

## Learning to Sing: The Practice of Creativity

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*“What makes your heart sing?”* Receiving this icebreaker question at a workshop, I reflected that singing (literally) makes my heart sing. Growing up, I sang in school and church choruses and at home with my sister. As an adult singing by myself and with others brought me joy. With that seed planted, I pursued this creative outlet.



Fortunately, I found a school and teacher in San Francisco that offered weekly group classes and began my singing practice. In *The Life We Are Given*, George Leonard and Michael Murphy define practice as *“an activity that, for all its benefits, is done on a regular basis primarily for its own sake, because it is the path upon which you walk.”* They further describe creativity as *“a natural human state”* and that the *“ability to create, to put together the stuff of existence in novel ways, is limitless.”*

My weekly singing classes followed a structure that began with an opening warm-up, a series of breathing exercises and vocal *“stretches.”* We sang scales on with piano accompaniment and moved on to songs, ranging from *“Happy Birthday”* to the Beatles and Pretenders. With all the demands and distractions of modern life, class became an hour to listen, attune and experience the present moment. With my fellow students, under our teacher’s guidance, we created sounds that were unique to that time and place.

Along with the changing of the seasons, the *“Learn to Sing”* class series progressed from levels 1 to 4. The number of students progressively decreased, and, building on the foundation, we learned more advanced exercises and techniques. In addition to group singing, students brought in solo material to present and receive feedback—and opportunities for more practice. In the safety of the class we stretched our comfort zones.

Some students had performance goals related to taking classes. While practicing for its own sake, I extended my range and improved my tone. Beyond technique, I often felt transported by combining my voice with others. Singer and musician Brian Eno captures this sentiment, *“When you sing with a group of people, you learn how to subsume yourself into a group consciousness because a capella singing is all about the immersion of the self into the community. That’s one of the great feelings – to stop being me for a little while and to become us. That way lies empathy, the great social virtue.”*

This synchronization or *“entrainment,”* described by George Leonard in *The Silent Pulse*, *“is so ubiquitous, in fact, that, as with the air we breathe, we hardly notice it.”* We can look for and nurture

entrainment experiences in our connections with others. Like group singing, the shared *"two step"* and other ITP kata movements and field created during transformational imaging and meditation are regular opportunities. We start with noticing and cultivate conditions for creativity through practice. What makes your heart sing and how can you make this a part of the path on which you walk?