

Interview with Leslie Harrington, Master Singing Teacher

— Barbara U. Jones

LH: Before you ask me any questions, I want tell everyone, singing is such fun! It is the most fun I know, that I've ever experienced. It's better than sex. Singing is the ultimate act of playing!

What is meant by your workshop title "Come Build a Stairway to the Stars?"

LH: The opportunity exists to experience reality in its eternal glory by capable use of the voice. Some cultures call that reality nirvana, others call it enlightenment. One of the benefits of singing is that enlightenment can occur within a relatively short period of time for those open to it. The stairway is learning the steps that will erect the voice for singing. The voice singing is the stars.

What is the difference between singing and studying singing?

LH: Learning to sing is even more fun than singing itself! The real joy is in the preparation. Because the body is designed to sing, the joy of singing must be a psychic requirement. Singing is not necessary for normal existence, but for spiritual enlightenment, vocalization with inspiration is very useful. All of the emotional experiences of humankind can be clearly expressed in song. When a person sings, they touch the fundamental core of their being and access their deepest emotions. Singing is a vital element of the experience of oneself. The vocal process is a complex system which is best served by conscious understanding of the involved reflexive structures. Though vocalizing is a reflexive function, our socialization process can establish habitual patterns antithetical to it. As a result, our singing voice can get covered up with the "stuff" of life, rather than being a true expression of who we are. Studying singing can override bad habits and restore a measure of a person's instinctual freedom. The impediments culture places upon the voice can be corrected and controlled by learning vocal technique.

What do you mean by vocal technique?

LH: Vocal technique is using the voice with control. We use the reflexes of the tongue and the breath. The breath is the source of inspiration, which means breathing in. The tongue is the reflexive control center. Learning and controlling the reflexive triggering mechanisms of the breath and the tongue provides conscious control of the voice. This is vocal technique.

How does vocal technique work?

LH: The body is a system of erectile functions. For example, we erect our spine to

stand. The voice erects in much the same fashion. When a person sings, the voice erects the body into vocal posture. This is reflexive in nature.

There are three master vocal reflexes: conversation, screaming, and calling. Conversation is the one most commonly used. Screaming is used as a warning, and calling is a beckoning. Calling is the reflexive structure used in singing and orating. When all are used, the complete tonal range of the voice is available.

Remarkably, I found that the tongue, the palate, and the torso contain the reflexive points of the tonal musical scale. These structures are assembled with coordination for vocal erection. Because of this, the ability to inflect intent in melody is available to all. Joy, grief, ecstasy, astonishment, all the greatest emotions, now become our tools of grace.

Is there a therapeutic benefit to singing?

LH: Culture and society instill inhibitions that block our instinctive responses. Singing restores our instinctual abilities, which can then override cultural/societal habits. Learning to sing, then, can provide a means of accessing our emotions, which themselves are also reflexive. As a result, it can create emotional balance.

Singing also teaches another order of time, which is an emotional relief. Time is an artificial construct, from which it is hard to escape. The reality is that everything is now. Rhythm, tempo, and speed changes, result in a "reordering" of time. Music also exists in another order of time that reconstructs our experiences and memories and allows us to exist out of time. Through the process of singing, a personal core value structure can be established. This happens in part through the resurrection of the instinctive expressive function. Singing also develops self-awareness, as the singer must tune into the deepest parts of his/her body to coordinate the reflexive functions needed.

Increased self-esteem is another therapeutic benefit. This occurs as the singer perfects the means to use the erectile function as it was intended to be used. The singer can respect himself/herself more for what he/she can do as a result of mastering the use of the vocal process.

You mentioned that singing can lead to spiritual enlightenment.

LH: In my view, the voice is ultimately the center of awareness. It is our first expression at birth, when we first utter a sound. That first utterance, which is usually a scream, is made because we want to breathe. That scream is the first

expression of self, and of self-awareness. Through this, we tap into the power of the universal utterance of existence. Enlightenment may be achieved by learning to become the instrument of the universal utterance in song.

How did you discover this method?

LH: I was gifted with a fully functioning singing voice. As a result, singers regularly came to me to ask how I did what I did. I sincerely tried to help. I must thank all those who asked, because their questions encouraged me to examine what I was doing. As a result, I studied pedagogy along with the biomechanics of the body. I tested my methodology out on students, and found that any student who works with this method can also have a fully functioning singing voice.

What happens in your workshop?

LH: First of all, I want the participants to have fun while they are learning something new. In the morning, the participants experience dynamic meditations, which include dancing and production of sound. The meditations are designed to open the chakras, enabling the person to experience the vertical core of their being, which prepares them for singing. Two hours are given to learning inspirational methodology. A pianist is present to accompany all singers throughout the week. I coach each participant individually on their song(s). By the end of the week each participant is able to successfully sing two songs of their choosing.

Can participants continue after a workshop?

LH: Through the Internet with a webcam and microphone, I offer intimate instruction in the privacy of their home. We can view each other and converse live (<http://www.singingworld.com>). And visitors to Taos are welcome to work in my studio.

Your goal is to teach the world to sing?

LH: This gift comes with requirements. I want others to feel fulfilled. In my studies and experience, I have come to believe that human beings are designed to sing and are not fulfilled until they do. All artists can find spiritual enlightenment through their work, but what is special about singing is that it is accessible to everyone. All should have the opportunity to experience the shine, the immanence, the illumination, and the enlightenment of others, which can happen with singing.

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