

***A talk given by Joan Mills at the Annual Gathering
of the Natural Voice Network:***

GIVING VOICE

An international festival and celebration of the voice in performance

A project of the Centre for Performance Research (CPR)

[Please note that I have adjusted the conclusions of this talk in the light of responses and discussions with the members present at the NVN January 2019 Annual Gathering and also following initial discussions with the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff.]

Some people see the word 'research' and assume that the CPR must be an academic research centre. But its origins were not within the Academy and its work reaches far beyond. It was founded and is independently led by practitioners who are fueled by curiosity: it is an independent organization and educational charity that encourages artistic led research via its wide-ranging programs. The CPR was established in Cardiff in 1988 and is the successor to Cardiff Laboratory Theatre, formed in 1974.

CPR is a multi-faceted arts organization, working nationally and internationally. It is based in Aberystwyth, Wales. Through its participation and presentation programs – working across a range of disciplines that include dance and theatre, installation and performance, music and multimedia projects, site specific and landscape-based events – CPR promotes emerging artists and ideas, explores the relationship of innovation to tradition and pursues (sometimes against prevailing trends and fashions) the underlying artistic and socio-political issues raised by the work.

Inscribed within every project is the desire to affect change, with the key objectives being investigation, discovery and sharing. These objectives are to enable audiences and practitioners to engage with traditional and emerging ideas, methods and theatre practices from around the world and, through this dynamic interchange, foster a vibrant and distinctive performance ecology in the UK.

The CPR has also developed a publishing imprint: *Black Mountain Press* and Richard Gough, the Artistic Director of CPR, is also the General Editor of the highly successful journal *Performance Research* (an independent, peer-reviewed journal published by Routledge Journals, Taylor & Francis Ltd for ARC, a division of the Centre for Performance Research Ltd).

Performance Research is a specialist journal that aims to promote a dynamic interchange between scholarship and practice in the expanding field of performance. Interdisciplinary in vision and international in scope, its emphasis is on contemporary performance arts within changing cultures. *Performance Research* is now published eight times a year and has just celebrated the 100th issue. One of the next the issues, 24.1, that will be published at the end of March is: 'On Song'.

Voice International

The voice projects are just one strand of CPR's work, but one of the most important, successful and enduring, having begun almost 40 years ago. They are consolidated and developed under the umbrella project *Voice International*, the aim of which is to restore the vital role of vocal expression and creativity within the performing arts and within community. Through a range of activities, organised at a number of levels, practical and theoretical, for professionals and amateur performers, individuals as well as the community, *Voice International's* aim has been to extend opportunities for all, to participate in explorations and projects that enhance and underline the significance of the expressive voice in creative life.

One such project was *Local Voices, Worlds of Song*, a programme designed to encourage the development of community choirs throughout Wales in the 1990s and early 2000's. It gave singers in the community further access to workshops by voice teachers at both a national and international level, commissioned compositions for choirs, created networking events, and performance opportunities in addition to those offered by the *Giving Voice* festival.

Giving Voice

Giving Voice is an established, recurrent, international festival that aims to advance the appreciation and understanding of the voice in performance through practical research and a celebration of its many and varied manifestations throughout time and culture. It brings together those who have an interest in the voice but who will not necessarily meet in the course of their practice: academics and practitioners; performers from a variety of disciplines; teachers of spoken voice and singing teachers; those with an experimental interest and those who favour traditional methodology; those from the world of medical knowledge of the vocal mechanism and those interested in the spiritual dimensions and healing properties of voice work. *Giving Voice* explores the voice through a series of themed meetings during which there are workshops, lecture demonstrations, discussions and performances and a symposium. *Giving Voice* attracts a wide range of participants from the performing arts but also from voice therapy, laryngology, teaching, linguistics, communication studies etc. as well as the general public.

There have been 14 editions of *Giving Voice* between 1990 to 2016. All have been collaborative events. The other organisations who have collaborated with CPR on this project include:

Chapter Arts Centre; Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama; Aberystwyth University; Teatro Era, Pontedera, Italy; Falmouth University; The Grotowski Institute and Theatr Zar, Poland.

- 1990 First explorations – Cardiff, Wales
- 1994 A Geography of the Voice 1 – Cardiff, Wales
- 1995 A Geography of the Voice 2 – Cardiff, Wales
- 1996 An Archaeology of the Voice 1 – Cardiff, Wales
- 1997 An Archaeology of the Voice 2 – Aberystwyth, Wales
- 1999 A Divinity of the Voice – Aberystwyth, Wales
- 2002 The Voice Politic – Aberystwyth & Cardiff, Wales
- 2004 Towards a Philosophy and Psychology of the Voice – Aberystwyth & Cardiff, Wales
- 2006 Myths of the Voice – Aberystwyth, Wales
- 2008 [Breath Inspiration Voice](#) – Aberystwyth, Wales
- 2009 [Harmonic Accord: Encounters Through Song](#) – Wroclaw, Poland
- 2010 [Hearken! Do you Hear An Angel?](#) – Pontedera, Italy
- 2015 [Listening Mind, Moving Voice](#) – Falmouth University, Cornwall, England
- 2016 [Voice Encounters](#) – Wroclaw, Poland

Philosophy

From the outset **Giving Voice** advanced a philosophy and in its first brochure stated:

Giving Voice works from the basis that the human voice is a vital means of expression and communication: as diverse and as subtle as all the peoples of the earth, and each individual upon it. Yet, within this richness and variety, the voice retains the ability to communicate beyond language and cultural difference. In a time when awareness of diversity may seem to produce only strife and separation, it seems more important than ever that we create moments to consider those qualities within the sounds of the voice which can allow people, from wherever they come, to enjoy both the riches of difference and the recognition and celebration of a common humanity.

What happens and when?

The festival has taken place just before or after Easter in March/ April, is approximately every two years and has ranged in length between 4 and 10 days.

The festival is usually programmed so that each day begins with a warm up then participants follow their chosen workshop/s working in depth for 4 to 5 hours. Workshops range in length from a single day to five days in length (a total of 5 hours to 40 hours of training). On each day there would be a choice of 5 to 6 workshops running in parallel, however participants follow each chosen workshop for its full length: it is about depth and not a series of 'taster' or 'pick and mix' experiences.

Some teaching may be best served by a single 5-hour introduction or might endanger the vocal health if practised for the first time for too long - for example yodeling or Inuit throat singing. However other workshops, that involve voice connections to the psyche and deep emotions or quite demanding physical engagement, need time to develop trust and confidence over four or five days. Some harmony styles of singing may work best with 30 participants, but other kinds of voice work would suffer from being experienced within a larger group than 12. Each type of teaching is carefully programmed taking these matters into account.

The overall programme is structured so that participants can buy a full festival ticket and map their workshop pathway throughout the whole festival, or book just the number of days that workshops they wish to follow involve. When they book a day or several - their tickets include: a morning group warm up, 4 to 5 hours of teaching within the workshop you chose; afternoon lecture-demonstrations and master-classes; panels and discussion sessions; the performances for that evening. On the CPR website there are examples of several past **Giving Voice** editions and it is possible to open the on-line brochures including the calendars that offer examples of this structuring.

www.thecpr.org.uk

Giving Voice is designed to allow participants to engage with the whole self through voice: viscerally: 'through belly and brain'. It is primarily focused on practice but integrates the whole intelligence and encourages practitioners to embrace reflection and analysis as well as theorists to engage with practical methodologies, so both can extend understanding and may generate new knowledge and approaches to voice in performance.

The Frame

In order to stimulate lively interdisciplinary exchange and new ways of thinking and experiencing **Giving Voice** 'frames' the individual editions of the project in a way that might inspire a surprising and poetic juxtaposition of events and approaches. If the topics are deliberately open to interpretation, yet clearly suggestive of potential interaction between disciplines, then we hope the experts in each field will be encouraged to consider their own work in a new light and the resultant events will be illuminating.

An example would be 'An Archaeology of the Voice' 1997, where keynote speakers included archaeologists and historians as well as voice practitioners, and was to bring together performers of very ancient vocal traditions of song, ritual and rites with those concerned with digging into the vocal layers of the soul and psyche, as well as to give consideration to voices across space and time and as carriers of history and biography.

Giving Voice's aims include the hope:

that from whatever perspective participants approach the voice, the interaction with others will illuminate their practice, and that the sharing of knowledge, experience and beliefs will enrich all our understandings.

Contributors and Participants

Over the first 28 years **Giving Voice** has hosted 267 groups and/or individual contributors from 47 different countries who have performed/taught workshops/given master classes/talked/ led discussions: and some of them have done all of this, and returned a number of times to the project at our invitation.

The various editions have been attended by more than 2,000 participants from at least 50 different countries and all five continents. Audience numbers are difficult to calculate but by now exceeds tens of thousands.

As one example of the international range of work offered, here is the list of contributors for the 13th edition of **Giving Voice** in Wroclaw in 2009:

Performances: Teatr Zar (Poland), Bente Kahan (Norway), PieśńKozla (Poland), Hasmik Harutyunyan (Armenia), Tempvs Fvgit (Corsica), N’Faly Kouyate (Guinea), Maisternia Pisni (Ukraine), Kitka (USA), Meredith Monk (USA), Vahdat Ensemble (Iran), Jonathan Hart Makwaia (USA), Pilpani Family (Georgia), Cuncordu de Orosei (Italy), La Kaita, Alejandro Vega, Antonio Silva and El Nene (Spain), Svetlana Spajic (Serbia), Jawaher Shofani (Palestine)

Workshops: Lalish Theater Labor (Kurdistan/Austria), TempvsFvgit... (Corsica), Hasmik Harutyunyan (Armenia), TeatrZar (Poland), Kristin Linklater (USA), N’Faly Kouyate (Guinea), Maryana Sadovska (Ukraine), Tserendaava (Mongolia) and Michael Ormiston (England:UK), Ermanna Montanari and Marco Martinelli (Italy), Meredith Monk (USA), Pilpani Family (Georgia), Cuncordu de Orosei (Italy), Nataliia Polovynka (Ukraine), Mahsa and Marjan Vahdat (Iran), Jonathan Hart Makwaia (USA)

Presentations: Nataliia Polovynka (Ukraine), Tomek Rodowicz (Poland), Joan Mills (Wales:UK) and Electa Behrens (USA), Ermanna Montanari, Marco Martinelli and Luigi Ceccarelli (Italy), Dashdorjin Tserendaava (Mongolia) and Michael Ormiston (England:UK), Nigar Hasib and Shamal Amin (Kurdistan/Austria), Caroline Bithell (England:UK), Martino Corimbi (Italy) and Bożena Muszkalska (Poland), Mher Navoyan (Armenia), Jaroslaw Fret (Poland), Erik Hillestad (Norway), Bragod (Wales:UK)

Legacy and Effect

Giving Voice generates the opportunity for voice practitioners to meet or reconnect and develop future collaboration and exchange within **Giving Voice**, but also beyond it.

As examples the working lives of Frankie Armstrong (singer of traditional and folk songs and teacher of voice) and Caroline Bithell (Head of Music and Professor of Ethnomusicology, University of Manchester), have been greatly influenced by the experiences encountered at **Giving Voice**. Frankie is the first to acknowledge the many opportunities that opened up to her because of her frequent participation in editions of **Giving Voice** over the years. Frankie has been a key speaker, performer, workshop leader, presenter and taken part in panel discussions at **Giving Voice**, but also, has been a participant learning from other disciplines, forms of singing, cultures and her many meetings with other voice enthusiasts has led to unexpected collaborations and invitations.

Caroline has also been a frequent contributor and participant at **Giving Voice**. She was invited to **Giving Voice** initially because of our interest in her research into Corsican polyphony and, through her informative introduction, and touched by her enthusiasm, we then determined to raise funds to bring the renowned *A Filetta* group to Wales to both perform and teach at the next **Giving Voice**. The workshop was immediately oversubscribed and many of those eager to learn more, were the other contributors, the other performers and teachers, who even though experts in their own field, were hungry for this rare experience.

None of us who took part in that workshop will ever forget how it felt to learn some fragments of the stunning repertoire of these Corsican singers. Being in that circle of exquisite sound for a moment where it feels as if the song sings itself into life, rather than is sung: this changes something in the soul forever. Such experiences are surely vocal alchemy.

Giving Voice's history is a complex interwoven family tree of legacy and influence; many projects have developed from its source, whether small scale and personal such as the subsequent working together of Cicely Berry and Kristin Linklater after the very first **Giving Voice** or a recent collaboration to make new work between MoFo (Anne-Helena Mclean) and Jason Singh after the 13th Falmouth based edition, or after being hosted several times at **Giving Voice**, Theatre Zar's initiation of their own voice project focused on ancient forms of harmony: *Voice Encounters*, based in Wroclaw, Poland.

These new, often cross-disciplinary and inter-cultural initiatives are frequently and generously acknowledged by the practitioners involved to have been conceived during editions of **Giving**

Voice and are the creative proof that the project has been successfully fulfilling its hopes and initial objectives over the past 28 years.

Georgian Connections

As a final example of the work of the CPR and **Giving Voice** it is interesting to trace why NVN members may be singing a range of traditional songs from Georgia with their choirs. Some will be using Edisher Garakanidze's collection, a singers' workbook: *99 Georgian Songs*. If you have read my preface, as editor of this collection, you will already know the background to how an interest in Georgian song was fostered in Wales, and how its popularity spread throughout the UK, and that the organisation that initiated this work was the CPR.

It was not initially through a voice project as it happens, but through a conference and events exploring *Performance Food and Cookery*, that Richard Gough, the director of CPR, invited two ethnomusicologists from the Folk Conservatoire in Tbilisi to Cardiff. With their collaboration Richard organised a Georgian Supper for the delegates to end the event, with a menu made up of many courses; Edisher and his colleague Joseph Jordania were to be the toast masters (*tamada*) and they asked me to gather 25 volunteers to become a Georgian choir that learned the 18 Georgian songs needed to accompany the toasts. During the teaching (a weekend plus five evenings) I, and my assorted singing friends and 11 of my students from RWCMD who agreed to take this on, all fell in love with the songs, and everything we learned about the people and culture. Among those 25 people were Venice Manley, Helen Chadwick, Frank Rozelaar-Green and others who would eventually lead community choirs. Many of these subsequently helped arrange workshops and residencies for Edisher and other Georgians throughout the rest of the UK. We all began to include the songs in our choir repertoires and Helen and Venice of course went on to create one of the first UK Georgian choirs Maspindzeli. Through **Giving Voice**, the CPR hosted Edisher and Joseph number of times to speak and to teach intensive workshops, as well as Edisher's ensemble, Mtiebi and other Georgians including Nino Tsitsishvili, Nato Zumbadze, Irakli Garakanidze; later Edisher's son Gigi; later still Magda Kevlishvili, Gigi's widow.

At **Giving Voice** in 1996, the growing popularity of Georgian singing in the UK prompted Edisher to ask the CPR's help in preparing and publishing a workbook for singers of Georgian songs in the west to help them develop the songs they had first learned in workshops and to answer some of the many questions he was always asked about Georgian traditions and culture. As many of you will know he was never to complete that project as tragically, he died in an accident, together with his wife and daughter, in 1998. But he and I had already completed the plan for the book; his introduction was complete and translated, and I had helped edit it. We had selected some, but not all, of the songs to be included. After Edisher's death, Richard Gough and I were determined to finish the book for him.

With help from Joseph, *Mtiebi*, Edisher's remaining family and many friends, and colleagues as well as all his friends in the UK, the CPR was gradually able to complete the book, to be published in 2004 through the CPR's own imprint: *Black Mountain Press*. The royalties went to Gigi, Edisher's son until his equally untimely death in 2012, and now go to Edisher's remaining family: Magda his daughter-in-law and his grandson Iliia. We created a revised and expanded edition in 2015 that sold out and has just been reprinted at the beginning of 2019. Over the past fourteen years CPR has supplied the book to choirs and individuals over the world. This is indicative of Edisher's wonderful legacy; but also, of the far-reaching influence of the CPR and its enduring commitment to voice work both within the *Giving Voice* project and beyond.

Thirty Years On

The 30th anniversary of *Giving Voice* will be in 2020 and the CPR will be marking this with a small celebration and pre-meeting that will lead up to a special edition of the *Giving Voice* project in 2021 that will give an opportunity to survey the developments in voice work over the past 30 years whilst looking to current and future developments in the field. As it is also the 25th anniversary of the Natural Voice Network in 2020 and the NVN will be holding its own celebration that year, the CPR would invite representatives of NVN to that pre-meeting in 2020 and would be delighted if NVN members will also become involved in the April 2021 project.

The project began in Cardiff where 6 of the 14 editions took place with the generous and much valued support of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. In 2020/21 we would very much like the opportunity to return to the RWCMD and have had some discussion with the new Head of the College with the hope that there might be the possibility of RWCMD sharing and hosting these events as well as engaging with the CPR's plans for further voice development and research.

The themes of the 2021 edition of *Giving Voice* would not only celebrate the development of natural voice practice and networking, but also: highlight the most significant developments within all kinds of voice work in performance over the past thirty years; explore understandings opened up to us by voice research illuminated through neuroscience, medicine and psychology; focus on the inspiration found through innovative voice focused performances and digital access to world voices. As always this would be carried out through innovative practical workshops, performances and demonstrations, open to all but vital to those of us who use and teach voice both in the community and professionally.

Joan Mills: Director, Voice International and *Giving Voice* for the CPR January 2019

To see some examples of past *Giving Voice* programmes and how the editions are structured, either click on the links in the list of editions on Page 3 above or follow the link to: www.thecpr.org.uk and then go into Projects: *Giving Voice* is first: click on the editions that will open up. You can also see an illustrated history of all CPR's work in the archive section.