

# Singing your way out of the blues

**W**HEN we were children, we sang for joy. We yelled if we were angry and we wailed if we hurt ourselves. And yet, as adults, we rarely use a fraction of our voice. We learn not to cry or groan; we hate having to speak in public, and if for any reason we have to sing, most of us squeak like mice or simply mouth the words.

A growing band of researchers believes that by refusing to vocalise, we are missing out on a simple, free and easy way to release stress, improve our moods and even heal ourselves.

'Our voice is unique,' says Susan Lever, who teaches people how to rediscover their natural voice. 'It says so much about who we are; it's so personal that often people try to distort it.'

Lever points out that in earlier times singing was a natural part of daily life: our ancestors sang as they worked, sang as they worshipped and sang for pleasure. Nowadays, with personal stereos, television and dwindling congregations in church, most people sing only if they go to Harvest Festival or Midnight Mass — or if they have one sherry too many.

'It's a great shame,' says Lever, 'because making sound can really change your mood. If you feel low and you make happy sounds, it will, without a doubt, lift you. Your breathing will automatically

## SELF

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change and so will your physiological state. You will find you have a lot more energy, a lot more confidence and that you have a lot less stress.'

Workshops are one way to get back into tune but Susan Lever points out that anyone can get off to a rousing start at home. The prime factor is to find your natural voice and relearn how to speak and sing without strain or effort.

That involves relaxing and teaching yourself to let the voice come naturally from the whole body, rather than holding it tight in the throat. Learn to resonate. Once this happens, Lever warns, you might find some surprising side effects.

'Often it starts to release long-standing blocks and tensions,' she says. 'If you have always spoken or sung from your throat, it is probably a protection mechanism. Start singing from your heart or



■ **HUMMING** is a good way of calming yourself. If you're feeling stressed, anxious or nervous, just sit quietly and hum very gently. Feel the hum resonating through your body. Where can you feel it? Does it change if you alter the note of the hum?

■ **EXAGGERATED** yawning is ideal if you're feeling tired. We hold a lot of tension in our jaws and mouths and stretching the mouth releases tension. Give a good stretch as well to really wake up the whole body.

■ **IF YOU'RE** feeling irritable and tense, try an elongated, noisy sigh.

## Learn the harmonics of health

Chris James, the Australian workshop leader, recommends deep groaning as well to release any negative emotions. The key is to forget about being polite and 'English' and really let go.

■ **TRY** singing the vowel sounds — uuuu, ooo, ooooh, aaah, eeeeh, iiiii. Where do you feel them in your body? How do they make you feel?

■ **TAKE** every opportunity to sing.

Sing with the radio, while you're doing the housework, while you're in the bath or, even better, while you're driving in your car. Don't worry about what your voice sounds like; simply enjoy really belting it out.

■ **PLAY** with mantras. You don't need to do Omm or anything spiritual — simply try singing positive statements, repeating them with different tunes. If you're feeling tense, try singing: 'I'm calm, I'm

calm'; if you need to feel more assertive, try: 'I've got a right to be heard.'

■ **EXPERIMENT** with listening to different music and work out what effect it has on your moods. Try listening to some of the sacred chants available on tape for deep relaxation and a profound sense of peace.

your abdomen and you might find something else coming up — old grief, hurt . . .

It sounds a little far-fetched, but in comparison to the latest theories in sound healing, it becomes quite banal. Researchers now believe that sound could be the medicine of the future.

'Disease is simply part of our body vibrating out of tune,' says Jonathan Goldman, author of *Healing Sounds* (Element). 'Every organ, bone, tissue and other part of the body has a healthy resonant frequency. When that frequency alters, that part of the body vibrates out of harmony — and that is what is termed disease.'

'If it were possible to determine the correct resonant frequency for a healthy organ and then project it into that part which is diseased, the organ should return to its normal frequency and a healing should occur.'

Goldman believes that by creating sounds which are harmonious with the 'correct' frequency of the healthy

organ, we could all learn how to heal ourselves, bringing our bodies back into balance. He and other sound researchers have been focusing most of their attentions on the sacred chants of varying traditions, believing that the high-frequency harmonics which most of them share, could be having profound effects on both the mind and body.

**D**R ALFRED TOMATIS, a French physician and sound researcher, believes that Gregorian chants (such as the selection that recently took the music charts by storm) could actually have a neuro-physiological effect which charges the brain.

On researching sacred chanting around the world, he discovered that many of the chants were employing very high frequencies (around 8,000hz) which were capable of

stimulating the central nervous system and the cortex of the brain. Dr Tomatis himself says that he manages with less than four hours of sleep a night, purely as a consequence of listening to four hours a day of harmonic sounds.

Dr Mark Ryder, of the Southern Methodist University in the USA, discovered more benefits. By merely listening to music that was high in harmonic content, his subjects reduced respiration and heart rate, calming and relaxing the entire brain and body.

If you actually make the sounds yourself, the effects are even greater. I tested out the theory with Jonathan Goldman's tape, *Harmonic Journeys* (Spirit Music), sitting at my desk wide awake and insomniac late at night in a highly analytical (and somewhat sceptical) mode. I followed his instructions and joined him in toning different vowel sounds, imagining the sound coming from varying parts of the body.

It started with a deep 'uh' sound resonating at the base of the spine and moved right through the body ending with a high 'iiii' from the top of the head. Within minutes I was deeply relaxed, and it soon began to feel as though the sound was resonating me, rather than I resonating the sound. I'm not sure how long the tape lasted — I totally lost track of time — but having finished it, I went straight to bed and had the best night's sleep I've had in months.

'Sound is vibration,' says Goldman, 'and everything in the universe is in a state of vibration.' You can break a glass by matching its vibration, and bring down a bridge by stamping out a rhythm over it, so he reasons that if you can destroy with sound, then there is no reason why you cannot heal as well.

Start with the odd hum, a few rounds of Bruce Springsteen in the bath and see where it ends. You could find yourself tuning up your whole life.