

# Vox Interna

## 1. The inner voice

In every human body there is a voice. We use it all day to communicate, and sometimes to sing; most likely whilst taking a shower, or walking on the street using earplugs and singing along to our playlists. We think it sounds great, but this is not necessarily the case...

Whether singing in or out of tune, we normally sing when we are happy. And when we are happy, we do not care what the rest of the world thinks of us. But when asking a fellow human, if she or he can sing, the most likely answers are: 'Oh no, I sing like a crow', or simply: 'I can't sing', or "I was told at school to mime along to the songs we sang in concerts because I was so bad". As a result, most people keep their mouths shut when asked to sing, unless they are very happy and/or think that no one can see and hear them. In the case of singing in the shower, this is a common misunderstanding: the fact that one cannot be seen, does not imply that one cannot be heard!

Although there is a common understanding that '*Happiness makes people sing*', there is little awareness that the opposite is also true: '*Singing makes people happy*.' And the good news is, contrary to what most people believe: Everyone can sing!

This therefore creates an opportunity: We can make this world a happier place, by enabling people to sing. The 'only' thing we have to do is to reveal the *Vox Interna*, the (singing) voice inside everyone. This is the mission of Vox Interna.

## 2. We all benefit..!

How does it work?

This is going to be a bit technical, but it is proof we want...:

Scientific investigation has demonstrated that, when people sing, the hypothalamus starts to produce *oxytocin*, which then flows into the circular system. When reaching the hypophyses it diminishes the production of *ACTH*, a neurotransmitter that triggers the production of *cortisone*, also known as the *stress hormone*. At the same time, singing releases *endorphin*, alias the *happiness substance*.

In plain English: Singing makes people happier and reduces stress. In addition to this, there is substantive evidence that singing stimulates bonding, plays a role in pain relief, increases natural resistance and makes people feel more energetic.

To make this more specific, some examples of scientifically proofed benefits are presented:

- *Singing during pregnancy*: Apart from stress reduction, which is good for the general development of the child, the singing strengthens the bond between mother and child. Within 30 seconds, the heartbeat of a foetus responds to music. Evidence has been provided through playing a lullaby composed by Brahms close to the belly of a group of pregnant women;
- *Speech problems*: A well-known benefit. Singing can be used as a therapy by mitigating speech problems. The same is true by other types of psychological limitations.
- *Choir singing*: Multiple studies provide evidence of the (additional) positive effects of choir / group singing. It basically works as a catalyzer on the positive effects mentioned. At the same time, it creates social bonds and creates solidarity between people which can bridge differences among and between groups.

Though limited in quantity, the above mentioned benefits, provide a strong case for promoting singing as a part of life. Unfortunately, the opposite occurs. Where, in the past people sang in churches, at schools or even on the streets, the churches are emptying and closing, public funds for music education are being cut back and a growing level of social disfunction can be observed on the streets.

But one should not drown in pessimism; try, as did a group of Anúna Summer school singers in 2018, to produce a singing flash mob at unsuspecting places: 'Standing in a cue for an ice cream' or 'waiting for the bill in a restaurant'. Spectators really cheer up; smiles all over. And the singers...: they returned in an euphoric state to their lodgings!

This should give sufficient evidence to settle the case: Singing should return to be an integral part of the daily life of people. Therefore, mission of Vox Interna is *to bring (back) singing to 'unsuspecting' people and groups.*

### **3. Breath-taking...**

As stated before: Everyone can sing, but learning how to do so can be a breath taking experience, even more than playing an instrument. For example: when an oboist plays a 'wrong' note, it can split the double-reed, water under a valve or a deficiency in the complicated valve mechanism (although the spectator might not always realise this...). But when a singer, sings out of tune, there can only be one reason: it is the singer! It is quite personal, this type of exposure...! The singer's body is the instrument. Just the thought of it can already take one's breath away .

And yet, singing can be quite easy if one knows the double secret:

*Singing is breathing – breathing is singing.*

Singing is no more and no less than a natural expression of the breath. And controlling the breath is controlling the singing. As Michael McGlynn, artistic director of the Irish vocal group Anúna expressed it: '*You don't lift your voice by lifting your eyebrows – you steer it with your breath*'

Singing properly requires the right use of the body and an appropriate way of breathing. Actually, the natural way of standing, as we all did as a child: the head and neck correctly aligned, chest open, rib cage buoyant, enabling really effective use of the breath, as the eastern cultures have already practised for thousands of years. By singing this way, the singer connects body and mind.

For this reason, Vox Interna does not (just) promote 'singing events where people sing together', but opts for a more specific approach: reaching out to those who benefit most by this integral approach to singing. This can be directly with groups of individuals, public workshops etc. or by training the ones who have access to these groups, i.e. teachers, group leaders, workshop facilitators in other disciplines.

Whilst doing this, the approach will be: Singing is a natural process, which everyone can do and nobody should feel afraid to engage with it.

### **4. Where to start?**

#### **4.1 Catch them young!**

With limited resources, a strategic approach for reaching out to the public should be chosen. A first point of entry of Vox Interna will be the younger generation, for various reasons:

- *Open mind*: Younger people tend to be more open to new experiences than the older generation. Especially when they are younger, the psychological barriers to singing (being afraid to sing), will be less, especially when the right entry strategy is chosen;
- *Easy access*: Through approaching schools, easy access to children can be found, when singing/music will be integrated in the curriculum.

It comes as no surprise that as children we still have the ability to use our bodies well, our heads and necks are appropriately calibrated and therefore we are able to breathe freely. We have yet to fall into poor use of our bodies – it is only as we get older we gain habits of physical use that can sometimes lead to neck and back pain and therefore limitations in making full use of the breath.

Unfortunately, due to the combination of budget cutbacks and a culture change in the educational system, geared towards the pressure to perform from an academic point of view, music education has declined dramatically in the last decades. This corresponds with broader (European) sad state of affairs that music, particularly singing, is given very little priority in the formal education sector. The arts in general are considered minority subjects.

But other European countries, the Scandinavians in particular, have music schools in their respective towns and cities that children can attend as an extra-curricular activity – some are government subsidized.

As a consequence, less and less school teachers are able give music lessons and virtually no funds are available to hire specialized teachers. Therewith, music education has become a luxury good within the education system and is considered to be an impediment for academic performance. However, recent research indicates the contrary :

- Although the evidence is not very strong, most experiments with music tend to indicate a positive relation between music education and the development of intellectual skills. The problem is that the duration of the experiment was probably too short. The effect is more likely to occur when music education is given during a sustained period (36 weeks, at least one hour a week). However, this makes the experiment quite expensive;
- At the same time, this assumes that all the time at school can best be spent on training cognitive skills. However, it is questionable if (young) children really have the span of concentration for this. They probably concentrate better after some ‘energizing’ singing than after ‘another academic exercise’.

With the declining education, the musical skills of the teachers have been subject to a severe level of deterioration. This kicks of a vicious circle:

- Restricted and inferior music education leads to musically undereducated children, who, when grown up, are not able to pass through the tradition and skills;
- In the absence of domestic music, other than heard on YouTube or I-tunes, new generation hardly shows an interest in practicing it. At the same time, there is little support from the not trained teachers, who are confronted with an audience showing little interest in group singing.

Given the above mentioned elements, one of the key entries could be by training the primary school teachers, since it is there where the music could start. For this reason Vox Interna will focus on the (bachelor) careers for primary school teachers.

However, it is the primary/elementary schools that are key to the success of using music and singing as a tool for engaging creativity, learning techniques in general, good use and awareness of the physical body and good mental health.

Therefore, a programme of work in schools and with teachers facilitated by the Vox Interna Foundation would enable access to this target group. Giving the teachers confidence to sing with their class is the priority. So many teachers as with other adults say that they “cannot sing” - this is not true! With even one week of workshops with singers/facilitators there are tangible results.

#### **4.2 Opening doors...**

@ Lucy and Michael: please feel free to add (you are more expert on this) – unfortunately I did not bring the book ‘Singing in the Brain’ with me; which would be helpful.

Some people are literary ‘locked up’, many are ‘psychologically’ in different grades. As a medium term line of action, Vox Interna will explore ways to open doors through singing for those groups. Since Vox Interna has no ambition, nor the capacity, for any kind of psycho-therapy related work, its function will be restricted to adding the *group* singing component to the existing efforts of professionals in the field. Examples of this type of activities could be:

- Facilitating group singing activities in closed institutions;
- Group singing activities for individuals with limited social networks. In this context, limited could refer to both ‘knowing few people’ or ‘locked up in a narrow (cultural) network’;

Excluded, as subsidized activities by Vox Interna are workshops for existing choirs or individual singers. Although these could be facilitated by Vox Interna, these should be based on (minimum) expected full cost recovery. Any surplus from these activities will become available for achieving the goals of Vox Interna related to the groups in society who do not have access to their inner voices.

#### **4.3 Never too old...**

Simultaneously, a programme of workshops with adults is proposed, in order for them to re-introduce themselves to their bodies, their ability to breathe better and to enjoy the physical act of not only singing, but singing together with others in a shared experience. The programme can be targeted towards adults of all abilities and regardless of any experience of music training.

### **5. Obtaining resources**

Considering the above, the potential demand for Vox Interna interventions seems to be infinite. Unfortunately, resources are not. For spreading the song, musicians/facilitators are needed, a segment of the labor market that normally has to work at under average fees to make a living. When not paying these an adequate compensation, Vox Interna would be in denial of one of its basic principles: *Making music is not a luxury item, but a largely unrecognized need that adds value to the lives of mankind.* Therefore, professional music making should not be taken for granted.

Since, though being a non-profit foundation, that Vox Interna is not an organization based on volunteers (except from board membership), there is a need for fund raising. The necessary resources for the activities of Vox Interna will be obtained through:

- Income generating events;

- Private donors;
- Contributions from private sector enterprises;
- Grants from public entities and private foundations;

#### Income generating events

The first source of income generating events will be an educational programme for trained singers. For this purpose Vox Interna will closely cooperate with the education programme of the Irish vocal group Anúna. Though building on the experience of Anúna, the cooperation will *not* be exclusive from both sides. This implies that both Vox Interna and Anúna will be free to engage in independent training activities.

The educational programme will take the shape of workshops with independent singers or choirs, with which Anúna already has a sound track record over the last years. Though not exclusively facilitated by the Anúna education programme, the so-called Anúna method will be leading while delivering the programme. In this way the benefits from singing, as experienced by participants in the Anúna training programme, as described in section 2, will fully mature.

At the end of the workshops benefit concerts will be organized, of which the income, as well as any surplus on the operational costs of the workshop, will be added to the resources of Vox Interna.

#### Private donors

Vox Interna will apply to the tax authorities for the status of ‘Organization of Public Interest’ (Dutch acronym: ANBI-status). This give Dutch taxpayers a tax discount, for any donation above the general threshold (for all ANBI-type donations) of EUR 500 per annum or, in case of a periodic contribution, a direct tax discount over the full amount donated. Depending on the income level, this will range from 37% to 47% of the (annual) gift. The first source of private donors that will be explored are the (former) participants of the workshops for trained singers that will be organized by Vox Interna.

#### Private enterprise donors

In case the ANBI-status of Vox Interna will materialize, any gift provided by a private company will generate a tax discount of at least 25% of the value of the gift. During 2019 a strategy will be developed to identify prospective companies for this purpose.

To this respect, it should be noted that the motives of private companies, for donating funds range from ‘purely philanthropic’, through ‘social projection (image)’ to ‘strong visibility’ (close to marketing). At this stage, there are no strong preferences for one of these motives, as long as the spender is not involved in activities which work against the objectives of Vox Interna, or has a reputation of fraud, tax evasion, violating human rights or exclusion of segments of society.

It should be noted that, to successfully attract donations from private enterprises, a proven track record is vital for success. Though in 2019 this part of the donor market will be investigated, it is not expected that any donation will materialize before 2020.

#### Public entities and private foundations

Public entities and private foundations have the common characteristic that they tend to focus on specific types of activities. Although the antecedents of the applicant are being considered, this normally is not a key factor, as long as the proposed activity (plan) is sound. At the same time, the smaller the amount requested, the less tight the requirements and conditions will be.

For central government agencies, any grant below EUR 25.000 is governed by public regulations, which prescribe a light regime of appraisal and monitoring. For municipalities, this threshold tends to

be lower, but, in the absence of central regulations, will depend very much on the specific municipality or even department within the municipality.

As a general strategy, Vox Interna will make use of the experience of the subject of its interventions. Normally the corresponding institutions already have experience with the application of grants, and can (or even should) apply as lead of a partnership with Vox Interna.

As far as the private foundations are being concerned, there exists a wide variety of foundations and institutions who support 'cultural' activities, which would be prospective to co-finance the concert part of the workshops organized by Vox Interna.

The private foundation 'donor market' for the core activities of Vox Interna, mentioned under section 3, is still to be explored.

## 6. Budget fiscal year 2018-2019

The first fiscal year for Vox Interna starts at [DATE OF FOUNDATION] and ends on 31 December 2019. Since the foundation is in its initial stages, still exploring the span of its activities and sources of income, there is no purpose for planning beyond 2019, since this would be more speculation than based on actual experience. Based on the above mentioned initiatives, the indicative budget for the first fiscal year of Vox Interna will be:

<b><u>Income</u></b>		
<b><i>International workshop for singers – Rotterdam Feb-19</i></b>		
Singers Fee (30 x €250)		€ 7.500
Grants; concert international workshop – concert		€ 3.000
Voluntary contribution concert Feb-19		€ 1.000
	Costs	€ 9.500
<b><i>Surplus</i></b>		<b>€ 2.500</b>
<b><i>Other workshops (surplus)</i></b>		<b>€ 1.500</b>
<b><i>Private grants</i></b>		<b>€ 1.000</b>
<b><i>Private companies – gifts</i></b>		<b>P.M.</b>
<b><i>Public grants (could be channeled through lead party)</i></b>		<b>€ 10.000</b>
<b>TOTAL (net) INCOME</b>		<b>€ 15.000</b>

<b><u>Costs</u></b>		
<b><i>Teach the Teachers (+25% contribution on grant)</i></b>		<b>€ 12.500</b>
<b><i>Pilot activities other intervention areas</i></b>		<b>€ 2.000</b>
<b><i>Administrative costs</i></b>		<b>€ 500</b>
<b>TOTAL (net) INCOME</b>		<b>€ 15.000</b>

<b>RESERVE BUILDING</b>		<b>P.M.</b>
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