was not just learning from another teacher's approach, itself valuable, but was literally getting my mouth around different sounds and deliveries, that opened up new possibilities. I encourage everyone to try these possibilities.

By means of the large-scale co-operative effort practised in my music theatre classes (ch.8), a more creative performing experience was possible. This was one in which people of widely different backgrounds, interests and abilities were able work together. This model is further discussed in EB.4.4.

10.3 Regeneration and renewal

I have noted that there is a need for succeeding generations to re-discover knowledge that was once commonplace, e.g. how the idea of community singing has continually been re-invented from the beginning of the 20th century. Conversely, I have shown how useful ideas have apparently been buried. In 2019 I obtained a copy of Charles Cleall's book on vocal technique (Cleall, 1969 [1955]). One particular observation of his, is that unison singing was still being pitched too high for many people and was an important cause of exclusion. I hear this continually from non-singers and singers alike. I have listened in church, in classes, and social gatherings to people who mouth, sing an octave lower, (if they can), or constantly switch octaves. I feel this still needs to be more widely recognised and that using lower keys can help. My emphasis throughout is on practical solutions, in everyday situations and this is a typical example of something that can be achieved.

10.4 The individual

While people tell me how pleased they are to have joined a community choir, there are still those who are 'carried along': they still ask me, "Am I really singing the right notes?" - "Am I even in tune?". I and others have made specific contributions to vocal knowledge, understanding and teaching of non-singers, that need to be disseminated to help answer such fears.

In conversations with Michael Graubart and Joan Taylor in 2019 (p.36), I was struck by their insistence on treating the members of choirs as individuals, paradoxical as that might seem. As I have shown in ch.1:19-20, this is much in the spirit of Gustav Holst. This study represents a number of different things, about the ways and means of empowering non-singers and other musically disenfranchised adults; but it also shows how in exploring my practice, the **person** of Person-Centredness can be seen to be me, as much as the student. This idea of the person being me, emphasises that, just as I encourage students constantly to review and regenerate their skills, so I must do the same, as an educator. Furthermore, I have drawn new skills and understanding from my own students (ch.2.13).

Most of us manage our lives through the **identities** we hold (pp.9,17,23,24,38,59,77) and the **habits** we have (pp.32,47,83). I have found that empowering a non-singer can often be achieved through enabling transformations of both of these states of being. Within myself, these identities are professional performer and singing teacher and my habit is that of a professional singer, modified by disability. My identities are mutually beneficial, but their relative importance has changed. At first, the performing persona dominated and the teaching persona, at times, was almost abandoned. After my move into adult-teaching, which I found particularly stimulating, I had fewer professional singing engagements and regretted the change of emphasis. I listened with self-envy to recordings of myself from 30 years ago, wishing I could emulate myself, but by applying my own teaching methods I was able to re-discover an expressive and easier tone again (EB.audio8.1 & 8.2). This is an example of the classic meme: 'if you don't use it - you lose it' and was another valuable insight for helping older adults to learn.

10.5 Prejudice and respect

Throughout the thesis, I mention authoritarianism and prejudice that I have experienced (pp.21,24,33,59,65). I make three points in doing so. Firstly, as in all matters of discrimination, it is the perception of a hurt that is important. Secondly, prejudice comes in various forms: the contemporary dialogue is dominated by racial and gender prejudices; these are rightly regarded very

seriously; however, prejudice through thoughtlessness and lack of empathy is hurtful too and can affect lives, even without malicious intent. Thirdly, my experiences make it easier to relate to those of my students; hearing my stories makes it easier for them to accept my advice. They might otherwise see me as privileged by 'natural' gift and training. I have often been asked, 'How can you listen to our awful singing' or heard that 'it's easy for you ... '.

To me, prejudice is the reverse of person-centredness, and being authoritarian the reverse of being an educator. However, an authoritarian approach may be justified if it is based on real authority: on knowledge and demonstrable skill (EB.8.1). To some extent, this is a question of words, but they do determine attitudes and results, as I have found to my cost, as well as to my advantage. Jorgensen makes a number of very useful points about the models of teaching music, but I partly disagree about her attitude to authoritarianism in teaching and conducting (Jorgensen, 2011:151). Although I have encountered authoritarianism, I feel that it was less a product of a dominant male culture, as Jorgensen suggests, than due to individual prejudice and a lack of pedagogic training. Besides, most of the inspiring conductors I know are women and not all the authoritarian teachers I met were men. However, comparing experiences with my peers, I acknowledge that my statement is necessarily based on mine alone. Perhaps it is because of my schooling, in which challenge was often allowed, set within the zeitgeist of upsetting the old order during the late 1960s.

The essence of person-centred teaching, and a vital part of the emerging paradigm, may be summarised in one single word: **respect**. This I interpret as respect for the person, for another's point of view and respect for difference and variety in musical cultures.

10.6 Afterword

In conclusion, keeping with the garden metaphor, I considered the words of the 'Serpent in the Garden of Eden' – as imagined by George Bernard Shaw (Shaw 1949 [1921]1:7):

You see things; and you say "Why?" But I dream things that never were; and I say, "Why not?"

In my work it has not been sufficient to ask "why?" The answers to, 'why tone-deafness?' and 'what is it?' may be interesting, both as theoretical observations, and as ways to validate part of my pedagogic approach.

But, I discover, I have dreamed and encouraged others to say, "why not?" - why not sing?

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