SINGING

ARTS FOR HEALTH

Series Editor: Paul Crawford, Professor of Health Humanities, University of Nottingham, UK

The *Arts for Health* series offers a ground-breaking set of books that guide the general public, carers, and healthcare providers on how different arts can help people to stay healthy or improve their health and wellbeing.

Bringing together new information and resources underpinning the health humanities (that link health and social care disciplines with the arts and humanities), the books demonstrate the ways in which the arts offer people worldwide a kind of shadow health service – a non-clinical way to maintain or improve our health and wellbeing. The books are aimed at general readers along with interested arts practitioners seeking to explore the health benefits of their work, health and social care providers, and clinicians wishing to learn about the application of the arts for health, educators in arts, health, and social care and organisations, carers, and individuals engaged in public health or generating healthier environments. These easy-to-read, engaging, short books help readers to understand the evidence about the value of arts for health and offer guidelines, case studies, and resources to make use of these non-clinical routes to a better life.

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ARTS FOR HEALTH

SINGING

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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SERIES PREFACE: CREATIVE PUBLIC HEALTH

The Arts for Health series aims to provide key information on how different arts and humanities practices can support, or even transform, health and wellbeing. Each book introduces a particular creative activity or resource and outlines its place and value in society, the evidence for its use in advancing health and wellbeing, and cases of how this works. In addition, each book provides useful links and suggestions to readers for following-up on these quick reads. We can think of this series as a kind of shadow health service – encouraging the use of the arts and humanities alongside all the other resources on offer to keep us fit and well.

Creative practices in the arts and humanities offer a fantastic, non-medical, but medically relevant way to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, and communities. Intuitively, we know just how important creative activities are in maintaining or recovering our best possible lives. For example, imagine that we woke up tomorrow to find that all music, books, or films had to be destroyed; learn that singing, dancing, or theater had been outlawed; or that galleries, museums, and theatres had to close permanently; or, indeed, that every street had posters warning citizens of severe punishment for taking photographs, drawing, or writing. How would we feel? What would happen to our bodies and minds? How would we survive? Unfortunately, we have seen this kind of removal of creative activities from human society before and today many people remain terribly restricted in artistic expression and consumption.

I hope that this series adds a practical resource to the public. I hope people buy these little books as gifts for family and friends, or for hard-pressed healthcare professionals, to encourage them to revisit or to consider a creative path to living well. I hope that creative public health makes for a brighter future.

Professor Paul Crawford

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J. Yoon Irons
Grenville Hancox

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WHY SINGING?

The only thing better than singing is more singing.
– Ella Fitzgerald

THE WORLD IN SONG

Wherever we go in the world, we will find individuals or groups singing in the workplace, on the streets, in fields and parks, in places of worship, at music concerts, or during formal or public events with national anthems. We see people singing at sports events as part of an informal, public choir. In pubs, clubs, and nursing homes, people join in 'sing-a-longs' or parents sing lullabies to calm their young at bedtime. Sometimes singing is particularly striking or memorable, as in songs during wartime, such as Vera Lynn's uplifting yet melancholic 'We'll Meet Again', or rugby matches featuring the New Zealand All Blacks and their blood-curdling Haka Ka-Mate, a loud rhythmic chant with accompanying self-flagellation to unnerve and challenge any opposition in its reminder of life and death:

Ka mate! Ka mate! Ka ora! Ka ora!

I die! I die! I live! I live!

Ka mate! Ka mate! Ka ora! Ka ora!

I die! I die! I live! I live!

Tenei te tangata puhuru huru

This is the hairy man

Nana nei i tiki mai

Who fetched the Sun

Whakawhiti te ra

And caused it to shine again

A upa … ne! ka upa … ne!

One upward step! Another upward step!

A upane kaupane whiti te ra!

An upward step, another … the Sun shines!!

– haka.co.nz

In early 2020, people across the world faced a more deadly threat than an opposing rugby team. They experienced a frightening lockdown in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. Despite the unprecedented challenges of this contagion, the global emergency also brought unexpected and significant gains, not least profound and generous community responses such as singing.

We have seen social media reports around the world of individuals and groups engaging with singing while spending long-periods indoors. For example, in Italy and Spain, people stood on their balconies or rooftops to sing, express themselves, and to connect with others. Celebrities made their popular songs into Covid-19 songs containing important health messages. Even Neil Diamond sang his 'Sweet Caroline' with a handwashing message from his home. Additionally, people rewrote popular old tunes, such as 'Do Re Mi' from *The Sound of Music*, into Covid-19 songs to tell the story of what had happened. Moreover, people sang to express the experience of being isolated and shared their singing on social media platforms. For example, people in the South-East England came together and sang 'What a wonderful world' from their homes, recording and collating their individual efforts into a choir performance.

The sound of those singing from balconies across the world poignantly reminded us of what we were missing. Valiant attempts

to bring us together across the Internet, to form virtual singing groups and choirs, brought into sharp relief the loss we felt. At very few times in history, in peace or war, have we been prevented from singing together, even in nations led by fascist, communist, parliamentary, or benevolent despotic regimes; only at strange puritanical times, has singing been outlawed by extreme religious groups.

With the onslaught of Coronavirus, we have newly recognized that singing is a social, shared activity and good for physical and mental wellbeing. We remembered that singing could motivate, help us learn, encourage us to achieve, develop our resilience, and strengthen our defiance. We recalled that we could sing of danger, sadness, and love, to strengthen and confirm our identities and that of our nation. We rediscovered that singing is part of what it is to be human.

Music is at the heart of people's lives. Many people wake up to music. We walk, run, commute, or travel listening to it, even singing along. Advertisers persuade us to buy all kinds of things through seductive or evocative music. Film, drama, and animation use music to drive and intensify their stories. These days we can access music through a variety of digital means such as streaming, subscribing, and playlisting. Indeed, it becomes increasingly difficult to think of a world without music, in particular individual and group singing. Yet many thousands of people feel that they are not qualified to participate in music making themselves, especially with regard to singing. They may say 'I can't sing!' or 'I only sing in the shower!' Such individuals may not have received key information on why and how anyone can sing. They have probably lacked the social experiences, including education, supporting such an idea. A teacher, friend, or relative may have told them that their voice was not 'in tune'. Indeed, in some parts of the world, notably United Kingdom, Europe, and North America, a focus on singing as a professional skill dominates, with individuals trained to become proficient in it, or compete through audition on talent shows for lucrative recording deals or to join famous choirs. This focus can put many people off singing. By way of contrast, in other parts of the world, such as the African continent or in the Philippines, for example, you may wonder how life can possibly go on without *everyone* singing.

My family and I sing when we are happy, sing when we are sad! We sing to welcome our new-born into the world and send our dear departed to the next world. Singing is living! Singing is being human!

– Dorothea Munzaneya, a British-Rwandan singer, dancer and actor

A clear picture has emerged, over the last century, of nation states for which singing is central to existence and others that place it at the edge of the cultural circle. Political change, even revolutions, has been the result of singing. Across history, people have sang to engender change in individual psychology and emotion or in wider society. A series of events including spontaneous patriotic national singing (emanating from a series of rock summer festivals between 1987 and 1991) led to the restoration of the independence of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The Singing Revolution (a term coined by the Estonian activist and artist Heinz Valk in an article published in 1988) was led by citizens who sang patriotic songs expressing their wish to break free from Soviet Socialist oppression. The fervour and passion for change resulted in a human chain (The Baltic Way) stretching over 675 km from Tallin to Vilnius on August 23, 1989. Over two million people held hands to form the chain and sang their way to freedom!

Similarly, Bob Dylan and Joan Baez expressed the anti-war feelings of the 1960s in song:

The battle outside ragin'

Will soon shake your windows and rattle your walls

For the times they are a-changin'

– 'The Times They are A-Changin', 1963

How many times must the cannon balls fly

Before they're forever banned?

The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind

– 'Blowin' in the Wind', 1967

Within the United Kingdom, people tend to view Wales as a singing nation whose identity is closely associated with its songs

and the Welsh language. It is hard not to be moved by a rendition of their national anthem:

'Mae hen wlad fy nhadau'?

Mae hen wlad fy nhadau yn annwyl i mi,

The land of my fathers is dear to me,

Gwlad beirdd a chantorion, enwogion o fri;

Old land where the minstrels are honoured and free;

Ei gwrol ryfelwyr, gwladgarwyr tra mad,

Its warring defenders so gallant and brave,

Dros ryddid collasant eu gwaed.

For freedom their life's blood they gave.

Gwlad!, GWLAD!, pleidiol wyf i'm gwlad.

Home, HOME, true I am to home.

Tra yn fur i'r bur hoff bau,môr,

While seas secure the land so pure,

O bydded i'r hen iaith barhau.

O may the old language endure.

– Translation by W. S. Gwynn Williams
Wikipedia, 2020

We sing to identify with others whom we admire or wish to support, and not only in Wales! Every time Liverpool Football Club don their red shirts and play in front of their fans at Anfield Stadium, 'You'll Never Walk Alone' rings around its most-renowned stand, 'The Kop'. It has also become the anthem of choice for the city of Liverpool itself:

Walk on, walk on

With hope in your heart

And you'll never walk alone

You'll never walk alone

– 'You'll Never Walk Alone', 1945

At other times, we sing to express our human identity and in order to demonstrate resilience and resistance. We now turn to the questions of how long humans have sung and how singing behaviour has evolved down the years.

HARD-WIRED TO SING

'Singing' Predates Languages

Every known language has a word for singing: for example, *singen* (German), *chanter* (French), *cantare* (Spanish), *menyanyikan* (Indonesian), *énekelni* (Hungarian), and *śpiewać* (Polish). Singing itself reflects an evolutionary shift in the history of humankind, as the development of language coincided with the development of *Homo sapiens* some 50–100,000 years ago. Before this time, communication must have relied upon the process of sound modulation, using different pitches, different intensities, and lengths of sound without recourse to what we know as language. We know from archaeological and anthropological evidence that the brains of Neanderthals (our closest relatives in evolutionary terms) would have allowed such basic communication to take place through this medium of sound modulation.

Try expressing a simple phrase ('I am hungry') without recourse to using words. The sounds you make probably have to be associated in some way with an action to convey the thought you are trying to share. You have tried to express a concept in sound. From this simple example, we can guess how sophisticated the brain of *Homo neanderthalensis* must have been prior to the development of language. This ability to make sounds to communicate complex concepts is something that essentially separates us from most other animals.

The March of Humankind

As modern humans evolved as bipeds, culminating in *Homo sapiens*, it came at the price of a reduced birth canal of the now upright females. This in turn became a limiting factor on the size of infants at birth, including the size of the head and brain. To

compensate for this, infants were, and are, born prematurely after only nine months' gestation and are physically helpless at birth. Indeed, evidence from the rest of the mammal world suggests that a 'full term' human baby would be born after two years in the womb if the pelvic girdle were big enough to allow delivery! After birth the human baby on average doubles in weight and grows an average of 25 cm during the first six months. Unlike the young of many other species, therefore, the mother had to carry, set down or fasten the infant in some way to her body to allow her to move around the prehistoric cave or settlement and to undertake other life-supporting activities such as hunting or gathering.

Today infants remain reliant on a caring adult at birth to meet their every need, and universally make the same song as they enter the world outside the womb. The cry of a baby is our universal song of being human, the sound indistinguishable by gender, race, or place of birth.

Infant-directed Speech

It was at this stage that infant directed speech, as language specialists call it, began to develop. We use the well-known terms 'Motherese' or 'Baby talk' for this modulation or changing of the property of sound. Various kinds of modulation of sound occur across cultures (Mithen, 2005). For infant-directed speech, this is characterised by higher overall pitch, a wider range of pitch, longer ('hyperarticulated') vowels and pauses, shorter phrases, and greater repetition. According to Steven Mithen, we now talk like this because the evolutionary process has resulted in infants demonstrating an interest in and sensitivity to the rhythms, tempos, and melodies of speech long before they are able to understand the meaning of the words. Whatever country we come from and whatever language we speak, we alter our speech patterns in essentially the same way when talking to infants.

Living in Groups

Our ancestors like all primates and baboons today (e.g. Gelada Baboons) were very social creatures, living in groups. Modern

day baboons share their lives with between 20 and 150 others, sometimes even up to 300 of them living in a troop. Troops afford protection for members, enabling safety while sleeping and support through grooming and preening. This is an important tactile means of ensuring knowledge of each other and determining a patriarchal, hierarchical structure to advance emotional bonding. Sharing over 94% of the genetic makeup of *Homo sapiens* the baboon offers clues to our ancestors' behaviour patterns.

We now know through current research that significant changes occur in the endocrine system among baboons when they groom each other and that there is a large correlation between social grooming and the brain's release of oxytocin (sometimes referred to as the 'love' or 'cuddle' hormone). Similarly, in humans, oxytocin is produced deep in the brain (in the hypothalamus) and released through the pituitary gland; it is a particularly important hormone for women, predominantly during the process of giving birth and also while mothers are nursing their young infants. The hormone causes uterine contractions during labour and helps shrink the uterus after delivery. When an infant suckles, the stimulation causes a release of oxytocin, which, in turn, orders the body to 'let down' milk for the baby to drink (Dunbar, 2010). (As we will read later, this is just one of a group of endorphins released from the brain when we sing! Endorphins are a group of hormones that activate opiate receptors, bringing an analgesic effect.)

Other positive effects come with the release of oxytocin. This hormone lowers stress levels, enhances sleep, encourages group bonding and protective behaviour, and crystallises emotional memories. A 2007 study published in the journal *Psychological Science* found that higher oxytocin levels in the first trimester of pregnancy increased the likelihood of mothers engaging subsequently in bonding behaviours such as singing to or bathing their babies (Feldman, 2007). Although maternal bonding is not necessarily hard-wired, since humans can adopt babies and take care of them, oxytocin released during pregnancy seems to have a role in motivation and feelings of connectedness to a baby. Singing to babies would seem