

# Happy

■ **NEVER** felt more like singing the blues? Well the good news is that singing is one of the best DIY therapies around - it can make you feel great

**ALISON FERST** discovers the healing power of the voice

■ **IN fine voice:** Susan Lever, right, has something to shout about - she wants to spread the word that talking, singing and music are the best therapy

**Pictures by  
MICHELLE  
MADDISON**

**HANDS UP** - who has cringed when they've heard the sound of their own voice taped?

So many of us are self-conscious about our voices and say we don't like the way we sound yet our voice is such an integral part of ourselves that it is like saying you don't like yourself.

Children shout, scream, laugh, cry and wail without inhibition but somewhere during the process of growing up we lose our ability to express ourselves naturally.

Once we become conscious of our voices we

**'What a difference it can make when you're happy with your voice'**

start to modulate them, think before we speak and worry about what we sound like.

Voice therapist Susan Lever knows exactly what kind of problems this can create. She confesses she grew up being afraid to express herself and then hit depression as a teenager which lasted through her early twenties.

Now Susan, 42, who has taken voice therapy groups all over the country, has moved to Middlesbrough to live with her partner and is tonight taking a voice group - all in the name of charity.

Susan is giving her services free of charge from 7-9.30pm at Whinney Banks Community Centre, Harehills Road, Middlesbrough. Anyone can go along and join in and the £3 entry fee will be donated to Anchor for the frail elderly based in North Ormesby.

"I know what a difference it can make to your life when you learn to be comfortable with your voice," Susan explains.

"These days people don't sing much or practice using their voices but if they did they could sound better. When you sing you breathe well and so start to feel relaxed.

"Singing a happy tune can lift your mood but often these days we don't feel safe to express ourselves. A century ago people used to sing as they worked all the time.

"Today people perform and others watch and listen. In Victorian times people had pianos and the family would gather round and sing for

entertainment. Now we watch people singing on the television."

Susan herself used to live with a musician who constantly told her to shut up when she sang and told her she couldn't sing properly.

"There's no such thing as being tone deaf. Everyone can sing," she points out.

Looks like there could be hope for me yet then!

"Getting in touch with my own voice was the most transforming thing of my life and if I can do it anyone can. Because it meant so much to me I really enjoy helping other people to find their voices."

Susan uses a lot of chanting and sounds in her workshops because there is no right or wrong, no need to worry about the tune, pitch or hitting the right note.

She helps people to learn to speak and sing from the abdomen, letting the sound resonate through their bodies instead of releasing it from the throat: "It feels great when you do it. Opera singers have a special glow because they do it all the

time."

Start in the bath or shower where the acoustics are good or the sound of running water drowns out your initial embarrassment, Susan advises.

"Sound vibrates through your body - it's why an opera singer can shatter a glass by hitting a particular note," she adds.

It is these vibrations which have led to the development of voice healing. By directing different vowel noises (sort of oohs and aahs) at different parts of the body, Susan heals people of stress, headaches and backaches.

She can also perform the unusual feat of uttering two notes at once which she demonstrates long and loud - a surprisingly powerful voice with seemingly very little effort.

"Learning to use your voice is about expressing yourself, having fun, getting in touch with the part of

yourself that likes to play without inhibitions."

When people first go to one of Susan's workshops, they are often shy so Susan makes a point of never singling anyone out: "We all chant and sing together and by the end of the session people often find themselves spontaneously dancing," she smiles.

"It doesn't surprise me that karaoke has become so popular because people enjoy singing and it makes you feel good."

So there's something in that old song after all - "I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony..."

In the New Year Susan is intending to set up voice workshops and therapy sessions on Teesside.

Until then anyone interested in finding out more about her work can contact Mavis Fielding on Middlesbrough 816055.

# talk

**'There's no such thing as being tone deaf - everyone can sing'**

