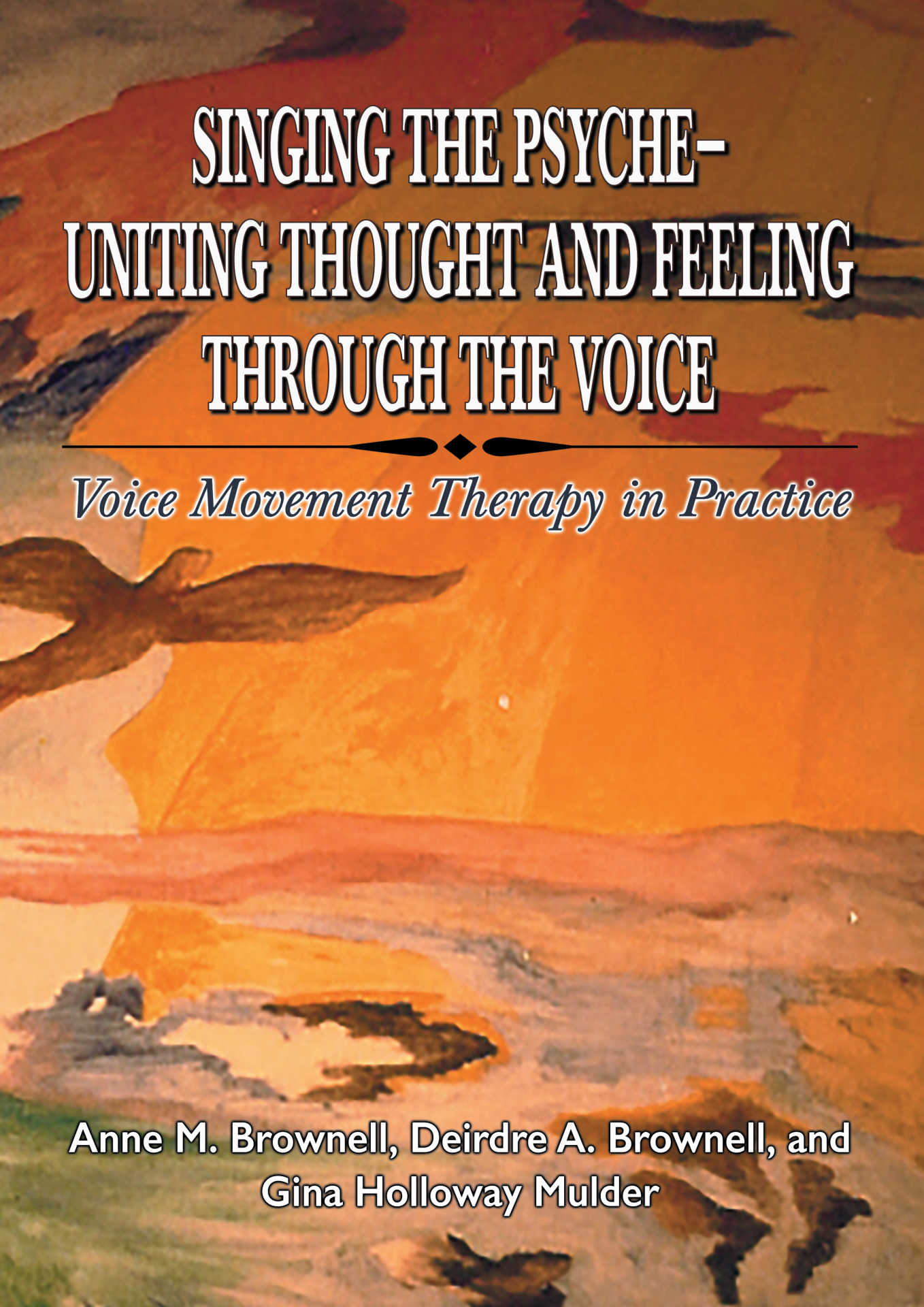
SINGING THE PSYCHE–
UNITING THOUGHT AND FEELING
THROUGH THE VOICE
Voice Movement Therapy in Practice
Anne M. Brownell, Deirdre A. Brownell, and
Gina Holloway Mulder

# SINGING THE PSYCHE– UNITING THOUGHT AND FEELING THROUGH THE VOICE

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## Voice Movement Therapy in Practice

*Edited by*

**ANNE M. BROWNELL, DEIRDRE A. BROWNELL, AND GINA HOLLOWAY MULDER**

*Foreword by Shawn McNiff*

*(With 20 Other Contributors)*

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Veronica Phillips who kept insisting that it MUST happen.

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# FOREWORD

*Shaun McNiff*

*Singing the Psyche* elucidates, renews, and advances one of the most important traditions in art healing–spontaneous and full-bodied vocal expression. It is essential reading for those engaging the voice and models how to undertake in-depth and truly art-based exploration of a particular form of creative expression within the larger and interdependent community of art healing.

## *A Legacy of Artistic Inquiry*

In recent years I have been exhorting colleagues to get back to the empirical basis of what we do and focus research and training on how the various kinds of artistic expression further well-being, both examining and perfecting their unique healing qualities while also identifying what they share—all of which is illustrated by this book's presentation of the history and current use of therapeutic voicework together with a comprehensive integration with bodily movement. The fecund terrain generates a wealth of new directions for research and practice.

For example, how does spontaneous, natural, and unscripted vocal expression "vibrate into being" as the authors suggest in the opening page of the preface, and then as posited in their title, bond "thought and feeling?"

Or as Alfred Wolfsohn who originated this vocal discipline, asked—is there a unique connection between the voice and the soul and what does it share with all artistic expression? Is there what Nietzsche called magic in extremes, with vocal expression of the "unbeautiful" enlarging perception of beauty? Does this generate a sense of participation in a *vox humana*—universal human voice, and bonds with all creatures and nature?

And Paul Newham, who connected voicework to professional therapeutic practice, asks whether the vocal tones of our speech are more expressive than words? How can we more completely realize the full range of tonality and what are the impacts? Do these processes relate to other art forms, to movement and the body which is a primary focus of this book and the community of practice the authors have created?

In addition to advancing the depth and power of vocal expression, I greatly respect how the creators of therapeutic voicework developed and furthered understanding of this medium through direct inquiry via their own art. As contrasted to self-absorption, artistic inquiry engages the maker of art as a necessary participant in firsthand exploration of the empirical processes and outcomes of creative expression. Like C. G. Jung (2009), both Wolfsohn and Newham shaped methods through personal vocal experimentation which engaged their conflicts and struggles.

Roy Hart, a student of Wolfsohn, established a theatre group that continued to research and develop his mentor's work with an expanded focus on community, involving people from throughout the world. The Roy Hart Theatre created an environment where actors explored their expression to bring greater "authenticity to the characters they presented." As my experience affirms, community practice and discovery often augment artistic inquiry, further creative energy and depth, and provide a context aligned with the fullness of our lives. I consistently see how effective group environments function as slipstreams of imagination, in which we go farther and deeper together, and where we often vicariously experience as much transformation and healing when witnessing others as through our individual expressions.

## *Communities of Creation*

My personal connection to voice and movement is longstanding and intertwined with many people and processes explored in this book. It might be helpful to briefly describe this history to give a sense of how communities of practice emerge and merge with worldwide continuities to create new forms such as the innovations described here.

Fifty years ago, I established the first graduate program to integrate all forms of artistic expression in therapy. *The Arts and Psychotherapy* (1981) published by Charles C Thomas brought our research and the development of total art expression to an international audience which included Paul Newham. He wrote with appreciation for the inclusion of sound dialogues and enactments, improvisation, therapeutic opera, and other features of vocal and acoustic expression. These processes often emerged from the experimental theatre traditions permeating our Cambridge, Massachusetts community, which at that time differed significantly from more siloed and institutional music therapy. There was an immediate kinship with Paul who went on to write *The Singing Cure* (1993) and *Therapeutic Voicework* (1998), and our close connections are sustained and expanded by this book.

When starting a graduate program in 1974, Norma Canner was the first faculty member I recruited (Brownell & Wilcoxen, 1998). As a mature and respected

New England artist she brought full bodied action—movement, enactment, voice, play—also teaching us how to work in large groups with all of art.

Anne Brownell joined the graduate program toward the end of the first decade and studies with Norma laid the groundwork for her lifework integrating voice and movement—and this book, synchronically published by Charles C. Thomas. It was a time of peak creativity and imagination when many of the processes described here were being investigated. The community was large, heterogeneous, and interdisciplinary with no prevailing doctrines or ideologies other than a shared commitment to a primary emphasis on artistic and imaginative inquiry involving the complete spectrum of art forms including voice and the body (McNiff 2023).

## *Transcendent and Sacred Dimensions*

In addition to closely studying world traditions of art healing, I have always encouraged the creation of personal methods, in keeping with the making of art, and especially eschewing the pre-existing and stock systems so common today. As Norma Canner said to her students, quoted here by Anne—the work is "New, always new."

In my studio groups voice has been the most challenging, new, and transformative mode of expression. Arguably there is nothing more tangible, innate, and visceral in human expression than full-bodied vocalization. We sometimes work exclusively with the voice and often use vocal improvisation together with body movement to respond to paintings, sculpture, and other artworks. There is reliably plenty of resistance and fear, all stoked by past experiences. As demonstrated by the authors, play and various preparatory exercises, alone and with others, are fundamental and a core part of the overall discipline with great significance in themselves.

The work is always focused on presence—supporting, witnessing, holding, and responding to the expressions of each person and moment, all of which reliably evoke a distinct and transcendent sense of the sacred, maybe attributable to the vital energy generated by what Wolfsohn called "dared expression." The welcoming of "unlovely," strange, and thoroughly authentic sounds and bodily movements, often while being encouraged to explore the full range of vocalization in the absence of a planned sequence, is not the norm in our experience and will predictably generate resistance, feelings of vulnerability and incompetence, fear of the unknown, all which become part of the creative mix and a source of expressive energy, making the integration of voice and movement one of the most impactful forms of artistic expression in therapy, and requiring the careful experimentation, study, unconditional support, and supervision documented here.

### *Forever Unique but Larger than Ourselves*

To ease performance pressure and affirm natural expression I emphasize the primacy of breath, slowing down and not doing too much, taking pauses, simplicity, and repetition as the path to depth. Try to put ego aside, or tucked away safely in a pocket as you work, together with all concepts suggesting what to do and not do and focus on letting Psyche sing and move freely through you, and with your responses and sensibilities being necessary partners in expressions made together with so many 'others,' both within you and in your environment. We never create alone.

Among the many admirable features of *Singing the Psyche* is the emphasis placed on studying the community of practice from which the work emanates. The authors describe their unique creations while affirming that we participate in a process larger than ourselves, accessible streams generated by so many more inside and outside the strain of a particular discipline.

I trust that this book by Anne Brownell, Deirdre Brownell, and Gina Holloway Mulder together with their many international contributors, will continue to encourage artistic experimentation realizing the broad range of the "singing body," from the "stirring…guts" to the tender lullabies of these pages. We are invited as Jung said, to imagine the dream further, perfecting the integral relationship of voice and movement as an opening to all of life.

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# WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING ABOUT THIS BOOK

*This comprehensive volume will enhance therapists', educators', caregivers', and parents' understanding of the intricacies of using our voices for expression and communication. Through practical guidelines woven together with current interdisciplinary practices, theory and research, Anne Brownell and colleagues creatively decode the language of vocal expression. The importance of embodied expression through "voicedances" which contain the intense feelings within the structure of song ring out through the text. A wide array of vibrant clinical applications with many populations greatly illuminates the voice/movement therapy model. Over and over we learn how the voice and movement are the points of entry for relationships and intervention.*

Susan Loman, MA, NCC
KMP Profiler
Former Director Dance Movement Therapy Program
Department of Applied Psychology
Antioch New England Graduate School (USA)

***In the beginning was the Voice.*** *"I have a dream" resounded MLK from the Lincoln Memorial sixty years ago. The ritualized voice can move mountains. As powerful as music and language are in cultural evolution, it is the human voice that sustains connection and authenticity. This book is a true gift to global culture and has the potential to inspire a renaissance of interest and practice in the creative use of expressive voice and movement for therapy, coaching, cultural change and transformative learning. May this book travel far, like a song that heals and blesses, voicing the sacred commitments and compassionate inquiry of its passionate authors!*

Aftab Omer, PhD.
President, Meridian University (USA)

*Implicit in Voice Movement Therapy is the notion that wholeness and health are innate. Reclaiming what has been lost through life's vicissitudes is the essence of healing, not repairing what is broken. We reclaim parts of ourselves that could not be experienced,*

*fully owned, or connected to before our loss of innocence. VMT is about reclaiming, integrating, and embodying the self you were before you felt unsafe, inadequate, or unworthy.*

Leonard Carr
Clinical Psychologist (South Africa)

*As an artist and writer, I and my friends in many different disciplines are well acquainted with creative blocks both in art and in life. When a friend suggested that I may be interested in reviewing a book on Voice Movement Therapy, I said, "Well, OK," expecting to read an informative, but unexciting tome. To my delight, this book clearly explains the basic principles of VMT in the first chapter, then presents five chapters of case studies by VMT practitioners who work with human situations worldwide read like stories. It is a great read and so interesting that I called a musician friend and read one of the stories aloud!*

Jo Walters, MA, MFA
University of California, Berkeley
Visual Artist and Writer

# PREFACE: TAKING IT TO THE FLOOR

The voice, our original and primary instrument for expression and communication, is the only instrument in which the player and the played upon are contained within the same organic form. The voice box, that tiny structure which houses the vocal cords through which air passes to produce the sounds we utter when we speak or sing is – by its location in the throat – perfectly positioned and – by its ability to express thoughts and feelings at the same time – ably equipped to join head and heart, mind and body, psyche and soma.

However, the words we say and the way we say them often do not match. The message and the messenger may be at cross purposes, the meaning conveyed by the words undercut by the feeling tones in which they are uttered. This can cause misunderstandings both within the self and between the people with whom we wish to communicate. Often it is necessary to go beyond words to achieve a congruence between thought and feeling that will enable us to find the full expression of our wants, needs, and ideas in order to communicate them more effectively to others. One way to do this is to use our actively sounding physical voice and the sensations it produces to literally vibrate into being a bridge between what we are aware of and what we are not, between the conscious and the unconscious mind.

A basic principle of Voice Movement Therapy (VMT), an Expressive Arts Therapy which had its beginnings in the early 1990s with founder Paul Newham's first Professional Practitioner Training in the United Kingdom and the publication of his first book, The Singing Cure, is that when an individual is in deep internal conflict or when a discussion between two people or among a group reaches an impasse, it is taken to the floor to be sounded and moved. Both unplanned vocalization, often beginning without words, and spontaneous movement within a witnessed safe space establish a kind of expressive discharge which can further meaningful contact and break down barriers both within an individual and between people in high states of emotion, frequently concluding with the creation of a song by the person or persons involved which can act as a containing structure. Because VMT begins with the affective tones of the voice rather than its cognitive content

and is dedicated to actualizing feeling states through voice and movement, it is to the physicalization of sensation, that place beyond words, that we go.

Conflicts or misunderstandings between individuals or between members of a group, organization or culture often cannot be solved by words alone and the act of "doing" something creatively in voice and movement while up, moving and sounding can be a catalyst for transformation. This kind of work may be intense or it may be gentle, but it always involves action—voicing, moving, sounding, singing. Whether in the context of a therapeutic session or a singing lesson, it is guided by an exploration of the describable qualities of a person's voice in relation to their habitual body movement and posture as a way of breaking down old patterns, both muscular and mental, to open up different perspectives and responses to reveal new ways to enter into the living moment with more freedom. The whole self, body and soul, needs to be engaged, for when talk has broken down – when words are not enough – we know we can "take it to the floor" to be worked out in sound and movement, prioritizing the affective self, the whole feeling body, not just the cognitive mind. Often the right words, the ones that need to be spoken and received, will follow.

The purpose of this book is to provide a basic understanding of Voice Movement Therapy and how it uses both spontaneous vocalization and the creation and performance of song to increase expressive and communicative skills and to strengthen one's sense of self. Chapter One presents an overview of its history and core principles and Chapters Two through Six provide articles by various practitioners to give the reader a sense of how they work, both with clients and students and for themselves, in ways that follow a basic set of principles, yet differ widely in accordance with the nature of the individual or group, the practitioner, and the cultural and socio-economic conditions of each encounter. Some of these articles reaffirm the past work of founder Paul Newham who, taking inspiration from the Alfred Wolfsohn/Roy Hart tradition of extended voicework, established a more specifically psychotherapeutically oriented vocal discipline and worked with individuals with special needs, students of voice, and performers. Other articles show how this work has been extended to new populations: those experiencing mental and physical illness and addiction, displacement and alienation, hidden disabilities, seeking formal mediation and conflict resolution, struggling with fierce emotions, and looking for guidance for transitioning into motherhood pre- and post-partum. Several others illustrate how the therapeutic component of the voice lesson has been broadened and deepened. In all instances, the aim of the editors has been to present a framework within which VMT Practitioners may tell their own stories in their own voices. The final chapter addresses ways in which we see this work going forward.

Anne, Deirdre, and Gina

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# SINGING THE PSYCHE– UNITING THOUGHT AND FEELING THROUGH THE VOICE

# Chapter One

# THE VOICE UNCHAINED[1]

*Anne Brownell*

## BEING PRESENT

"Singers at their moment of greatest affect keep on singing and that is the singing cure." These words were spoken to me by Paul Newham on a transatlantic phone call in 1996 when I was attending my dying mother in hospital on Cape Cod. She was experiencing great pain and fear, and the only thing that seemed to soothe her and alleviate her suffering was my daughter's and my bedside singing, ranging from peaceful to dramatic, depending on what we sensed from her at any given moment and what we knew she loved. Paul, founder of the creative/therapeutic discipline of Voice Movement Therapy, and I, a former student now assisting him, had been scheduled to conduct our first workshops together in the USA over the coming weeks, but that clearly was not going to happen. He had called to see if there was anything he could do and even offered to fly over from London to lend support. I said not to worry because, when I told him how hard it was to carry on singing in this situation, he had in that one sentence given me what I needed: an understanding that what Deirdre and I were doing was a useful and compassionate way to stay fully present with Mother as she went through this process of dying. To be able to express our love for her while sufficiently containing our intense feelings within the structure of song so as not to overwhelm or be overwhelmed—to keep connected in this way—was a great gift and a great learning. There would be time for the unstructured sounds of our own mourning later on.

For me, to this day, the crux of Voice Movement Therapy is contained in that sentence and everything else follows...

Feeling and thought, expression and containment, bringing one's voice into the outside world and experiencing it being heard, if only by one person; the use of breath and sound, melody and rhythm to increase one's sense of self and presence with others, and how to facilitate this process—that is what this book is about. Whether the practitioner is working with clients in therapy needing to express themselves more fully in order to contact and bring forth repressed or hidden memories; with various kinds of performers such as singers, actors, teachers, preachers, or others seeking a more durable, flexible, and versatile instrument to use in their profession; with individuals with language delays or other neurological, mental or physical conditions which are impeding their ability to express themselves and communicate effectively; or simply with those seeking to become more expressive and clear in what they are able to convey through the voice–change of some kind is the order of the day. As Alexander Lowen once notably said, "It is the limitation of our being which makes us sad and angry and constitutes our fear.... If one wishes to change character, it is not enough to talk about feelings; they must be experienced and expressed."[2] Whether one's expressive facility, in singing or speaking, has been hampered by conditions from birth or by physical or emotional trauma experienced later in life, it is the investigation and subsequent embodiment in song of one's issues—with all their shadows and their lights—that we employ to move us toward the fuller expression and depth of communication we desire.

How can this be done through the sounding voice in speech or song? How can I express what I feel and "get it out" in a way that is satisfactory and fulfilling for me? Alternatively, how can I do this so that what I am trying to convey can be not only heard but received? How can I "have my voice" and, at the same time, make contact with another person or persons in the most meaningful way for everyone concerned? In short, when do I simply need to express my feelings and when does that expression need to be, in some way, crafted? To be able to recognize and work with these distinctions is, to me, at the heart of Voice Movement Therapy and what it has to offer. But how did this way of work develop and how does it relate to therapy? For Alfred Wolfsohn, pioneer of a new kind of voicework begun in the aftermath of World War I, it was a means of survival, a redemption of soul.

## The Beauty of the Dared Expression and the Right to Make Unlovely Sounds

> The beauty of the dared expression is that only in encountering and overcoming the dark side of oneself can one achieve true artistic expression, uniting all aspects of the self in order to feel whole and encounter others. (Alfred Wolfsohn)[3]

The same could be said of therapy.

Wolfsohn, a German Jew serving in the trenches of World War I, had the experience of hearing severely and mortally wounded soldiers calling, crying, and screaming out their fear and anguish in an incredible array of pitches and sounds. In the thick and deadly muck which was the reality of trench warfare, a tunnel collapsed and Wolfsohn had to choose whether to try to crawl back to rescue a dying comrade—and risk almost certain death himself—or continue his crawl toward the living.

He chose life, but after being sent home from the front, found he could not rid himself of constant auditory hallucinations; he still heard his comrades screaming. Discovering that neither doctors nor therapists nor teachers of singing could relieve him of the voices that were driving him mad, he, like many other pioneers of new forms of alternative therapies, sought to cure himself. While in hospital for what was becoming known as shell shock, he came across the writings of Sigmund Freud and Freud's conviction that the words spoken by the patient to describe deep trauma must be imbued with the feeling and energy of the original event if they are to be effective. Thus began Wolfsohn's quest to find a way, through the quality and intention of the sounding voice, to locate, release, and exorcise the hallucinatory voices that haunted him. After his initial stage of recovery and months of trying to cope with his haunted inner landscape, Wolfsohn had two revelations:

Journeying to Italy for an encounter with nature in a more gentle climate that his doctor hoped would restore him to health, he climbed Mt. Vesuvius where, "He became aware of the intense warmth of the sun, of life singing in him. It was his first real discovery of music within himself and it was life affirming…. In this moment he felt restored, saved, and even more than that, he actually felt happy."[4] For a little while, the accusing voices of those he felt he had abandoned receded and he came to realize that his possibility of recovery ultimately depended on his ability to cure himself.

Wolfsohn knew that he needed to sing, to give voice in an amplified way to the sounds trapped inside him, but the vocal instruction available in his day had no place for the sounds of voices in extremis, only those that were aesthetically pleasing. When one of his teachers, for a few moments, allowed him to shout out the agony and desperation he almost constantly felt inside, he experienced some relief and the realization that "a new way to sing was needed."[5] As he saw it, a voice needed the freedom to express all aspects of the human condition and so must be "unchained" from notions of flawless technique and smooth delivery and allowed not only to express wondrous and pleasant things, but to moan and groan, weep and wail in a manner not found in the churches, concert halls, or salons of his day. The quality and range of sounds must extend, in his words, "from Bel Canto to Hell Canto" if they were to empower a wounded

soul and serve as a means of healing.[6] Thus he became acquainted with the notion of *enantiodromia,* the process by which something pushed to its extreme becomes its opposite—for example, "I laughed until I cried—and this opened up for him a whole spectrum of human sound with which to express the totality of the soul. As a result, he developed his concept of the *vox humana*, a universal voice potentially available to anyone, male or female, and capable of astonishing range and multiple timbres with which to express experiences and emotions in sounds both beautiful and unbeautiful, but congruent with the subject matter.

Several years after making a partial recovery and just prior to the beginning of World War II, Wolfsohn fled to England where he was interred as an "enemy alien" and then volunteered for the Pioneer Corps which had a unit for individuals categorized as "aliens and other undesirables" in which he served until 1943 when he was invalided out. The following year, he received permission from the Home Office to give singing lessons in London.

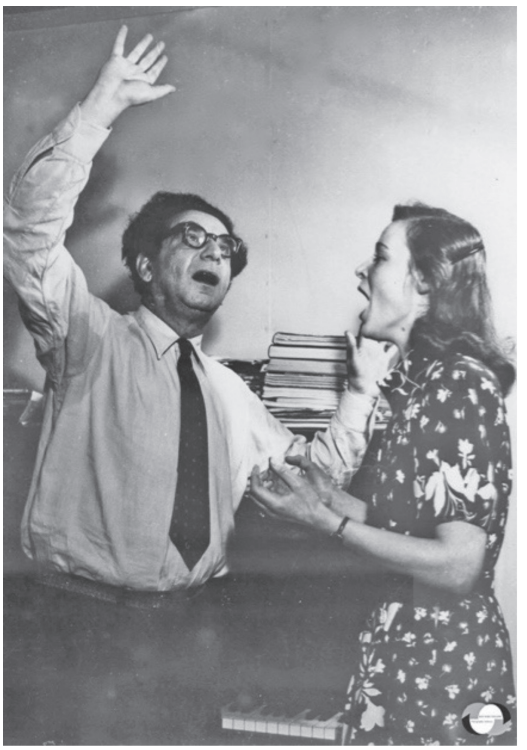

Figure 1. Alfred Wolfsohn teaching Marita Gunther, London, 1952. Roy Hart Theater, Anduze, France.

By this time, he was avidly reading the works of Carl Jung and coming to believe that psychological concepts such as *archetype, shadow, anima* and *animus* were not only distinguishable parts of the human psyche, but could be made audible through the voice. His own struggles to become a singer had led him to conclude that voice problems could not be solved by vocal techniques or medical treatments alone, but needed the perception, engagement and self-understanding of the psyche, or soul. He discovered further that the sounds made by the human voice could give audible form to inner aspects of the mind such as are visually represented in dreams. According to Jung, images represent the way that unconscious mental memories interact with conscious events to influence how we deal with our lives and nothing can be conceived of by the mind without first being represented in an image.[7] Wolfsohn sought to apply this understanding to sound.

Images come in different forms: visual, kinetic, acoustic. From a painting, sculpture, or mosaic we receive physically stationary images, while from dance or film what predominates is an image that moves. Acoustic images are conveyed by sounds that travel through the air, and although fleeting, can be recognized as universal or archetypal: the siren wail of a newborn baby, the evil laughter of a wicked witch, the deep growling signifying danger of an angry dog, a big cat, or a rock-crushing giant; or it may be very personal like the habitual way a particular individual laughs in joy or sobs in grief, or simply says "Good morning." Jung was the first person to document how the speech of people suffering from schizophrenia disintegrates into apparent meaninglessness while still retaining the shape of the speech patterns—the acoustic form or image—but he did not pursue this revelation further, being increasingly attracted to visual exploration. He is thought of by many as the first Art Therapist, although it might be more accurate to recognize him as the first Expressive Arts Therapist, since his process of Active Imagination can be applied to most arts modalities, including singing.

It was Wolfsohn's belief that not only could Jung's ideas on individuation and the fundamental wholeness we possess at birth be heard in the voice, but that these sounds were rooted in an impulse to act. As Wolfsohn said,

> The baby is without any inhibitions, possessed by one drive only: to still [his] hunger. [He] does not actually cry; he cries out… but as he learns to speak and become socialized, he loses much of his natural expression and becomes inhibited… By the time he is an adult, he has forgotten how to scream.[8]

Wolfsohn further believed that by accessing the full range of one's voice, one could not only achieve the natural kind of expressive wholeness found in a healthy baby, but also a return to the totality and wisdom of the soul. If the voice was to be employed as an expression of the true nature of the psyche