

Contemplayful Singing: The Craft of Co-Enchantment

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What is contemplayful singing? And what's the craft of co-enchantment?

To contemplay is to contemplate playfully, to inquire, practice, improvise and engage in life with provocative wonderment. There are many ways to contemplay. You can practice contemplayful juggling, gardening, quilting or dancing. This essay offers an invitation into (and overview of) the vision and practice of contemplayful singing. It also is meant as an introduction to *The Contemplayful Songbook*.

We co-enchant when we mingle imaginations through creative expression. Contemplayful co-enchantment is a convivial craft. Friends who contemplay together are contemplaymates. Contemplaymates practice co-enchantment in consensual cohorts. A contemplayful singing cohort consists of 2 to 12 contemplaymates who collaborate in raising resonant voices and attuning attentive ears.

Contemplayful singers play with paradox: We cultivate disciplined spontaneity. We encourage each other to sing with confident vulnerability. We balance easygoing excellence with serious whimsy. In harmonizing opposites we foster both our personal and cultural evolution. As Krista Tippett observes: "In life and society, wisdom emerges precisely in those moments when we have to hold seemingly opposing realities in a creative tension and interplay: power and frailty, birth and death, pain and hope, beauty and brokenness, mystery and conviction, calm and fierceness, mine and yours."

Here, Sinead O'Connor muses on how we can unify our opposites by singing:

It's no accident that the voice is placed where it is, right between the head and the heart... The voice is halfway between the heavens and the earth—constantly grounding us to the earth at times then guiding our path up out of it at other times... Song and chant places us in the "between"—between heart and head, between the beyond and the here-and-now—pulling us in two directions. In this unity of opposites lies its healing powers.

How can we realize this union of opposites? This question is key to the craft of co-enchantment. Singers co-enchant when they mingle imaginations and voices, bridging self and other, expression and reception, visionary heights and emotional depths. Later in this essay I'll present some recipes for contemplayful co-enchantment. To convey both the spirit and form of these recipes, let me introduce some contemplayful concepts:

A Contemplayful Vocabulary

"Uttering a word is like striking a note on the keyboard of the imagination." -Ludwig Wittgenstein

Eight seed concepts articulate the vision and practice of contemplayful singing. I offer brief definitions of them below. In the pages that follow, they're more fully elaborated. This contemplayful vocabulary has grown over years of musical experimenting and conversation. These terms help us describe and refine our craft. They're essential notes on our

keyboards of imaginations.

1. Contemplay: To engage in contemplative play.
2. Consensuality: The practice/experience of feeling, thinking and acting in consort with others.
3. Presonance: Presence joined with resonance; a dynamic attunement of bodies, hearts and minds.
4. Co-Enchantment: A communion of imaginations and intentions, an uplifting mutuality generated by learning and singing together.
5. Interspection: A joint reflection, shared by two or more collaborators, on the patterns, purposes and perceptions that shape their relationship.
6. The Song Seed Game: The propagation of co-enchantment and wonderstanding through contemplayful singing.
7. Singing Dojo: A community of singers who cultivate consensual co-enchantment.
8. Mugician: A musical magician, or a magical musician; a player of the Song Seed Game.

Here's a fuller exploration of these seed concepts:

Contemplay

The word "Contemplay" is a fusion of "contemplate" and "play." To contemplay is to harmonize action and reflection, depth and levity, spontaneity and deliberation.

"Contemplay" branches into a family of related words, including:

- *Contemplaying - "We spent several fruitful hours contemplaying the agenda for our annual retreat."
- *Contemplayful - "I'm feeling contemplayful this morning. Let's grab our ukes and head to the river!"
- *Contemplayer - "Sue is such a dedicated contemplayer. She inspires me to up my game."
- *Contemplaymate - "He and I have been contemplaymates for years."
- *Contemplaydate - "We meet every Wednesday night for a contemplaydate."
- *Contemplayground - "The singing dojo is our contemplayground."

Consensuality

Much emphasis is given these days to the importance of "consent," both in a legal sense and as a relationship ethic. In musing on consent, I consider the overlapping meanings of three related words: consent, consensus, and consensual:

Con-sent, verb:

1. give permission for something to happen.

etymology: from Latin consentire, from con- 'together' + sentire 'feel.'

(To consent is to "feel together.")

Con-sen-sus, noun:

1. general agreement: UNANIMITY

etymology: from Latin consentire, from con- 'together' + sentire 'feel.'

"Consent" and "consensus" mingle in the word "consensual":

Con-sen-su-al, adjective:

1. relating to or involving consent or consensus.

Notice how the Latin root "sentire" is embedded in many words:

Consenting... Sentient... Sentiment... Sentinel... Scent... Sense... Sensitive... Sensible... Sensual.

"*Sentire*" conveys a sense of consciousness, of awareness. Likewise "consent" and "consensus" imply mutual understanding, a shared sensibility, a shared reality.

Consent and the spirit of consensuality are fundamental to all forms of social play amongst equals. A game flourishes when players consent to act in accord with the game's rules, boundaries and spirit. We can consider conversations also as consensual games (at least some of the time). Every culture has its own rules and rhythms of conversation. (Note: Games and conversations in which one or more players participate unwillingly or half-heartedly aren't fully consensual.) Consensuality is more often implicit (i.e. unspoken, based on tradition or habit) than explicit (negotiated). Implicit consensuality works fine when one is operating within a familiar status quo. When we're breaking new ground, navigating a crisis, or growing a new culture, we need consensual clarity, mutuality about our terms of engagement. To grow consensuality is to grow a culture.

Presonance

Presonance is a hybrid word: presence + resonance. Consider each of these terms on its own:

"Presence" is a quality of wholehearted awareness and engagement that manifests when a person is focused, curious and engaged. (In a related vein, educators at MIT have developed a practice of social sensemaking and changemaking that they refer to as "Presencing." Otto Scharmer writes: "*When moving into the state of presencing, perception begins to happen from a future possibility that depends on us to come into reality.*" Learn more at the website of the Presencing Institute: www.presencing.org)

"Resonance" holds both a physical and psychological meaning. When you sing, the vibrations of your vocal cords resonate in your body. From there the sound emerges into the world, where it may further resonate in the environment. When we sing together, we experience the resonance of our voices in unison and harmony. Beyond this physical resonance, singing evokes emotional and imaginative resonances. When we experience such resonance in song, we enjoy a communion of voices, hearts and minds. As lyricist Yip Harburg observed: "Words make you think a thought. Music makes you feel a feeling. A song makes you feel a thought."

Psychologists use the term "**positivity resonance**" to describe the rejuvenating rapport people generate when actively attuned to each other. Positivity resonance grows when we consensually engage in work, play or conversation. It's key to fruitful teamwork and collaboration.

Think of a human being as a musical instrument. Each of us has unique timbres, and an innate capacity to resonate, to contain and give forth music. We play and are played by each other, sometimes roughly or inconsiderately, other times with great sensitivity. Young children are easily played by others, by life. They readily resonate with awe, delight and/or dismay at life's everyday wonders and tragedies. As we become adults (adulterated?) our capacity to resonate can diminish. We protect ourselves in the armor of conformity and/or indifference. We're simultaneously wary of being

played and hungry to be played. People flock to spectacles like sporting events and concerts to shed their armor for a while. In these designated zones we resonate and empathize freely with strong emotions. We feel we're participating in a great story or song. Such resonance fulfills a basic human need. Lack of resonance can lead to depression and/or apathy.

So, resonance is an interpersonal attunement that emerges from and sustains interpersonal alignment. It emerges most consistently in consensual relationships and teams, when participants are "all in."

Resonance begins within. We start by going "all in" with ourselves. A contemplative singer is dedicated first and foremost to raising their own resonance. As drummer Mickey Hart observed: "As a musician the idea is to uplift your own spirit, because if you don't uplift *your* spirit, you won't be able to lift anyone *else's*."

Co-Enchantment

Co-Enchantment is the mingling of hearts, minds and imaginations that transpires in spirited social singing. The roots of the word "enchant" illuminate this meaning:

en-chant: from Latin *incantare*, from *in-* "upon, into" + *cantare* "to sing"

Several dictionary definitions of enchant are also apropos:

- 1: to influence by or as if by charms and incantation
- 2: to attract and move deeply: rouse to ecstatic admiration
- 3: fill (someone) with great delight; charm.

Co-enchantment confers all these benefits. There are many forms of co-enchantment. Devotional singers may generate an effervescent exuberant co-enchantment, while liturgical co-enchanters might cultivate a subtle serene rapture.

Co-enchanting friends foster singtimacy (sing + intimacy).

Interspection

Interspection bridges between the terms "introspection" and "extrospection":

"Introspection" is the examination or observation of one's own mental and emotional processes.

"Extrospection" is defined as: examination or observation of what is outside oneself: other people and one's environment.

"Interspection" occurs when two or more collaborators describe and reflect on the dynamics and patterns that characterize their relationship. We might practice interspection in romantic, familial, and/or working relationships.

A useful adjective form is "interspective": "Kris and I shared a great interspective conversation about our working relationship."

An interspective conversation seeks mutual understanding and co-empowerment. Blame and evasion are incompatible with interspecting. Mutual good will and honesty are foundational to introspection. (At the same time, the interspective

exploration of patterns of blaming and/or evasion can yield great benefit.)

Interspection is both a science--a way of studying the ecology of communication--and a practical skill. By developing our capacity for interspective conversation, we grow our ability to negotiate and transcend differences of tastes and understandings. This increases our capacity for full-on collaboration and co-enchantment. Brene Brown describes a conversational practice called “rumbling” that offers useful tools and insights that can enhance the practice of interspection. Check out her short blog post, “Let’s Rumble”: brenebrown.com/blog/2019/05/01/lets-rumble/

Singing Dojo

The word “dojo” comes from Japan. In the U.S., “dojo” usually refers to a martial arts school or studio. In Japan, the word has broader and deeper meanings. Dojo literally means both “place of training” and “place of awakening.” Aikido master Richard Strozzi-Heckler writes:

In traditional Japanese culture there are many kinds of dojos: martial arts dojos, meditation dojos, tea ceremony dojos, for example. In these dojos, students practice a specific art together under the direction of a qualified teacher. While the students learn and gain competency in a discourse or craft, they also build the foundation for a moral, ethical, and spiritual life. (From [The Leadership Dojo](#).)

In the same spirit, Gaku Homma, founder of the Denver Aikido Dojo wrote: *“I believe that learning how to share, understand, help, trust, forgive, and learn from each other is the original educational ideal for the martial arts.”*

With this understanding of dojo, we can consider chanting monks, college acapella groups and barbershop quartets as different kinds of singing dojos, each perpetuating its own culture of co-enchantment. Singing dojos come in many shapes and sizes: intimate duos, large inclusive cohorts, and everything in between. Whatever the size or context, a contemplative singing dojo provides a consensual environment for playing the song seed game. Years of experimenting with contemplative singing practices have shaped evolution of a singing dojo we call the singing compass. The format and precepts of a singing compass are described in the “Contemplative Cookbook.”

The Song Seed Game

The term “song seed game” is a play on the “Glass Bead Game,” an art/science/religion described in Hermann Hesse’s novel of the same name. The Glass Bead Game is described as an open-ended, ever-growing interplay of ideas and principles, an integration of scientific, aesthetic, mathematical and musical forms. Players of the Glass Bead Game seek truth, and beauty, not victory. John Crowley describes it as “a game played more as music is played than as a sport is played, a game that players spend a lifetime learning and yearning to excel in, but in which they can excel only by cooperating, not competing: you triumph at the Glass Bead Game only insofar as other players do too.” In the same spirit, players of the song seed game generate co-enlightening co-enchanting by singing, teaching, learning and creating together.

Poets and visionaries have long advocated living life in a spirit of open ending inquiry and mutual-illumination. Here’s some invocations:

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*
-T. S. Eliot "Little Gidding"

"All questions of religion and ethics are really questions as to what are optimal game rules." -Alan Watts

"We are all bundles of potential that manifest only in relationship. Thus, when we're in good relationships, based on a generosity of spirit and not 'what's in it for me' we discover new potentials and create new potentials together. The narrow sense of self, where we focus only on our needs, keeps us all from realizing new potentials. So life is all about relationships which then gift us with new discoveries. Being in good relationships is the only way to release this energy of life, which always wants to move toward the new and does so with great flair and abundance." -Margaret Wheatley

"Questions aren't transient means to get to better answers... Answers and solutions are transient means to help us ask better questions." - Daniel Christian Wahl

In the song seed game, contemplative singing is our vital vessel of creative inquiry, of co-enchantment.

Mugician

Music is a form of magic, a way of eliciting states of consciousness. Music evokes mood and emotion, attunes hearts, minds and imaginations. A haunting air or ardent anthem can stir the soul of an individual, a community or a nation. Musing on the magic of music has led me to discover the term "mugician." A mugician is a musical magician who conjures feelings, thoughts and relationships with song. I myself am a freelance mugician. Songs are my spells and incantations. My ukulele is my magic wand. Mugicians co-conspire in singing dojos. There they partake in the sacrament of learning together, propagating haunting harmonies and communal epiphanies. A community of mugicians is a co-enchanting coven.

Weaving It All Together

These 8 seed concepts coalesce in a statement like: "In our contemplative singing dojo, mugicians play the song seed game of consensual co-enchantment. We grow in resonance through our vocal interplay and eager interspection."

Clarifying questions spring from these fertile concepts, furthering our contemplative co-evolution. Hopeful questions like: How can we strengthen our consensuality? What co-enchantments might we cast in this urgent hour? How might we propagate singing dojos and proliferate the song seed game? Such questions hold a vital relevance at this crucial moment in humankind's unfolding. The machine of civilization accelerates relentlessly towards a reckoning with the limits of its growth addiction. Mainstream culture generates a ceaseless torrent of games and enchantments that entrance and infatuate the alienated masses. In this context contemplative mugicians propagate singing cultures that liberate imaginations, that bond all contemplative players in illuminating mutual enjoyment. In this way we sow the seeds of the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible.

For detailed contemplative singing recipes and provocations, follow this link to “A Contemplative Singing Cookbook”:
tinyurl.com/wglmhr7