

# *The Contemplayful Singing Cookbook: Recipes for Co-Enchantment*

Let's put this conceptual tool kit into practice. Below are some contemplayful singing recipes and tips. I hope you adapt and evolve them for your own culture and community.

## **The Contemplayful Uke**

I must begin by testifying to the role the ukulele plays in my contemplayful journey. As you'll see, this songbook is extremely uke friendly. The uke has become integral to my path as a contemplayful musician. While it is only one tool amongst many that a musician may employ, it has proven ideal for my purposes. The uke is the Swiss army knife of the music world: compact, versatile and empowering. It exemplifies the credo: "Simple in means and rich in ends." Playing uke while singing facilitates insight into song structure. It deepens understanding of harmony and rhythm. The uke is affordable, portable, charming and easy to learn. At the same time it's a subtle instrument that rewards a lifetime of study. I've become a uketivist, a uketopian activist.

Here's how the uke catalyzes wonderstanding and presonance in my contemplayful practice:

First, by learning the chords to accompany a song or chant, I deepen my understanding and memory of that song. For the most part I play simple rhythmic accompaniments. The most basic strum, confidently played, jumpstarts the co-enchantment of singers and listeners. When I teach a song, by playing chords on the uke I conjure a harmonic scaffolding that facilitates learning. Once the song is flowing, we'll often drop the uke accompaniment and continue singing accapella. As the musical scaffolding disappears, the sudden stark beauty of acapella singing gives an aesthetic thrill.

A few specifics about the type of uke I employ: I play a tenor uke, the largest standard uke. The slightly larger fretboard suits my hand size. I replace the high G 4th string on my uke with a low G string, an octave lower. That low G note matches the lowest note I typically sing. The extended melodic range this low G gives is useful for teaching and elucidating vocal lines. The keys and chord progressions used throughout this songbook have been selected to be uke friendly.

Typically in our singing sessions only one or two ukes are played at any time. The aim is for the uke to inform and energize our vocal expression, never to overshadow it. In some contexts we convene contemplayful ukulele dojos. In this context most singers play uke. Here, uke craft comes more to the fore. We take the time to clarify a song's chord progression. Even in this uke-centric context we take care to moderate the intensity of our mighty collective strum.

If, upon considering this testimonial, you want to take up the uke, I recommend this solid starter uke: the [Kmise 26 inch mahogany tenor uke \(Model: KMU26T\)](#). It comes in a package with a tuner and gig bag for around \$60. This uke also comes with a shoulder strap, which I highly recommend. It's empowering and freeing to strap on your uke!

There's a wide variety of uke resources available on the internet. My favorite online instructor is Stu Fuchs. He offers teaching videos for both beginners and advanced players on his "[Ukulele Zen](#)" [youtube channel](#). His warm and lucid presentations

elegantly convey both ukulele technique and a spirit of easygoing excellence. Highly recommended.

### **Dyadic Contemplaydates: Weaving Nets of Souls**

*“The smallest indivisible human unit is two people, not one; one is a fiction. From such nets of souls societies, the social world, human life springs.” -Tony Kushner*

One-to-one relationships—dyads—are a microcosm of culture. Consensual dyads provide an optimal context for co-enchantment and interspection. A dyadic singing dojo can activate the song seed game in its most basic and profound form. Here’s a description of a deep and simple dyadic contemplaydate.

Syd and Lee meet weekly for a 45 minute contemplaydate. A typical session is structured as follows:

They start by warming up with a drone/improvisation duet. They select a vocal pitch they both can comfortably sustain, then sing it in unison in long resonant tones. After three breaths cycles of this, Syd continues sounding a steady drone while Lee explores harmony, dissonance and melodies, improvising against Syd’s steady reference point. After a minute or so, they switch roles: Lee tones a drone while Syd freely vocalizes.

Next they explore leadership and followership in song collaboration. Lee selects and shapes the first song, “Amazing Grace.” Lee sets the key, tempo, and dynamics to play with; decides whether or not to employ improvisation and/or harmonization, and whether to sing sitting, standing, or in motion. Lee also chooses what instrumental accompaniment (if any) to give the song. Today Lee asks Syd to play chords on the uke as they sing. Finally, Lee determines how to end the song. They sing a final reprise of the chorus acapella, followed by three silent breaths to savor the experience. In all this crafting, Syd acts as Lee’s avid assistant and sounding board, all in the span of 10 to 15 minutes. They then reflect on their shared experience, each saying what they enjoyed, learned and perhaps struggled with.

Then they reverse roles: Syd chooses and “conducts” the second song, “This Land Is Your Land”, sung in a blues style, while Lee plays backing uke and harmonizes on the chorus in accord with Syd’s preferences.

Next they take up a third song that they both find alluring. This week they choose to play with a mashup medley of “I’ll Fly Away/Laid My Burden Down” They collaborate as equals; shaping the song as partners, spontaneously creating a musical expression they both shape in the moment.

Lee and Syd conclude with a few minutes of interspection on their contemplaydate. They share a hug and part ways, each brimming with ideas and an afterglow of presonance.

For more insight into the ecology of creative dyads, read Joshua Shenk’s excellent [\*Powers of Two: Finding the Essence of Innovation in Creative Pairs\*](#).

### **The Double Dyad Dojo Date**

If you and your dyadic partner want to play “doubles”, invite two friends who are game for a singing adventure to a double

dyad dojo date. A double dyad is a pair of dyads, a total of four singers. Your invitees might already sing together, or you can convene with two singers who haven't yet met. The basic structure is like the dyadic date outlined above. In a double dyad, one or two of the singers can play an apprentice or understudy role, perhaps learning to sing in two-part harmony or to play chords on the uke. Double dyads also offer opportunities to practice the give and take of co-mentoring. No matter what different skill levels we are relating from, there's always so much to learn from each other. A wise zen saying observes: "A teacher is a student who teaches to continue their studies."

## **The Singing Compass**

A singing compass is a contemplayground for curious singers. The format has evolved to nourish consensual singing and listening. The recipe below gives the basic framework and protocol for a singing compass. If you adapt and evolve this form to suit your own vocal community, let us know how it goes.

The optimal context for a singing compass is an open, uncluttered room. The higher the ceiling the better. A 6 foot diameter circle can comfortably hold 8 to 12 singers. A 12 ft circle can accommodate 20+ singers. Singers are encouraged to sing while standing. If chairs are desired by some, it's best if they are simple, movable straight backed seats, set just outside the perimeter of the circle.

Recipe for a contemplayful singing compass:

Ingredients:

\*4 to 20 singers.

\*1 to 4 ukuleles (optional)

\*15 minutes to 2 hrs of dedicated time

\*Environment: An open, sparsely furnished room suitably sized for the number of singers participating. A room with warm acoustics and a wood or carpeted floor. A dance or yoga space can work well. If possible, set up simple movable chairs at the room's periphery. What size space? For 12 singers, an 8 foot diameter space is about right. A singing compass can also convene outdoors, though an outdoor space can be challenging to focus and hear clearly in unless in some way it's protected or contained.

Social Architecture:

Singers divide into 4 subgroups. Each subgroup clusters at a cardinal point in the circle: North, South, East and West. These zones in the circle don't need to literally conform to geographic coordinates. They're just names that come in handy when giving guidance. You can use physical attributes of the room to set the compass up. For instance, if a wall of the room has more windows or light, you could call that the south. With some songs, these four groups of singers might be arranged in terms of bass, tenor, alto, and soprano vocal parts, but that is not the main purpose of this arrangement.

If there's a big group (relative to the size of the space), singers may stand shoulder to shoulder on the compass perimeter. In smaller groups (or larger rooms) include open territory between the four groups. A tighter circle can feel more intimate and conducive to group listening. On the other hand, allowing space between the subgroups can allow singers to move about freely and explore the soundscape being generated.

Here's a good song for introducing the singing compass to new participants:

“[Ocean Breath](#)” by Helen Greenspan is a meditative, easily learned call and response song with just a few words. (You can find it in the “Rounds” chapter of *The Contemplative Songbook*.) Start by teaching folks to sing it in unison. Then North and South singers become callers, while East and West play the responders. After a few rounds of that, singers can choose to circumambulate the compass, each at their own pace. Towards the center of the compass is the zone in which interaction between singers is more direct. The center can also be a great point in which to just listen, absorbing the overall forest of sound being generated. At the sounding of a chime, all singers return to their original points for a final unison singing of the song, followed by 3 shared breaths in silence. (I encourage a moment of silence after most songs. There's a saying: “The silence after Mozart is also Mozart.”)

The co-empowering leadership protocol detailed above is well applied here. Each song can have one or more designated facilitator. Facilitators introduce songs, model adventurous participation, and guide the tempo and dynamics. Mentorship and/or assistance is available for anyone who wants to learn to lead. Co-mentoring is the norm in all singing compass collaborations.

### **The Empowered Round Robin: Culturing Contemplative Leadership**

The empowered round robin adapts the collaborative spirit and structure of the singing dojo to a community format. It's an inclusive and adaptable structure that fosters consensual musicianship and skill sharing. A good size for an Empowered round robin is 10 to 20 singers. For larger singing gatherings, it may work better to go with a “curated” singalong/impromptu choir. Groups smaller than 10 can work too. The smaller the group, the greater the exposure for each participant. That can be a plus or a minus depending on what participants are looking for.

Round robins are a common format for singing gatherings: a group of singers and musicians gather in a circle. Participants take turns requesting a song for the group to sing, often selecting out of a common songbook. Empowered round robins (ERRs) are structured to encourage a more intentional and learningful culture of collaboration. This is the empowering part of the format: When a singer selects a song, they become the group's creative director for 5 to 10 minutes. (Let participants feel free to pass if they don't wish to lead a song, for whatever reason.) Whatever the leader calls for, the group is game for, within reason and capability! If the leader/facilitator asks everyone to stand and stomp rhythmically as we sing, we make it so. Facilitators are also encouraged to play with song dynamics and tempo, or to request a specific instrumental accompaniment from musicians in the circle. The more everyone is gung ho to participate in this spirit, the deeper the magic that unfolds.

The ERR cultivates the same spirit of attunement practiced in dyadic singing dates. A difference is that in the ERR, we don't assume that everyone shares a common culture or confidence in their song leadership skills. ERRs are most fruitful when the conveners offer support and guidance, both modeling and mentoring contemplative leadership. Make a standing offer to back up any participant who feels anxious about leading a song. Cultivating a collaborative atmosphere is key. It's fun and empowering when participants partner up to co-teach songs. In some ERRs co-leading is the norm. It's also fine for a song leader/facilitator to give only basic directions about how they want the group to sing their song.

To maximize the co-enchantment level when leading a song at an ERR, know your song, backwards and forwards. Have a clear vision of how you intend to cast a co-enchantment. Enlist allies, other musicians who are wise to your game plan. Co-enchantment is born of the fire and focus that we musicians bring to our song casting. When you confidently conjure and cast a song spell, you galvanize others to develop that ability too. Hosts of the ERR are stewards and benefactors of the evening. Sometimes in a larger public ERR it works to use a “sign up” protocol, with a specific number of song leading “slots” available for sign up, and an emcee holding the evening together. An ERR that meets regularly can employ a process of supportively

acculturating prospective song leaders, asking for a preview of their song. This is offered in a spirit of co-mentorship. It can be a treat to warm up your song in a supportive “green room.”

### **Conclusion**

The cultivation of contemplative relationships and dojos is an infinite game. There’s always more to learn and propagate. To further your inquiry, visit our website: [Contemplative.com](http://Contemplative.com). You’ll find pdf samples from the songbook and other useful resources.

Follow this link to read an online version of this essay which contains helpful links that expand on the themes touched on here: [tinyurl.com/7apggg](http://tinyurl.com/7apggg).

If you’d like to add your voice to (and stay updated with) our consensual co-enchanting contemplative conspiracy, drop me an email: Craig Green <[seedsofharmony@gmail.com](mailto:seedsofharmony@gmail.com)>