

Lost your voice? Finding it again may open the way to self esteem

MOST young children are completely spontaneous – they scream, cry and sing as the mood takes them.

Adults are more inhibited, and for many, singing can become an ordeal. They may squeak or merely mouth the words instead of releasing the full power of their voices.

One woman who would like to change all that – and more – is Susan Lever. She believes not only that each voice is unique, but also that it can be used to heal.

She has traded the stress of London life for a base near Guisborough and holds voice and sound healing workshops around the region.

They are aimed at freeing up repressed voices, instilling confidence and inducing

relaxation at the same time.

Her passion for sharing the power of sound comes from her own transformation. "I suffered from severe depression as a teenager and I had very little sense of myself. I always worried about what people thought of me. I lived my life doing what I considered other people wanted me to do and that never works."

She first opened herself up to sound through her experience of American Indian shamanism work.

"They use a lot of repetitive chanting, which I love. As my voice became stronger and more confident, someone suggested I go to a singing teacher."

"Then I started writing songs. They just flooded out of me, as though I had opened the doors to a repressed creativity. It was

Singing and learning to resonate vocal sound can be a form of therapy, according to a woman who holds voice workshops in the region. She spoke to **SHEILA TODD** about the benefits

an extraordinary and magical time for me.

"In Victorian times people used to sing while they worked, but with the advent of radio and television we have become a lot more passive."

"Singing used to be as natural as eating and drinking, but now the only time we sing is carols at Christmas or occasional trips to church."

She says we have forgotten to do something that is completely natural.

"People had pianos at home and would have sing-songs. Now they have televi-

sions in every room and computers and they don't come together. Singing is really bonding, and even crowds at a football match find that out."

While many therapies rely on outside objects such as crystals or oils, she says the beauty of singing is that it comes from within.

"Sound is free and everybody has his or her own voice. It appeals to all ages and when people have a taste for it, they love it and always want to do more."

She works on a lot of pure vowel sounds

and says people are amazed at how calming and beautiful they can be.

"All I am doing is using a lot of tried and tested techniques – including breathing – to help people recover their voices."

It involves relaxation and teaching yourself to let the voice come naturally from the whole body, rather than holding it tight in the throat. Learning to resonate.

"We lose the spontaneity we had as children when we grow up. In many ways we are told we are not OK, we are not good enough, and we may feel we are losing our right to speak."

"I definitely didn't think I had the right to be heard when I was depressed."

She does not believe it when people tell her they are tone deaf.

"I think a lot of children will try to copy an adult voice and it comes out all wrong. Some people are apprehensive and perhaps they aren't listening properly."

"Others make jokes about your voice and say shut up, so you no longer like to sing. The truth is if you can talk, you can sing."

When it comes to healing, she points to some simple calming, exercises which can be performed at home.

"Humming is a good way of calming yourself and it takes your mind off whatever is upsetting you. The vibrations from chanting can also have a powerful effect on the body and the mind."

"You can play with mantras, which don't have to be anything spiritual. Simply try singing positive statements and repeating them to different tunes."

"When people come to me for the day, they end up much more relaxed with each other and also start to listen more intently to what I am trying to do. It is very simple and very powerful."

She was inspired by Frankie Armstrong, a folk singer involved in the Greenham Common movement, who set up Voice-work 30 years ago.

She also travelled out to Colorado to train with the American pioneer, Jonathan Goldman, who reasons that if you can destroy using the vibrations of sound, there is no reason why you cannot heal as well.

Ms Lever has been featured on television several times and appeared on BBC1's *The Heaven and Earth Show*.

She holds workshops at Sunnyfield House, Guisborough, and on March 3 will start sessions at Hurworth Community Centre. She will also hold a holiday course in September in West Crete.

Anyone who wants more information should telephone 01287 201769 or check out the web site www.susanlever.co.uk.



LISTEN TO THE BEAT:

Suan Lever learnt about the power of sound though experiencing American Indian shamanism.