

It is not every day that you meet someone who really has an impact on the way you use your voice to sing or who can influence the quality of your everyday speaking voice. Madeline Poyser is, however, such a person – a holistic vocal therapist from north-west London, who specialises in helping people to find their own individual voice for all types of vocal work.

Like many others, I felt that the traditional practice of singing lessons did not unlock the key to my individual tone or indeed offer any explanation of the mental blocks created from past experiences that inhibit performance. Through a friend of a friend (the usual way one hears of innovative practitioners) I decided to try something different and invest in a musical practice that was not simply focused on scales or replicating old standards. Also I was fascinated to learn how this collaboration between East and West would operate.

The inspiration for Holistic Vocal Therapy originated from Poyser's own experiences of the traditional singing lesson, which she found to be 'too impersonal – I constantly wished I could find someone who was more hands-on and who could explain things in a way that made sense to me. I didn't feel I was producing the level of expression I was capable of...' – despite having already been in the music industry for 14 years, been signed to BMG, recorded several albums and successfully set up and run her own record label. She felt there was a need for tailor-made sessions, that would not

Open voice

Accessing your own individual voice is not as easy as you think. Madeline Poyser uses a holistic approach to break down the blocks we put in the way of our true vocal expression.

Jacqueline Harvey put herself in her hands

only provide the technical know-how of singing, but also help people to develop confidence in expressing their own unique vocals.

Naturally, being a woman of our times, her therapy emerged as an integration of Western singing practice and alternative healing techniques that focuses on the voice, but benefits the whole body to produce a sense of well being. It is a mixture of traditional vocal practice that includes familiar elements like warm-up and breathing exercises, but also uses colour visualisation and the Eastern healing technique of Reiki. Sounds like a bit of a tall order, but if you look at her theory of singing in our society it makes sense:

'Everyone should be singing as part of their natural being, but people often think that their voice is not good enough. We do not live in a society that

encourages us to sing and dance in the streets. There is a lot of judgement attached to that type of behaviour, which also helps to create the "not-good-enough" voice. People mask it to appear confident and I want to strip down the layers of masks, so that people feel good enough as they are. It is a matter of confidence. Some people try to disguise this lack of confidence in their physical body through their posture, or in other cases they may not even be aware that this is the issue that is holding them back from expressing themselves in a fully committed way.' Therefore, it makes sense to use a healing technique to help repair trauma, as well as teaching singing/song-writing skills to express creativity.

The content of each session is different each time and dependent on the client's needs, so it is difficult to explain what you may experience in your lessons. But the first one will definitely consist of a thorough consultation of your musical, physical and emotional history. Then, once it has been mutually agreed, the session may continue with a warm-up exercise, aimed at relaxing the throat as well as bringing some fun into the proceedings, followed by breathing exercises, and some vocal practice.

At the time of my second session, because I had some rather challenging voice work to present on video, she used some colour visualisations and Reiki to help me let go of some past thought patterns that could have prohibited me giving an optimum performance. This process is largely intuitive, but she is formally trained in the practice of Reiki – a spiritual healing discipline that was founded in Japan by Dr Mikao Usui, a Buddhist monk.

Based on the idea that the power to heal is within all of us and can be passed on once a person is connected with the 'universal life force energy', a practi-

ANTONIA COULLING



Madeline Poyser: 'The whole process of singing can produce vulnerability as you feel you are being judged by the audience. But you can sing or work through it and gain your power back through using various tools.'

tioner identifies their healing 'ki' and uses it to strengthen the 'ki' of others. Neither the practitioner nor client need know what the problem is as it could be physical, emotional or spiritual. When ki is strong and free, the body and mind are healthy, but if weak and blocked, either consciously or unconsciously, then the body and mind may succumb to a physical disorder or emotional imbalances.

The practitioner channels universal life-force energy to the recipient to clear blockages. She will place her hands either on or just above the body and will tend to use 12 basic positions. These positions roughly coincide with the major energy points of the body, called 'chakras' or major organs.

I had this session a couple of days before my filming and after this experience, felt a strange 'lightness' of both body and mind. It was also as if I had slotted more into myself. A very subtle calming effect that helped me to feel more relaxed and focused about the piece I had to perform. And this feeling stayed with me until I completed my piece to camera, even though I did not think at the time that it was the best piece of work I had ever performed. Vocal confidence had increased and that helped me to get through the thoughts of flight or indeed failure.

She helped me to come to terms with a key part of my pre-performance nerves that no one had ever stated before. It related to feeling vulnerable while in the act of performance itself, which in turn made me feel a loss of power. 'The whole process of singing can produce vulnerability as you feel you are being judged by the audience. But you can sing or work through it and gain your power back through using various tools.'

Rational scepticism made me wonder whether the sessions worked for me simply because I believe in the healing properties of alternative therapies and therefore might not work so well for non-believers. But, according to some of the feedback from clients, this is not the case. Poyser's sessions have had a positive response with both professional/unprofessional singers, actors, television presenters, celebrity backing singers and just about anyone who wishes to, 'unlock the creative part of themselves as opposed to regurgitating what has been done before'.

For one client, an IT consultant, who had a pitching problem, the sessions helped him to change his lifestyle. Since his sessions with her, he packed in his job in the city to start a new life that truly reflects the person that he is – he became more in tune with himself and his needs at a deeper level.

For Madeline, although some pitching problems are often related to going against your own grain in life, others can be symptomatic of past experiences and the sub-personalities that are within us. 'People often feel they can't hear themselves sing as they have often been told to shut up. But if they can get out of their own way, they are usually in tune.'

I suggested that in part at least, some vocal problems might be due to pressure put on singers to fit into the current music market. To which she passionately agreed and argued that the present system for vocal talent, 'is very ageist. It is simply not about reaching hearts through lyrics and the voice but about being very packaged. And rarely allows the artist time to develop like they used to – it's almost as if they are operating a closed shop. Singers and audiences are looking for more and are fed up with following market forces. This powerful combination can bring about change, especially with the growth of technology. It has never been so easy to record your own material and the ability to sell your music on the Internet.'

Armed with such passion, enthusiasms and commitment to help all vocal performers bring their unique gifts out into the public arena, I think there will always be a need for teachers like Madeline who support real individual expression. The days of the, 'Pop Idol' may well and truly be numbered.

Contact: Madeline Poyser on +44 (0)7956 506635 or e-mail innvoice@btopenworld.com