Online workshop (0 - 35 minutes)

"The Healing Power of Music”

Duration: approx. 60 minutes

Platform: ZOOM

Speaker: Norbert Hermanns, interpreter / moderator; Elizabeth Parsons (Liz)

Target groups: singers (professional, semi-professional, layperson), music therapists, music educators)

1. Norbert Hermanns

• Music therapist at the Cologne University Hospital since 2001

He works with patients in palliative care, phsyco - oncology and also focuses on "Singing with Parkinson disease"

• Classically trained Singer and since 1994 is a member of the Cologne Opera Chorus

• Former board member and currently an honorary board member and speaker for the international Singende Krankenhäuser – the Singing Hospitals network

Further information can be found at www.norbert-(dash)hermanns.net or on Facebook.

1. Overview:

1. Brief introduction to Norbert Hermanns (singer, music therapist)

2. Overview of the topics:

**3. The role singing plays in connecting the body and soul**

 Emotions have a direct effect on our body and can be felt. And vice versa: Our body posture, our way of breathing and moving influences our ability to perceive and express emotions.

We will be explaining how our emotions and feelings are mapped in the body and use examples to show how we can use music as an immediate connection to our feelings.

4. **How we “sense” each other - the phenomenon of mirror neurons**

For example: If we observe that a friend cuts their finger while chopping vegetables, we ourselves experience discomfort and can we can feel empathy with their pain.

5. **The way to an embodiment of serenity, calm and joie de vivre** - and the positive effect it has on our body as an instrument.

**6. Singing Hospitals -** The International Network for the promotion of singing in healthcare settings/facilities

**7. Singing research:** Extensive research over the past 20 years has shown the amazing effects of singing on our mental and physical health**.**

Before we get started, we would just like to say that:

It is our goal to awaken your curiosity and interest in the subject of "The Healing Power of Singing” and we hope very much that you will be inspired by our seminar!

We will be providing further information with details of relevant studies and research networks in the form of PDF documents to download via our website. If you take a look in the chat, you will find the link:

If you like, we can recommend a great translation platform called deepl.com to translate the German links into English and vice versa

Norbert and I will accompany you through this session today - we ask you to be patient as the content will be explained in both German and English: This also gives you the chance to "digest" the information and take time to compare it with your own experiences and understand what your body can do to help itself.

With all that said, let’s get started:

**3. The role singing plays in connecting body and soul**

Let’s go into this in a bit more detail:

In these months of lockdown, many of you will be more than ever sitting at your desk in front of your computer.

The way you sit has a major impact on your breathing, your muscles and even your emotional experience:

With this in mind we invite you please stand if you are able:

Now stretch, and loosen your body, have a good loud yawn and feel the calmness enter your body.

And now we’d like to ask you to activate your respiratory muscles by moving on the spot with a feeling of exhilaration - flicking your hands as if you were "brushing away" tiredness:

"FFFFF", "FFFF", ...

With these lively movements, your "mood" lifts and your emotional ability to vibrate actually increases: Your body is more alert and can better perceive and express emotions and feelings – and especially expressing yourself when you sing!

Please take your seats again but continue stretching and keep a good posture. / As most Choir rehearsals are often held seated – how can we sit and maintain the positive body tension that we need for singing?

* Sit up straight. When exhaling, straightening up as if you were being pulled up by a string from the center of your head and remaining mobile throughout your upper body (like a puppet), your breathing and voice can react flexibly.

* Here is also a great tip: you try the so-called breathing tilt where you can remain flexible when seated: While exhaling, tilt your pelvis away from you, then stretch your lower back as well as keeping your head upright - as if you were carrying a book on your head. After that, inhale and tilt your pelvis in the opposite direction, this releases any tension. repeat this a few times. This gentle exercise supports the lungs and surrounding muscles, and also the straight abdominal muscles.

Emotions accompany us constantly and have a direct effect on our body - on our muscle tone, i.e. the state of tension in our muscles, our skin elasticity (when we sweat - for example under stress), on our breath, our posture, our movements and hormonal balance.

Soul and breath are synonyms in almost all cultures:

Psyche: ancient Greek: breath-soul

Spiritus: Latin: spirit breath

Atman: Indian: breath-soul

Etc.

The word "Emotion" (from the Latin - "move out") describes the material effects of an event or a situation on our psyche and body:

Example: How we perceive something depends on our previous experience and also on our current mood.

You have Short-term emotions/feelings: such as: how you slept last night, whether you just took a walk outside or if you have been sitting at your computer for 3 hours. Or,

Long-term emotions: how general a previous experience is in relation to a situation (for example like in an audition or examination situation, etc.).

So, if you sing a song that touches you, or, do a little dance just like at the beginning of this workshop - you can have a positive influence on your mood and your "view of the world" may be brighter. How about greeting each day with a short movement or dance to get the body going?

Experiencing a feeling means that we become aware of a previous emotion.

Something that moves our psyche is therefore directly physically represented as an emotion, and directly affects our breathing patterns.

Fear – our breath becomes shaky, restless and flat

Grief - powerless

Anger - accumulated, explosively discharging under high tension

Joy - bouncing, lively

And of course, this too, is then represented in our speaking and singing voice!

Music touches and moves us directly and can help us to perceive our emotions and feelings and therefore help recognize the needs behind them.

An example:

Let me tell you about something quite beautiful that Norbert recently experienced …On the evening of 23rd December, the day before Christmas Eve, Norbert and his wife were driving on a quiet, remote country road in the middle of a beautiful landscape near his home region.

They saw a parked car in front of them and discovered that it was a friend who was alone under the canopy of stars playing Christmas melodies on his trumpet, he was playing in turn with another trumpeter about 400 meters away who was also playing in his courtyard.

Later on, they heard that many residents of the surrounding buildings had come outside of their homes to sit and listen. They all shared this wonderful moment together – this, in the midst of the corona-related distancing.

Songs / melodies are like vessels for our feelings. A song sung quietly can convey sadness, but can also calm, depending on the current mood. Every song sung has a different effect on everyone, depending on their previous experience. Music often brings back memories. Please take a moment to think back to family celebrations, the first parties with your friends when you were younger, of holidays ...which songs, memories, emotions do you remember?

Positive experiences of connectedness and especially moments of happiness can activate our sources of strength - we try to make this conscious in music therapy.

For example, if you hear "You’ll never walk alone", it may remind you of the Liverpool Football Club fans singing at the top of their voices, maybe also of your graduation or exam party.

The powerful communal singing of the same melody in the midst of familiar people conveys warmth, solidarity - especially in these challenging times. We are social beings and have been connecting to form communities through music for thousands of years. Important celebrations, rituals such as baptism, communion / confirmation, marriage, death ... are framed by music and communal singing.

A patient once told me that he followed all football matches live in the stadium - not because of the football, but because of the powerful singing and chanting that gets under his skin every time.

Music gets under your skin, but, singing even more so. Our first film also conveys this.

**Film 1 minute 0.04 - 1.14**

Case study 1:

Patient describes: “That was fun!”

Yes, basically I've been waiting a long time for someone to show me how I can sing. At school, they told me to keep my mouth shut. I actually like to sing. I always said when someone asks, can you sing? I always answered: No, but I do it with passion! It brings me into contact with my body so nicely and it’s something I’ve never felt before. Just by the sound, I feel a vibration. I've waited so long for this, so I'm really happy now and could cry with happiness. That's my very honest opinion and it’s just wonderful.

The patient in this film (leukemia) worked long hours as a senior executive, had heightened body tension, and as a result spoke very quickly and in a high-pitched voice. He hardly stopped to rest - his thoughts and feelings were constantly running at full speed.

Together, we practiced deep breathing using the pursed lip breathing technique (which we show you later). We concentrated on controlled exhalation, as well as the perception of language. We will be explaining this in a little moment using a poem.

The patient consciously explored deeper and softer parts of his voice for the first time through the buzzing feeling of fricative sounds and the corresponding awareness of these vibrations (m, n, vvvv, s,):

Exercise: First you widen your jaw muscles while yawning and move around whilst making this sound.

Then please place a hand on your cheek and forehead and softly sound a “mmMMMM” in “Glissando”, so gliding up and down, with your lips loosely on top of each other.

Do you feel the vibrations? This vibration is a balm for our voice and touches us and one another deeply. For millions of years we have been using this kind of head voice when we want to calm someone down.

The sound "M" is a melodious sound that we often use in English to agree with someone "mmhMm", and also when something tastes good: "mmmMMMMmmm". In addition, it is the fundamental sound in many languages ​​for “Mama”, “Mutter”, “Mother”, mére, madre, etc. The “M” is like a tonal envelope for a newborn baby. In addition, the “M” is the central sound of two original mantras “Amen” and “OM”.

When we are aware of this tone imaging where we concentrate on the sound we make, we sing differently, more inspired, more consciously...

Place your hand on your chest and with relaxed lips make a “vvvvvvvvvv” sound, do you feel any vibrations?

Many of Norbert’s patients are in pain – but by making this “Vvvvvvvvvv" or "ssSSSSss" sound, you experience a pleasant feeling. By focusing on this vibration your pain reduces, as well as the accompanying, deeper exhalation.

The patient in this film was able to be aware his body in a new and much more conscious way through deep breathing. He was now able to influence his body tension himself and relax! His voice became considerably deeper and more resonant. Through “tonal imaging” (as just described for the “m”) he was able to connect with his emotions and make his language more mindful.

They then recorded the poem “Mondnacht” by Joseph von Eichendorff: He was so enthusiastic about his new, deeper more pleasant voice that he sent a recording immediately to his father and consequently to his friends.

Whenever we feel, see or hear we consciously immerse ourselves into a vision of music. We are singing and something "magical" can arise that has a very strong effect on body and soul. We would like to explain this briefly using the aforementioned poem:

Imagine a night with a full moon in early summer. The moonlight is reflected in a still green cornfield in a clearing in front of a forest. A gentle breeze sweeps across the field ...

**Show PPT "Mondnacht"**

Joseph von Eichendorff

**How do emotions and - more generally - feelings materially affect our body?**

We would like to take a brief look at our autonomic nervous system with you:

If we feel insecure we “sense” danger and our nervous system sets itself to “alert”, the necessary hormones are released that make our body ready for action within a few seconds: our heart beats faster, the muscles in our arms and legs are well supplied with blood, our blood pressure rises, the airways widen and we are suddenly wide awake.

When we feel safe and comfortable, our brain signals our body that we can relax: breathing and heart rhythms slow down, muscles relax, blood pressure drops. Body and soul relax.

**Let’s have a look at the effect that music has on our psyche and body:**

Many of Norbert’s cancer patients are often tense because of their diagnosis and the anxiety that accompanies it. This is expressed in many ways, one being the extreme tightening of the jaw muscles. We all know this: When we are stressed - for example before exams, we tense our jaw muscles, or even “grind” our teeth at night while we sleep and our breathing pattern increases.

Norbert’s patients find the following exercise very helpful. It helps the voices to relax, opens our lungs for deep breathing.

**Pursed Lip Breathing** – to self-calm:

<http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lippenbremse>

We will now go through with you the instructions for this relaxation technique for you to try out for yourself:

First relax - chewing slowly – loosening your jaw muscles - let your lower jaw fall downwards / backwards – to achieve a kind of "double chin position".

Your lips are loosened up and puckered. Now take a breath and exhale on a gentle "fffffFFFFfff" sound. To do this, place your hands on your lower abdomen (just below your belly button) and feel how your abdominal wall falls to exhale – and then lifts when inhaling.

This form of deep breathing, an "extended exhalation" if you will, has a very calming effect on your body - just as when you sing a lullaby.

Lullabies have a tradition that goes back thousands of years in all cultures. We mentioned earlier that we automatically sing softer more gently and with a flowing melody, we may even sway as we sing, instilling calmness…

In music therapy, we start by adjusting to the tension and mental state of the patient in order to gently guide them further and further into deeper relaxation. In the same careful way, we guide patients to a higher level of stimulation.

Stimulation and activation can be a useful means of stabilizing patients to lighten their mood, increase their self-esteem or to convey the joy of life.

Stimulating the nervous system through music therapy has proved greatly beneficial to patients suffering from strokes and Parkinson’s disease.

Music drives us to move our limbs, motivates movement and dance, and activates our respiratory muscles when we move accordingly:

We would like to illustrate this with the help of the Indian song "The River is flowing" and sing a calming and stimulating interpretation in order to highlight the musical factors including tone range and timbre etc…

"River is flowing": calming:

Floating, quiet, gentle - flowing manner...

Leads to:

- slowing of a pulse and breathing rate

- a drop in blood pressure

- a Relaxation of the skeletal muscles

"River is flowing" stimulating:

rhythmically lively, louder, faster tempo

leads to, (amongst other factors)

- an Increase in blood pressure

- an Acceleration of breathing and pulse rate

- and increased occurrence of rhythmic contractions of the skeletal muscles

These factors can be transferred from one to the next

"Floating, quiet, gentle - flowing ..."

Across from

rhythmically lively, rather strong, faster tempo

This therapeutic non-verbal communication can also be relevant for all musicians: Do our movements, gestures, facial expressions correspond to the musical interpretation we want to communicate?

If we succeed in determining where the patient draws their strength from, such as nature, community experience, their “joie de vivre” and zest for life, by giving them security in a protected environment, then pain and the experience of illness can reduce, and the patient then feels "safe". We would like to explain this with our next video clip:

**Film 2 "Headaches are gone" 0.30 minutes**

 The patient explains: “Yes, I came in with a headache today. I had quite a few appointments this morning and was in such a rush. I was a little worried that I might not get here on time and felt very tense. And now that's all gone. I feel that I am grounded and centered and yes, I feel great - the headache has gone! "

To sum up:

When we feel insecure or afraid, we become tense - our diaphragm tightens, the tongue retracts, the elbows are close to the body, the shoulders are high, the jaw, neck and other muscles groups similarly affected.

All of this has a correspondingly inhibiting effect on our voice.

When we feel safe and comfortable, our body expands, the voice sounds calmer, deeper - more relaxed.

**4. How we “sense” each other - The phenomenon of mirror neurons and the importance of self-care**

Mirror neurons in the brain are special nerve cells that can heighten our compassion for others.

If we observe that a friend cuts their finger while chopping vegetables, we ourselves experience discomfort and can empathize with them.

The closer this person is to us, the stronger we feel and connect with them. You are all familiar with it: You are on the phone, for example, with someone you trust and immediately feel from their voice how they are doing from the sound of it – and you mirror their emotions.

**This next part is very important for musicians: Using a conductor as an example:**

* The mental and physical disposition of a conductor and how they relate to the musicians is transferred directly to the singers and orchestra: If the conductor is tense or puts undue pressure on performers to achieve unrealistic levels of perfection in terms of intonation, phrasing, articulation etc., intensifying performance anxiety (stage fright?) amongst the musicians and triggering a fear of mistakes, this will all be passed on directly, (subconsciously or otherwise) to the performers and will adversely affect their mental and physical state- their breathing and muscle tone and therefore their music making.

**As singers, the body is our instrument, so this has an even more intense effect on us.**

**How to you create a focused, but constructive collaboration…**

A constructive partnership is characterized by trust and a caring relationship:

Essential prerequisites for this are:

* To create a safe, familiar space that is characterized by positivity, appreciation and an openness to constructive criticism.
* Physically: to always plan breaks with body exercises: Consciously breathing, widening (yawning, stretching) and activating the diaphragm...

**5. The way to an embodiment of serenity, calm and joie de vivre**

When we are anxious, we often look down, our shoulders drop, our breath becomes shaky, shallow.

However, if we find ourselves under stress, we can consciously stand up straight and exhale. We feel the ground under our feet and move and sing with confidence. When we do all this; we embody size, stability and a feeling of security.

Example: Song: "Earth my body, water my blood, air my breath and fire my spirit!"

This combination of rhythmical movement and song is a powerful force of creativity and expression which has a direct effect on the psyche.

Please stand if you are able and follow my movements:

"Earth my body" - feel the ground under your feet. Bend a little into your knees.

“Water my blood” - flowing movement with arms

"Air my breath" – opening, widening movement - width under the elbows – like threads that draw our elbows outwards

"Fire my spirit" - decisive, powerful movement.

**6. Singing Hospitals Initiative**

How can the healing power of singing benefit patients? The International Network of Singing Hospitals has risen to this challenge.

Singing Hospitals is an international network for the promotion of singing in health facilities. They are networked with Singing researchers around the world and compile relevant studies and have been offering training courses since 2009:

“Singing with Cancer”, “Singing with Respiratory Diseases” (COPD ...), “Singing with Neurological Diseases” (Stroke, Parkinson's), “Singing with Psychosomatic Complaints”, “Singing with Dementia”, “Singing with the Aged”, “Singing with the Dying or Grieving,” ...

In this network, to which the University Hospital of Cologne also belongs, we sing easy songs from memory with a short text, because only then, can we concentrate on being creative and really enjoy immersing ourselves in the music.

Most singers know: that as soon as we read, part of our attention is taken up and we no longer listen to ourselves as actively, nor do we perceive our surroundings as carefully. Singing by heart promotes self-awareness as well as social awareness. This brings us to the most important effect of singing particularly in these challenges times: That singing creates a feeling of community and connects us all.

**Film 3: Singing Healthy Minute 0.37**

The patient describes: "Well, I remember well how you came to me at the very beginning, when I was still on the ward and had to lie in bed, and then I started singing again. Well, I used to sing a lot as a teenager, as a young woman, and then for years not at all. You then came to me and we started singing together which energised me. Yes, it has been an essential contribution to my recovery, by opening myself up to new experiences. And that's why singing is very important to me! "

Norbert’s patients report back on how they felt while singing the songs, although many, especially those who are new, are sometimes cut off from their emotions. So, by more experienced group members expressing how they feel while singing, new patients can say if they feel the same or differently. In this way, they learn to listen mindfully in order to understand their feelings at that moment, which may result in a release of emotion in the form of tears or liberating laughter.

**Film: 5 minutes 1.27 "Singing to feel connected"**

Song:

In this film, you hear the song: Sei gewahr, sei hier, sei gelassen, sei geliebt, sei starck, sei heil.

"Be aware, be here, be calm, be free, be loved, be strong, be whole. "

The Patient explains: “To be sung to by others, and to be accepted and loved – that has always strengthened me incredibly. This makes me feel sad but at the same time I’m so touched by those songs, I have a good cry and once the grief has dissolved, I then feel happy. "

Every year Norbert and his music therapy colleagues organize a “singing parade” through the university hospital, in which outpatients, inpatients and employees take part by wearing colorful costumes and singing.

**Film 4 SU WS21 minute 0.41**

**Singing connects us to one another and can activate our self-healing powers - our body's own pharmacy.**

**7. Singing research**

**Singing deepens self and social awareness, promotes connectedness?**

Singing simple songs from memory and with plenty of soul, in particular, slows down breathing, promotes focus on the emotional experience and a realization of the effects on the body.

Singing stimulates the limbic system, our emotional center, and releases a number of hormones - messenger substances such as oxytocin, the so-called "cuddle hormone", which have a positive effect on our immune system, but above all convey feelings of well-being and happiness.

By synchronizing their breathing, singers' heart rhythms also align. This deepens bonding experiences that are intensified through shared emotional expression.

Oxytocin can:

• Build trust in other people

• Reduce stress and anxiety and lower cortisol levels

• Suppress aggression

• make us empathetic

**Singing and your immune system**

Immunoglobin A are anti-bodies that sit in the mucous membranes of the mouth and are responsible for fighting bacteria and viruses. According to studies, it has been observed that singing supports, among others, the immune system via these antibodies and can therefore also prevent colds.

**Singing strengthens the lungs and heart, and increasingly relaxes the body / psyche**

Singing deepens your breath. It improves the oxygen supply to the body's organs and the brain, right down to every cell in the body. When singing, a healthy full breath is activated in a completely natural way, including the abdominal area. The heart is supported in its pumping movement by the intensification of the movement of the diaphragm, the heart rate stabilizes - the pulse slows down - and we relax. When Norbert was studying at the Folkwang University, at 9am the practice rooms were opened for the singers. At 9:15 a.m. the toilets were often occupied: clear evidence of the digestive effects of singing. So, as you can see, singing has many positive health benefits – in more ways than you think!

To sum up:

You can do a lot for yourself, for your well-being and your health, and so, if you feel inspired, sing with joy and know that connectedness experiences can activate your body's own pharmacy.