

Why Singing is important

Choir concerts as a medicine?

Singing improves the immune system, but listening to the same music does not have the same effect!

Does singing foster immune defence? This was the question a pilot project of employees of the Institute for Music Education at Johann Wolfgang Goethe-University, Frankfurt (Main) dealt with under the guidance of Professor Hans Günther Bastian and Dr. Gunter Kreutz, who lead the project in collaboration with the Institute of Psychology of the same university and the Deutscher Sängerbund (DSB) in Cologne.

As written in the press release of the university, the team chose an amateur church choir from Frankfurt, rehearsing the Mozart Requiem in order to check the hypothesis.

In two successive choir rehearsals, subjective and physiologic changes were recorded, once while singing, and, during the following rehearsal one week later, while listening to Mozart's Requiem.

Every experiment took 60 minutes. Quantitative comparisons were drawn beforehand and afterwards with respect to positive and negative moods and with regard to the concentration of Immunoglobulin A (indicator for immunity capability, measured taking account of the saliva flow rate) and Cortisol.

The press release says that the results show statistically significant positive changes of immune defence while singing, but NOT while hearing choir music. At the same time, the subjective moods after singing were statistically much better. Those results, which will be published in one of the next issues of the "Journal of Behavioural Medicine", support the assumption that active singing is provoking much stronger effects than simply listening to music.

In further studies, the specificity and long time effect of the short time results will have to be studied. This seems to be worthwhile, considering that 3,2 million of active singers sing in more than 60.000 choirs in Germany alone. If the indirect effects of singing on the immune defence and health can be proved, the singing activities in amateur choirs will have to be measured in future health reforming processes – this is the opinion of the university in its press release.

Source: press release of Johann Wolfgang Goethe-University Frankfurt (Main)

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Why do we care about singers ?

"Why do we care about singers? Wherein lies the power of songs? Maybe it derives from the strangeness of there being singing in the world. The note, the scale, the chords, the melodies, harmonies, arrangements, symphonies, ragas, Chinese operas, jazz, the blues; that such things should exist, that we should have discovered the magical intervals and distances that yield the poor cluster of notes, all within the span of a human hand, from which we can build our cathedrals of sound, is as alchemical a mystery as mathematics, or wine or love. Maybe the birds taught us. Maybe not. Maybe we are just creatures in search of exaltation. We don't have much of it. Our lives are not what we deserve; they are, let us agree, in many painful ways deficient. Song turns them into something else.

Song shows us a world that is worthy of our yearning, it shows us our selves as they might be, if we were worthy of the world. Five mysteries hold the keys to the unseen: the act of love, and the birth of a baby, and the contemplation of great art, and being in the presence of death or disaster, and hearing the human voice lifted in song. These are the occasions when the bolts of the universe fly open and were are given a glimpse of what is hidden; an eff on the ineffable. Glory bursts upon us such hours; the dark glory of earthquakes, the slippery wonder of new life, the radiance of singing. Music, love, life, death...."

Salman Rushdie, From "The Ground Beneath Her Feet"



Robert Schumann's Advices to Young Musicians (1854)

- The cultivation of the Ear is of the greatest importance. Endeavour early to distinguish each several tone and key. Find out the exact notes sounded by the bell, the glass, the cuckoo, etc. (1)
- Endeavour, even with a poor voice, to sing at first sight without the aid of the instrument; by these means your ear for music will constantly improve: but in case you are endowed with a good voice, do not hesitate a moment to cultivate it; considering it at the same time as the most valuable gift which heaven has granted you! (12)
- Frequently sing in choruses, especially the middle parts, this will help to make you a real musician. (43)
- Pay attention to national airs and songs of the people; they contain a vast assemblage of the finest melodies, and open to you a glimpse of the character of the different nations. (47)
- Highly esteem the Old, but take also a warm interest in the New. Be not prejudiced against names unknown to you. (51)

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