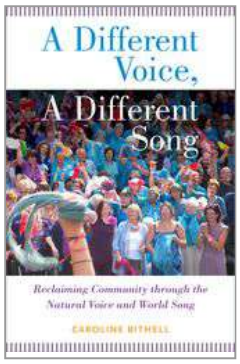

A Different Voice, A Different Song: Reclaiming Community through the Natural Voice and World Song
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Print publication date: 2014
Print ISBN-13: 9780199354542
Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: October 2014
DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199354542.001.0001

Natural Voice Practitioners and Their Journeys

Histories and Connections

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DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199354542.003.0004

Abstract and Keywords

Combining analytical commentary, historical contextualisation, and oral history, chapter 3 explores the diverse journeys that have led individual practitioners to the natural voice fold. First, the reader is acquainted with the different experiences and insights that have fed into Frankie Armstrong's distinctive brand of voice work. Further reference to the musical and professional backgrounds of a representative selection of practitioners based in the United Kingdom reveals how the movement has incorporated perspectives and values from a variety of musical worlds while also being influenced by the sociopolitical currents with which some of its more established members were associated in the 1970s and 1980s. Here, brief forays are made into the realms of folk revival, experimental theatre, community music, social work, the women's movement, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, circle dance, summer camps, and alternative therapies. The Natural Voice Practitioners' Network emerges as a contemporary community of practice.

Keywords: Natural Voice Practitioners' Network, Frankie Armstrong, folk revival, experimental theatre, community music, circle dance, cummer camp, alternative therapy, community of practice

A Gathering of the Natural Voice Clan

January 2010 is marked by the heaviest snowfall Britain has seen for many years, and South Yorkshire is no exception. Wortley Hall sits majestic and secure on its twenty-six-acre estate, surrounded by formal gardens and picturesque woodland covered in a blanket of white stretching as far as the eye can see,

silently awaiting the arrival of the next party of guests. From all corners of the British Isles and beyond, we make our way towards the beacon of light and the warm welcome we know we will find at the end of our journey. Trains are delayed and cancelled; some set off but grind to a halt in a Narnia-like land we can barely see through the whirling flakes of snow that fall ever thicker and faster. Taxis lose their way and drivers lose their nerve when they find the usual route to the hall closed. The lane that eventually brings us to the gates is still just about passable.

Apart from a few brave diners who will emerge, ghostlike, from the snowy wastes to partake of the Sunday lunchtime carvery, we have the house to ourselves and soon take possession of what are now familiar haunts: the lounge, dining rooms, library, garden room, conference rooms, ballroom, the Henry Collins Room, and the Stuart Charnley Room. The opulence of the setting belies the more humble environments to which we are more accustomed. The well-appointed rooms are lavishly fitted out in neoclassical style, with fluted Corinthian columns and pilasters made of light stone or green marble, ornate cornices and architraves, and ceilings heavy with embellished plasterwork. Vast fireplaces, mirrors, and chandeliers complement oak panelling and heavy **(p.70)** wooden doors and shutters, with their decorative mouldings and reliefs. The rooms intended for relaxation are tastefully furnished; their generously proportioned windows look onto Italianate gardens whose well-maintained lawns and beds—asleep for now beneath a crystalline quilt—are studded with fountains, statues, and topiaries.

Wortley Hall, with its multiple staircases and warren of passageways, and still unexplored nooks and crannies, would make the perfect setting for a murder mystery weekend or a live game of Cluedo. We, however, have other things on our minds: we are here for the NVPN Annual Gathering. We assemble in the ballroom for the welcome session and a preview of the programme of activities for the next three days, drawn up with the help of the “wants” and “offers” noted on members’ booking forms. Options include a range of singing workshops and song-swaps, together with practical and discussion-based workshops on a variety of topics, including song-writing, improvisation, conducting, developing leadership skills, working with different target groups (e.g. children, adults with learning difficulties), and the practicalities of establishing and maintaining choirs. There are also optional early morning chant and yoga sessions, post-breakfast warm-ups, evening singing sessions for the whole group (at which songs, often new, original compositions, are taught by different teachers), and a singing walk. From time to time there are spontaneous flash-mob performances as smaller groups take their place on the main imperial staircase to entertain the listeners gathered in the hall below. On Saturday night, the ballroom is transformed for an exuberant cabaret-style party and awed silence alternates with joyful hilarity as all manner of performing talents emerge. Those who have

energy to spare after an action-packed day take up residence in the bar, where they continue to construct ever more elaborate harmonies late into the night.

Given the fundamental principles embraced by many in the NVPN, it seems entirely fitting that for the past sixty years Wortley Hall—formerly the ancestral home of the Wharncliffe family, who had made their fortune from the coal mining industry—has been co-owned by the trade unions, the Labour Party, and the co-operative movement. Following extensive renovations that rescued the building from its semi-derelict state, the hall was reopened in 1951 as an educational and recreational centre, thereby restoring the fruits of their toil to the people. It is for this reason that some of the main function rooms are now named after a political figure or a specific union. We gather for breakfast beneath a plaque that reads: “This Dining-Room was endowed by the Fire Brigades Union 1952. Knowledge is Power, and Knowledge in the minds of Working Men and Women, is Power in the hands of those who will change the World.” For many of us, the time we spend here is a highlight of the year—an opportunity to catch up with friends and colleagues, refresh repertoires, and seek help with specific problems encountered in our own work. Above all, the annual gathering reminds us of the power of song to change lives. **(p.71)**

Fast forward two years: the 2012 gathering reflects some of the ways in which the network has continued to evolve. This year we are joined by special guest teacher, Kathy Bullock, who is a professor of music at Berea College in Kentucky. She is also an inspirational gospel singer and workshop leader, and over the next three days she will take us on an uplifting and informative journey through the African American singing tradition. The ease with which the singers pick up the parts and words of the songs she brings, without recourse to either scores or word sheets, is testimony to their impressive aural skills, while the ecstatic heights reached by more than eighty of us singing and improvising together are revelatory of the strong sense of community that has built up over the years and into which those new to the network are now drawn (see video tracks 03.01–03.03).

Other workshops offered during the weekend are illuminating in different ways. A session focusing on “failsafe” songs is an interesting indication of the type and range of repertoire that might be found in a natural voice choir, as are the song-swap sessions where volunteers take turns teaching the parts to favourite songs that they wish to pass on to fellow choir leaders. The songs that emerge include original compositions, quick-and-easy rounds, songs from a host of foreign lands, and a healthy number of English folk songs. Other sessions on singing in hospitals and hospices and on working with people with dementia reflect the growing interest in using singing in health settings.

The tables on which attendees display items for sale and leaflets advertising future events seem fuller than ever. The delights on offer this year include books and CDs by Frankie Armstrong and songbooks and teaching CDs featuring original compositions by other NVPN members, including Alison Burns, Nick Prater, Helen Yeomans, Kirsty Martin, Polly Bolton, and Pauline Down. There are also CDs made by choirs directed by some of the practitioners attending the gathering, and these offer intriguing clues to the lives of individual choirs. Hot off the press is *Lilizela!* by Rough Diamonds, one of several choirs directed by Hilary Davies. The predominance of South African songs in this choir's repertoire is explained by the fact that this 24-strong ensemble was specially formed for a trip to South Africa in 2008. There, the ensemble worked with the Diamond Choir, established by a group of mine workers from the Cullinan Diamond Mine near Pretoria who two years previously had accepted an invitation to visit Hilary's choirs in the United Kingdom. Profits from the sale of the CD will support HIV/AIDS programmes and community projects in the township that is home to the Diamond Choir. This CD therefore points to the practical links that are increasingly being forged between British community choirs and local communities elsewhere in the world.

Possible dates for this year's diary suggested by the colourful array of flyers include "Carry It On", a training, support, and networking weekend at Kinnersley Castle led by Frankie Armstrong, Rowena Whitehead, and Pauline Down; "Leading a Community Choir—Starting Out Training", a day workshop **(p.72)** in London led by Gitika Partington; a songwriting weekend at Oak Barn in Shropshire, led by Polly Bolton, Sue Harris, and Gitika Partington, with poet Gill McEvoy; "Sing Folk", another weekend at Oak Barn where Polly Bolton will teach her own arrangements of traditional British folk songs together with vocal ornamentation techniques; a series of weekend courses led by Maddy Prior, Rose Kemp, Abbie Lathe, and others at Stones Barn, Maddy's venue in Cumbria; a songwriting weekend with Helen Chadwick at Hawkwood College in the Cotswolds; "The Alchemy of Song", a three-day residential course in songwriting, arranging, and improvisation led by Nick Prater and his daughter Susie at Holycombe House in Warwickshire; "Rise Up Singing", a week-long summer camp on Dartmoor whose portfolio of teachers includes Helen Yeomans and Roxane Smith; a series of events led by David Burbidge under the auspices of his Lakeland Voice project, including a four-day singing walk along Hadrian's Wall, a folk carols weekend, and a harmony singing week on the Scottish island of Jura; "Sing Out on Kos", a weeklong Greek island singing holiday led by Dave and Liz Stewart; and "Singing in the Olive Lands", another singing holiday in Turkey led by Rowena Whitehead.

The presence of Kathy Bullock as this year's special guest and the recent appointment of a design team for a brand new NVPN website are two indicators of the healthy financial and organisational base the NVPN now enjoys. Fifty-five new members have joined in the past year, and a quarter of the eighty-odd

practitioners lucky enough to have secured a place at this year's gathering are here for the first time. One thing that has changed little is the gender balance: our company includes only ten men. The number of younger faces, meanwhile, offers reassurance that the future of the network is secure.

The physical journey that brings us together for these few days may—as in that snowbound January of 2010—have its share of challenges and diversions. We start from different places, travelling by different means; for some, the journey may be comparatively short and direct but for others it can be protracted, unpredictable, or circuitous. What of the longer journey each has taken to get to this place in his or her life? How did these disparate individuals, with their many talents and enthusiasms, varied experiences, unusual generosity, and seemingly boundless energy, find their way to the NVPN clan?

The Roads That Lead to the Natural Voice

In this chapter we delve deeper into the world of the voice practitioners and choir leaders who have gathered under and around the natural voice banner in the United Kingdom. Alongside a predominance of British-born teachers who (to varying degrees) draw on songs from many different musical cultures, we meet others who have grown up elsewhere in the world and specialise in teaching songs and techniques from their native musical traditions. Almost **(p.73)** all of those featured are members of the NVPN. Several were among its founding members. Others have a looser affiliation and are also members of other professional bodies or networks; in this case they may not use "natural voice practitioner" as their primary identification. Finally, there are representatives from a wider pool of UK-based community music practitioners who may not be formally affiliated with the NVPN but are nonetheless part of a recognisable culture that we might imagine as a series of intersecting networks with many points of contact and modes of communication. They, too, are known to many of the singers in choirs run by NVPN members who attend their workshops or come into contact with them at larger singing events.

As we travel through this landscape we will pass a series of landmarks that serve as anchors or signposts and we will pause to listen to the tales they have to tell. We will also stumble on hidden clearings where people arriving from different directions exchange insights and visions as well as songs. By the time we reach the end of our journey through this chapter, we will have a better understanding of not only the shared experiences that brought this particular band of travellers together but also the historical context of the natural voice scene in the United Kingdom and the different musical, social, and political currents that have informed its philosophy and practice. We begin, however, with the seminal journey taken by Frankie Armstrong (Figure 3.1) (see web figure 03.01).

Frankie’s Singing Journey

By what route, then, did Frankie arrive at the convictions and insights that form the bedrock of her inimitable brand of voice work, whose influence is today felt not only across the length and breadth of the British Isles but also in parts of Australia, North America, and the European mainland? A brief survey of some of the most relevant milestones in her life will help to explain how her work has been informed in equal measure by her passion for traditional singing styles, her fascination with the way in which free use of the voice can enhance personal well being and strengthen community spirit, her understanding of pedagogical methods that are nurturing and enabling, and her broader engagement with a variety of sociopolitical movements.[1]

Figure 3.1 Frankie Armstrong at the Natural Voice Practitioners’ Network annual gathering, Wortley Hall, Sheffield, January 2011.

Source: Photo courtesy of Caroline Bithell.

Frankie’s musical journey began in the late 1950s with an attraction to skiffle. She first performed in public in 1957 with the Stort Valley Skiffle Group (based in Hertfordshire), which subsequently changed its name to the Ceilidh Singers as its repertoire shifted towards folk music. She became an avid listener to now-legendary blues and folk singers and was “transfixed by the rawness and directness” of their music:

> In my teens I loved classical music and singing, Elvis, Little Richard, Fats Domino and also the great Broadway musicals. But something profound happened **(p.74)** when I first heard the early blues singers, the chain gang songs of the Southern Penitentiaries and the mountain songs of the Carter Family, and the political songs of Woody Guthrie.
>
> (Armstrong 2004: 21)

She also listened to The Weavers, and in 1963 she was at the Royal Albert Hall when Pete Seeger's voice rang out from the stage, proclaiming: "Everyone can sing!" Soon she was working with the leading lights of the British folk revival. She talks of her "own personal voice workshop" beginning when she started to sing with Louis Killen, who encouraged her to listen to source singers, in particular singers from the Gypsy and Traveller communities. As a result, she says, "I changed my whole style of singing completely" (interview 2008). Most notably, she began to explore the chest voice that she had never used up to that point.[2] Her greatest influence from the folk world—"the person who really spoke to my heart and soul"—was A. L. ("Bert") Lloyd (interview 2008). It was his album *Folk Music of Bulgaria*, released by Topic Records in 1964, that introduced her to Bulgarian singing. "I wore it nearly thin," she recalls, listening to it over and over in her tiny bedsit and trying to reproduce "that glorious sound" with her own voice (interview 2008; 2004: 21). When she visited Bert **(p. 75)** at his home in Greenwich, he would play her extracts of field recordings he had made in different parts of Eastern Europe.

It was in 1964, too, that Frankie began performing professionally as a folksinger and joined what became known as the Critics Group. During the group's weekly meetings at the house of Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, Frankie was introduced to more recordings featuring vocal styles from different parts of the world. As a member of the Critics Group, she took part in several theatre pieces, recordings, and radio productions, often using approaches derived from the work of Russian actor and director Constantin Stanislavski (who was an important influence on Ewan MacColl). Ewan also gave his apprentices reading lists that included titles from anthropology, social history, political thought, and drama theory, as well as works on folk songs and traditional cultures, and these would inspire regular debates. Frankie considers her time with the group to have been an important part of her education, vocal and otherwise.

Among other noteworthy influences, she cites Hans Fried, who worked at Collet's record shop in Shaftesbury Avenue. She describes how she would go to the shop to buy the latest Watersons record, for example, and Hans would say, "Frankie, listen to this!" It was there that she heard a UNESCO recording of Georgian polyphony—"I just thought it was absolutely stunning," she recalls—and had her first taste of Mongolian overtone singing (interview 2008). Recognising her passion for unusual vocal styles, other friends and colleagues brought her recordings they thought might interest her. She found further treasures on her travels. When she began running workshops in Sweden in the late 1970s, for example, some of her trainees gave her recordings of Tuvan singers "and various other strange and wonderful styles from right across the Soviet Union" (interview 2008). In this way she accumulated an extensive collection that she still dips into to play to participants in her workshops.

Frankie describes the continued development of her own vocal quality at this time as “very much trial and error” (1997: 46). As she had done with Bert Lloyd’s record of Bulgarian singing, she would spend hours experimenting on her own, trying to fathom out how to reproduce the voices she heard on the various recordings that fell into her hands. She attributes the intensity with which she applied herself to these vocal experiments in part to the loss of her eyesight (she would be registered blind in 1975), which gave her “a ferocious capacity to attend to the unending range of expression of which [the voice] is capable” (2000: 68). Her visual impairment also, of course, precluded the use of scores, but in many ways this is beside the point. Her attention was focused first and foremost on matters of timbre, placement, and ornamental technique—sonic dimensions that are critical to establishing vocal identities and rendering performances culturally “authentic” but that elude being captured in written form.

As she was developing her career as a folk singer, Frankie was also accumulating many other skills that would add important dimensions to her **(p. 76)** approach to voice work when she later began to lead singing groups and voice workshops for amateur and aspiring singers. The deterioration of her eyesight in her teenage years had thwarted her childhood ambition to become an artist and forced her to rethink her future, and she had trained as a social worker. In the early 1970s, she helped to set up the Co-operative Training Services and discovered a fascination with training, and more specifically with role play and simulation. Exploring with fellow social workers issues they were faced with in their work, she learnt many techniques that she would later use in her work with novice singers, including the value of constructive feedback: it was, she observes, “a constant challenge for us to find ways of being honest which were not judgemental or rejecting and collusive, and that gave useful, respectful feedback” (1992: 75). Later, she also began teaching Assertiveness Training and further honed her skills in evaluation, team development, and group training as part of becoming an Action Research worker.

A major turning point in allowing Frankie to make a direct connection between the vocal and the therapeutic was her meeting with American singer, folklorist, and collector Ethel Raim (founder of The Pennywhistlers). An initial invitation to perform at the Mariposa Folk Festival in Canada in 1972 had led to a return visit to North America the following summer. This time, Frankie combined an appearance at the Philadelphia Folk Festival with visits to drug projects around the United States, supported by a Travel Study Award from the Ford Foundation.[3] On her first evening in Philadelphia, she found herself dining out with Ethel. “My cup was overflowing,” she recalls. “We adored each other from that first meeting” (1992: 81–82). Ethel had conducted research in Eastern Europe and was at the centre of the Balkan music scene in the United States, having launched her first voice classes in Philadelphia in 1967 before going on to establish her Vocal Workshop in New York in 1969. Frankie had her first taste

of the way Ethel worked when she attended an all-women evening class in New York's Greenwich Village:

> I guess it was the singer in me that revelled in the sounds we made and songs we learnt, while the social worker in me observed with delight the changes that came over individuals in the group. As a group, too, we quickly developed a sense of support and collective identity. Though I had no idea at the time, this was the experience that would eventually change the direction of my life.
>
> (Armstrong 1992: 85)

She was struck by the effect of this singing on the other members of the group:

> It was very obvious to me as a social worker, group worker, that people went out bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, even if they'd come in dragged off the New York subway pretty bedraggled.…You could actually see people's *physicality* change.
>
> (interview 2008)

(p.77)

Another thing she found interesting was "to hear, see what happened to women when they found the bigger, peasanty voice". "So right from the beginning," she reflects, "it was…the musical, the social, and the psychological elements that intrigued me and that excited me" (interview 2008). From Ethel, then, Frankie acquired not only a repertory of Balkan songs, together with specific techniques for achieving the so-called open-throated style that is widely used in Eastern European singing, but also an insight into the way in which this choice of musical material functioned in combination with a broader teaching ethic to produce such a dramatic effect on the group's vocal attainment. Ethel's method was notable, she observes, for its "constant encouragement, rather than discouragement". At this point, with a decade's experience as a social worker behind her, Frankie was able to recognise "what a potent tool this way of working with the voice was for building individual confidence and for creating group support and cohesion" (1997: 46).

Back in London after a further summer in America, during which she had been able to attend Ethel's daily Balkan song workshops at Sweets Mill Music Camp, Frankie enthused about her experience to her friend Shirley Peters, who ran the Singers Club, and Shirley responded with the suggestion that Frankie should lead an Ethel-type session.[4] On her most recent visit, with Ethel's permission, Frankie had "recorded a goodly number of these songs and so returned to London with three or four cassettes marked 'Ethel'" (1992: 104–105). These were the songs she taught that first night (in 1975) to members of the Singers

Club, complete with Ethel-style warm ups. Her fellow singers immediately wanted more, and what had been intended as a one-off experiment developed into a weekly group. Frankie gradually added more diverse material drawn from her ever-expanding collection of traditional music recordings and, as news of her work spread, she was invited to lead workshops in different parts of the country.

At the same time, her political engagement opened up a wider range of performance opportunities, and she now appeared regularly at events sponsored by the women's movement and CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament). She wrote her own songs for these and other causes close to her heart, some (like those of Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and the young Bob Dylan) inspired by contemporary events, such as the encirclement of the Greenham Cruise Missile Base by the Women's Peace Camp in 1982.[5] Now she was using her voice not simply to entertain but to speak out, spread a message, and uplift and inspire. It was in the context of these political happenings that some of those who would later find their way to the NVPN first encountered Frankie.

At some point, Frankie's reputation in Britain shifted (as she describes it) from "performer" to "singing person". She was receiving invitations to run workshops not only for folk festivals and theatre companies but also for women's groups, community centres, psychiatric hospitals, day centres, and disability groups. "That," she explains, "was where I cut my teeth....I started **(p.78)** working across a much broader base in terms of doing the voice workshops than I would have done had I just stayed in the folk music scene" (interview 2008). In 1985, she made the decision to leave social work and become a full-time professional singer and voice worker, a step that coincided with her first invitation to Australia to give both concerts and workshops. There, she met her future husband and co-worker, Darien Pritchard, a massage trainer and Feldenkrais practitioner. In response to demand from a growing number of people who had been inspired by Frankie's voice workshops and wished to lead singing groups of their own using a similar approach, she and Darien established their residential Voice Training and Resources Week. The first training week took place in the United Kingdom in 1988 and, using Kinnersley Castle in Herefordshire as its base, the training became established as an annual event.[6] The seeds of the NVPN as a formal body took root at a party-cum-reunion held at Kinnersley Castle in 1995 to celebrate Frankie's birthday, where the majority of guests were active voice practitioners who had already trained with her. The unanimous feeling that "we must do this again" led to the establishment of an annual Kinnersley reunion, which later functioned as the annual gathering of the NVPN until the expansion of the network forced a move to a larger venue. The NVPN was officially constituted, and its mission statement formulated, in 2000.

Frankie and Darien's week-long residential courses for voice practitioners and workshop leaders continue to act as an important training ground for new recruits.[7] Although originally intended for people who had already taken part in

one or more of Frankie’s shorter voice workshops, the courses now attract participants from a range of professions, including teachers, community musicians, drama therapists, and actors. Some also come from overseas, especially from Australia, where Frankie continues to work for part of the year, and from America, where many know of her work through her involvement with the Voice and Speech Trainers Association (VASTA), of which she is an honorary member. She has also taught at the Central School of Speech and Drama and the National Theatre Studio in London, and she continues to teach on a number of theatre courses during her annual visits to Australia, including those run by the National Institute for the Dramatic Arts in Sydney and the Victorian College for the Arts in Melbourne.[8]

Meetings with Voice Practitioners: Contexts and Continuities

Frankie’s career, then, offers an instructive indication of the diverse strands that are woven together to form the complex and dynamic web of philosophies, ideologies, experiences, influences, initiatives, and actions that I set out to explore in these pages. A number of key ingredients may be extrapolated from Frankie’s story as recounted above: a fascination with the unexplored **(p.79)** potential of the human voice; an interest in English folk music leading to the discovery of folk music from other parts of the world; an insight into the effect of vocal liberation on the body and emotions; a combination of musical acumen and skills gained from experience in social work and counselling; a commitment to the principles of accessibility, inclusivity, and personal empowerment; interactions with the world of theatre; involvement in a variety of social and political movements, especially the women’s and peace movements; a process of building skills and knowledge through what would be referred to in contemporary education-speak as “self-directed learning”; and finally, the part played by key mentors, life-changing encounters, and other eureka-like moments of discovery and understanding. It should at this point be clear how these various ingredients became part of Frankie’s own practice and, in turn, fed into the philosophy and working principles of the NVPN outlined in chapter 2.

Perhaps not surprisingly, many of these same ingredients are to be found in the life and work stories of other practitioners, in several of which Frankie herself now features as a key mentor. When I interviewed Sarah Harman, for example, she began by enumerating four different strands that had fed into her own work with the voice—the folk tradition, the classical tradition, theatre, and political activism. In some cases, practitioners-to-be did not initially set out on a musical career, but happened, as if by chance, on experiences that held the seeds of their future calling. For others, their musical career took a different turn when they discovered an affinity with the natural voice aesthetic. Some of those drawn into the same orbit brought to it new kinds of knowledge and skills that enriched the ever-expanding field of practice now associated with natural voice work, broadly defined. In this part of the chapter, then, I propose to unpack further dimensions of certain of these ingredients—conceived from this point on as “connections”—

and consider at greater length the properties that made them so well matched to the natural voice endeavour, while also illustrating their relevance as stages in the individual journeys of other voice workers and pioneers. What follows is therefore a combination of analytical commentary, historical contextualisation, and oral history. My primary source for the latter is a set of semi-structured narrative interviews carried out between 2007 and 2012, supplemented where appropriate by quotations from personal websites and other writings. The voices of many of those to whom the reader is introduced here will be heard again in the course of the descriptions, analyses, and debates that are the subject of later chapters.[9]

Musical Lives

By this point, some readers may well have detected a countercultural streak running through the natural voice world as I have depicted it. I begin, **(p.80)** therefore, with a word of caution. It may be the case that the average NVPN member will not have the kind of focused musical background that we might associate with professional performers, conductors, or music teachers—excelling at instrumental lessons at school, singing in youth choirs or playing in orchestras, studying music at a university or conservatoire, and then perhaps gaining a diploma in performance, composition, or teaching—although, as we shall see, some have followed precisely this path. For the rest, this does not mean that they are lacking in either musicality or skill. However they have arrived there, a significant number of NVPN members now sustain busy lives as professional performers, music educators, or music therapists, alongside running community choirs or other dedicated singing groups, such as a mother and baby group or a Singing for the Brain group (the latter in association with the Alzheimer's Society). Some run their own music-related organisations; others maintain a private practice as a vocal coach. A surprising number have published original compositions and arrangements. Statements made by some practitioners themselves about their lack of formal training or advanced qualifications in "music" often mask a wealth of musical experience and competency and can therefore be misleading.

Gitika Partington's account of her musical background offers an interesting insight into the kind of rich and eventful musical journey that can exist in parallel with the conventional classical path (Partington 2001; http://gitikapartington.com/, acc. July 6, 2013). Gitika grew up in a working-class mining community in Lancashire, in a family of self-taught brass players, pianists, and choral singers. As The Partington Family Singers, she and her parents and siblings performed at community events, their repertoire ranging from American protest songs to four-part sacred music; among her memories of this time is a full-length concert that the family gave at Wigan's main concert hall when she was only ten years old. At school, however, she was not among the elite orchestral players who were considered the "real" musicians and so felt excluded from the world of "proper" music. An important formative experience

came when, during her pre-university gap year, she studied meditation at an ashram in India, where the hours devoted to dancing reinforced her feeling for "the necessary link between music and dance". At university in London, she led weekly dance sessions at which she taught simple songs and dances from different parts of the world. Finding other musical activities closed to her because she had not, as she puts it, "climbed up the 'Examination Grades' ladder", she joined a rock band and began to write her own songs in a variety of styles using a four-track recording machine ("So I had no use for traditional notation," she explains). She earned a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in performance arts, to which she later added a Licentiate of the Guildhall School of Music (LGSM) diploma in jazz, a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) in secondary teaching (specialising in music), and a Master of Arts (MA) degree in choral education. She also completed Estill Voice Training levels 1–3. **(p.81)** As well as working as a choral animateur for the British Federation of Young Choirs, she has delivered numerous long-term projects in schools, including her work for the Sing Up Vocal Force initiative, and she runs in-service training in singing for local education authorities and music services. This is all in addition to having undertaken (many years ago) one of Frankie's voice practitioner training weeks and having attended a host of workshops devoted to different genres and styles—from Georgian and Bulgarian, through gospel and shape note, to doo-wop and jazz. She has also published two volumes of her own pop arrangements (*Sing Pop A Cappella: Book 1* and *Sing Pop A Cappella: Book 2*) and is co-editor, with Ali Burns, of *Community Voiceworks* in Oxford University Press's Voiceworks series. Clearly, this is the profile of an accomplished musician whose training and experience is just as rigorous and valid as that of someone who has followed the more conventional (and quite possibly less varied) route of a strictly classical education.

The Folk Connection

Like Frankie, several practitioners have one foot in the folk world, and some played a prominent part in the English folk revival of the 1960s and 1970s. Sue Harris, who is also an accomplished hammered dulcimer player, has from the early 1970s been a familiar presence on the folk scene, performing and recording as a duo with John Kirkpatrick and playing in revival bands, such as the Albion Country Band. Touring around folk festivals in the early days gave her the opportunity to hear a lot of traditional singers—people who were "part of the unbroken tradition" rather than the revival (interview 2009). It was also through travelling to sessions in different parts of the country that Sue first crossed paths with Frankie and other folk singers who are now part of the natural voice network. Janet Russell, a later arrival on the folk circuit, made her mark in the 1980s with her work on Scottish traditional music and her own topical songs relating to women's issues. She continues to perform and record both as a solo artist and with the politically engaged *a cappella* group Sisters Unlimited and the newly formed JigJaw. The political commitment that is evident in her folk-

related work carries over into her work with community choirs, in particular the East Lancs Clarion Community Choir. Other NVPN members who balance active recording and performance careers as folk musicians with directing community choirs include Yvette Staelens (founder member of the Roots Quartet, with which she performed from 1984),[10] Kate Barfield (also an accomplished fiddle player, who has performed and recorded with the Boat Band since 1989), and the late Sarah Morgan (a member of the *a cappella* trio Craig Morgan Robson, whose varied folk career spanned more than thirty years).[11]

Polly Bolton also started out as a folk singer in the early 1960s and in 1970 began performing professionally with the acoustic folk-rock band Dando Shaft **(p.82)** (while also studying for a degree in zoology). She went on to work with a host of folk and jazz luminaries, including Bert Jansch, Ashley Hutchings, Kevin Dempsey, Alan Stivell, the Albion Band, and Show of Hands. Like Frankie, Polly cites Bulgarian music as an early discovery that came through her folk connections, recalling how John Martyn "turned us on to Bulgaria" by playing Bulgarian records when his musician friends came to visit. Attending one of Frankie's workshops turned out to be a major turning point for Polly. It was, she says, "the most wonderful day I'd ever spent in my entire life". An important dimension, she explains, was the effect of group harmony singing: as a solo performer, she'd never experienced "that fantastic feeling of singing with loads of other people". She came away thinking "I might have a bash at doing this" and then embarked on "a very, very steep learning curve of feeling that it was everyone's right to sing and wanting to help empower people to find their voices". "I'm *so* grateful to Frankie," she concludes. "She's an absolute inspiration....I can't *imagine* what my life would be like had I not gone down that road" (interview 2009).

It is perhaps natural that working with songs from the British oral tradition should, for some at least, have led to an interest in songs from the oral traditions of other nations. The ethos of folk music as "roots" music (as opposed to the commercialised variety that has become part of the music industry) is also well matched to the natural voice philosophy that "anyone can sing". Source singers—and indeed, many revival singers—do not, as a rule, have formal music qualifications, and few have undertaken any kind of classical voice training. In the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, the message of Pete Seeger and other musical missionaries in the United States—promulgated in publications like the *People's Songs Bulletin* and *Sing Out!* as well as in the camps, rallies, clubs, and coffee houses where they performed and met their public face-to-face—was that anyone could pick up a guitar or banjo and sing. In this context, the voice was principally a vehicle for telling a story and spreading a message, not a carefully refined instrument to be judged on its aesthetic merits or its mastery of "technique". And when Pete Seeger got the crowds singing, he did so without having trained as a conductor. The songs themselves typically had accessible

choruses that invited participation in the form of singing along, and they were meant for sharing.

Here it is worth recalling Walt Whitman's notion (expounded in the *Broadway Journal* in 1845) that if Americans were to build a morally responsible society, they would have to replace the courtly traditions of European "art-singing" with an aesthetic that subordinated style to substance in the form of "heart-singing" (Garman 2000: 81). Deliberately fashioning himself in Whitman's image, Woody Guthrie—the archetypal troubadour—saw himself not as an entertainer but as an educator, and set about redefining a place for "culture" in the lives of common working people. As Charles McGovern puts it: **(p.83)**

> Here Guthrie's legacy to rock and roll was one with the legacy of the blues and country music: you didn't have to be a schooled musician or have a trained voice to communicate....That aesthetic was essential for linking music and social change.
>
> (McGovern 1999: 125)

Guthrie was to echo Whitman's sentiments in a letter he penned to fellow Almanac Singers Pete Seeger, Lee Hays, and Millard Lampell in 1941:

> And it is our job if we claim the smallest distinction as American Folk Lorists [*sic*], to see to it that the seeds are sown which will grow up into free speech, free singing, and the free pursuit of happiness that is the first and simplest birthright of a free people.
>
> (quoted in Cohen 1999: 144)

Sentiments such as these clearly resonate with the ethics and ideology of the NVPN. The front page of Guthrie's book of songs and jokes called *On a Slow Train to California* (which he sold for twenty-five cents) famously bore the inscription: "This book has an iron-clad copyright....Anybody caught singing one of these songs...will be a good friend of mine, because that's why I wrote 'em." Again, it is interesting to find statements in a similar spirit in some of the books of original compositions produced by NVPN members.

The Political Connection

If, in many parts of the world, collectively sung songs play an indispensable role in social life, newly composed topical songs in the folk idiom have provided a more direct link between folk revivals and contemporary sociopolitical movements, as has been well-documented with regard to the American civil rights and anti-war movements of the mid-twentieth century, for example. David Burbidge, who uses a lot of English folk material in the community choirs he runs in the Lake District, says it was partly these political associations that first attracted him to folk music in preference to rock, which he found too aggressive.

The “revolutionary spirits of the time” to whom he was drawn as a teenager, he explains, were mostly folksingers (interview 2007). It is not surprising to find that many natural voice practitioners in Britain had their first powerful experience of unaccompanied, collective singing at rallies or benefit concerts connected with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), the anti-apartheid movement, the women’s movement, or the miners’ strike of 1984–1985. It is in these same contexts that some were also introduced to songs from other countries, notably South Africa. Collective singing in turn reinforced the association of singing with a sense of community and solidarity. Reflecting on her strongest formative memories of singing with others, Moira Hill, for example, cites **(p.84)** CND marches in the 1960s, followed by Reclaim the Night marches in the 1970s and Greenham Common in the 1980s. Years later, Moira joined the East Lancs Clarion Choir directed by Janet Russell, and then went on to launch the Bolton Clarion Choir as well as the Preston People’s Choir and Kadenza women’s choir. “Every song we sing,” she writes, “from Georgian music to folk songs, to songs from other countries, and songs of protest and revolution, shows us and those we sing for that we are part of a bigger picture and that singing is political action too” (2007: 19). Jules Gibb identifies the tradition of the political choir that was especially strong in the North of England as part of another important pathway that would lead some people to the NVPN. These choirs (described in more detail in chapter 7) were a prominent feature at the marches and strikes that proliferated during the years Margaret Thatcher was prime minister, and they formed an informal network through which songs were exchanged. It was in this context—a decade before “community choirs” and “workshops” became fashionable, Jules comments—that she and others first cut their teeth in the song-teaching business (interview 2011).

Political engagement is also an important strand in Sarah Harman’s story of finding her way to the natural voice clan. She was a member of the Cardiff-based Côr Cochion (Reds Choir), which “used music in a campaigning way”, to support the miners’ strike and the international anti-apartheid movement, for example.[12] She remembers “singing in supermarkets [and] getting dragged out by the police for stopping people buying South African goods”. “So,” she reflects, “some of my singing tradition is about being punished for singing.” It was through her political involvement that she first became aware of Frankie Armstrong. “She was one of my heroines,” she explains, “mostly because I used to go on CND marches and Frankie used to be on the stage singing” (interview 2008).[13]

The Theatre Connection

My discussion of the Giving Voice initiative in chapter 2 has already highlighted the influence of trends in contemporary theatre on the approach some natural voice practitioners take to voicework. Reference has also been made to Frankie’s theatrical involvement. Theatre figured prominently in the career paths of several practitioners I interviewed, and was often the bridge over which they

crossed into the world of voice. In particular, Dartington College of Arts, Cardiff Laboratory Theatre, and the Centre for Performance Research emerge as important training grounds for several NVPN members. Helen Chadwick attended Dartington, and it was her subsequent work in theatre that furthered her interest in singing. (Her attraction to unaccompanied **(p.85)** harmony singing began in her early teens when she heard church music by English composers, such as Stanford and Byrd, at King's College Chapel in Cambridge, where she grew up.) In 1979, she became a founder member of Dr. Foster's Travelling Theatre Company, which soon established itself as a leading community theatre group in southwest England, and not long afterwards she joined Cardiff Laboratory Theatre. Attending a series of voice workshops around this time (including one led by Frankie Armstrong) allowed her to explore a wider range of vocal styles and techniques.

Chris Rowbury (founder of Coventry's WorldSong choir) became involved in experimental and physical theatre after initially training as a computer scientist. It was in the context of his work with Cardiff Laboratory Theatre's successor, the Centre for Performance Research, that he was introduced to intensive voice work that included regular vocal workouts with Joan Mills supplemented by specialist workshops with guest practitioners. "I'd never really sung before in my life," he recalls, "and then I found myself singing Balkan songs and weird stuff.... I just fell in love with it, really." He was working as a senior lecturer in theatre in the Performing Arts Department at Coventry University when he established his own singing group. He reflects that, while he had much to learn about "the musical side of it", his twenty years of teaching experience had prepared him well for the role of group leader (interview 2008).

Sarah Harman and David Burbidge also started out in theatre. After earning a degree in English and theatre, Sarah worked for some time as an actress before discovering the voluntary arts and becoming a drama worker in community arts organisations. It was at this point that she also encountered community music through the newly established Cardiff Community Music programme, and, soon after completing the community music teaching course, she took over managing it. Her encounter with the natural voice world in the early 1990s coincided with her shift of focus from drama to voice work. Her theatre skills stood her in good stead, and, in the early days of running singing groups, she used many of the warm-up exercises she had learned during her theatre training (interview 2008). David began his voice-work training while he was still at drama school, and subsequently worked as an actor while developing parallel careers in journalism and psychotherapy. In his present work he also draws on more than thirty years of yoga practice and incorporates elements of other body-based disciplines, such as tai chi, Feldenkrais, and the Alexander technique. In his early years as a natural voice practitioner, he was an avid workshop participant, honing his working methods at events organised by the Centre for Performance Research and other bodies, such as Folkworks.[14] In addition to Frankie Armstrong (with

whom he trained), he counts Kristin Linklater, Enrique Pardo, and Augusto Boal, who all come from the theatre world, among his main influences. **(p.86)**

The Classical Connection

In the sections that follow, we hear from a number of practitioners who had trained as classical musicians but later found greater fulfilment working in the voluntary sector and put the classical world behind them. Here I consider briefly two practitioners who remain committed to the fundamental tools and techniques with which their classical training has equipped them while applying their skills to the project of bringing a wider range of music to a more inclusive singing community.

Michael Harper, the classically trained counter-tenor, opera singer, and accomplished gospel singer introduced in chapter 1, describes how he reached his personal "fork in the road": "I was knocking at these doors in classical music and sometimes they were opening and a lot of times they weren't....[At the same time] there were people opening doors for me in this world music area and saying, 'Come, we want you to do this'." He therefore proceeded by simultaneously pursuing work in the worlds of community music (including running his own arts organisation, the Lodge Farm Project), music education (including working as a consultant and trainer for Youth Music and Sing Up), and classical music (including acting as Associate Artistic Director and Chorus Master for Pegasus Opera Company and maintaining his own private practice with studios in England and Norway). As part of his mission "to get Britain singing again", he has been keen to break down some of the barriers between these different worlds. If he has any misgivings about the NVPN, he says, they concern "the technical side of it", and one of his contributions to the Unicorn camp has been to offer introductions to sight reading. He meets other natural voice practitioners on common ground in his commitment to "empowering people to sing but not only to sing, because I think singing goes deeper than that. For me the singing is only a tool...It's a journey, it's not just about my voice" (interview 2008).

Michael Deason-Barrow, director of the Tonalis Music Centre in Stroud, similarly seeks to bring about a more holistic engagement with diverse musical repertoires, from classical, early music, and contemporary classical to world, folk, and jazz. His voice was first brought to a national audience when as a choirboy with Salisbury Cathedral Choir he was featured as a soloist on radio and television and also made a number of recordings. He later went on to study singing at the Royal College of Music in London. In his account of his growing attraction to sounds from more distant parts of the world, it is interesting to find references to some of the same landmarks that appear in Frankie's story. He mentions, for example, the draw of Collet's record shop in the 1970s and tells of being so struck by the voices of Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares bursting out of his car radio that he had to stop driving and listen. *Mankind's Music*, a radio series

by David Attenborough, was another revelation (pers. comm. April 27, 2013). When he came to pursue his fascination with **(p.87)** world vocal styles at closer quarters, he was able to apply his expert technical knowledge to analysing how different sounds and effects were produced and, in his teaching, his intimate understanding of how the vocal mechanism works allows him to help his students explore unfamiliar vocal qualities in ways that are both effective and healthy. At the same time, his grounding in anthroposophy informs his promotion of “holistic music teaching methods that speak to the whole human being—body, mind, heart and spirit” (http://www.tonalismusic.co.uk/, acc. July 9, 2013). Michael’s professional work now ranges from giving masterclasses in conservatoires to working with community choirs, children’s groups, and “uncertain singers”. At the Tonalis Centre (which he founded in 1991), he offers a suite of two-year vocational training courses, including Music Education, Community Music, Music as a Therapeutic Practice, and Choir Leading and Choral Conducting. The extensive list of weekend workshops that he delivers at locations across Britain include Giving Voice to Community, Renewing Music as a Community Art, and World Voice. Publicity materials for World Voice carry the taglines “Expand the Borders of Singing” and “Discover your Multi-cultural Voice”. An acknowledgement and appreciation of the “multiplicity of extraordinary world singing styles and beautiful choral idioms” to which our ears have been opened since the late 1980s lies behind Michael’s insistence that “what we mostly hear today is the specialised voice, not the ‘whole voice’”. His aim therefore is to lead singers towards “new more open-minded and holistic paradigms in singing” that bring together “voices from ancient traditions with modern research” (World Voice promotional leaflet, 2013). This and other descriptions that appear in Michael’s publicity materials—we find further references in the publicity for World Voice to a “singing adventure”, “celebrat[ing] the richness of singing in its broadest sense”, creating “a unique singing community”, and discovering the “healing power” of singing in different vocal styles—clearly chimes with the philosophy of nurturing, empowering, and broadening horizons that is a hallmark of the natural voice ethic.

The Community Music Connection

The community music world has served as an alternative training ground for some practitioners, who may be members of Sound Sense (the national professional association for community musicians) as well as the NVPN. The community music movement shares with the NVPN a cardinal commitment to extending music-making opportunities to those who are more often excluded. A statement formulated by the Community Music Activity Commission of the International Society of Music Education lists as its guiding principles decentralisation, accessibility, equal opportunity, and active participation in music making, noting that “these principles are social and **(p.88)** political ones, and there can be no doubt that community music activity is more than a purely musical one” (Olseng 1990: 59). Community music organisations typically act as

an umbrella for a wide variety of activities, including specialist work with people with physical, sensory, or learning disabilities or mental health issues or addictions, as well as people confined to institutions, vulnerable young people, refugees, and suburban communities that have been identified as suffering from economic and social deprivation; they may also offer more broadly recreational and educational courses aimed at the general public. Here we begin to appreciate the point at which some kinds of community music activity move closer to the world of therapy, as discussed in the following section. A broader contemporary definition given by Lee Higgins, however, is applicable to many natural voice practitioners and resonates clearly with the NVPN philosophy:

> Often a response to an unjust situation, community music practice has at its heart a commitment to cultural democracy, a call for both action and appropriate intervention, a system of support and respect for the many cultures and communities across the world.
>
> (Higgins 2013: viii)

Jane Wells (co-director of the Big Heart and Soul Choir in Castle Acre, Norfolk) found her feet in the community music world after first following what she refers to as “a rather standard middle-class classical music education”, which included attending the junior department of the Royal College of Music before studying for a degree in Music at Durham. She also undertook postgraduate study in composition. As a freelance musician, however, Jane was incrementally drawn into the world of community arts. She worked with the Arts and Education team at Battersea Arts Centre and later moved to Norfolk, where she worked as an Arts Council funded musician-in-residence and as a project worker with Norfolk Music Works. In Norfolk, she was introduced to the work of Sian Croose —“probably the first person on this patch working in that way”—and this inspired her to establish a series of singing groups when she took up a new post as County Music Worker in Lincolnshire (interview 2008).

Based in Norwich, Sian Croose is well known in natural voice circles, not least because of her involvement with Sing for Water (as both a soloist and a conductor), but sees herself as having stronger ties with the community music world, since it was this network that nurtured and nourished her. She notes that the community music movement predates the consolidation of the natural voice network, and comments that while the remit of community music is broader, its ethos is in many respects similar: “very much about participation and about an alternative to…the straight music world—the more experimental, the multicultural, all of those things” (interview 2008). Her trajectory towards becoming a voice practitioner began in 1980 with her first work experience (as part of the Youth Opportunity Scheme) at Norwich **(p.89)** Arts Centre. For her, the arts centre functioned as “a kind of informal university of performing arts”. She was able to take part in the arts centre’s progamme of public workshops

and she joined the Theatre in Education group that was based there. A weekend workshop led by Helen Chadwick was a turning point for Sian, and she has never looked back: “Probably about half an hour in, I thought, ‘This is what I want to do.’…All of it was just a great experience and I think literally the next week I started a choir.” The Norwich Women’s Soul Choir quickly became a quirky and much-loved feature of Norwich life and later had a moment of national fame when it appeared on the popular BBC television programme *That’s Life* (presented by Esther Rantzen). Sian recalls how, setting out with just a single song ready to teach, she kept a step ahead by learning a new song every week. At the same time, she enrolled in a one-year apprenticeship with the newly formed Community Music East, where she was introduced to music fundamentals, learned about the mechanics of running groups, and immersed herself in a new, unconventional sound world, where “the musical boundaries were really a long way out”. She augmented her material and skills by attending events such as those organised by the Magdalena Project in Cardiff,[15] where she once did a weeklong workshop with Frankie Armstrong, and by frequenting places like Laurieston Hall.

One of Sian’s recent initiatives is The Voice Project, an innovative music education and performance project that “bring[s] together outstanding musicians and community choirs in events that combine the ethos of community music with cutting-edge creativity and high performance and production values” (http://voiceproject2.wordpress.com/, acc. December 23, 2011). Sian, then, is another example of someone on a quest to bridge the divide between different musical worlds by challenging assumptions and extending the boundaries of what is possible.

The Therapy Connection

The NVPN counts a number of qualified therapists in its ranks. These include registered music therapists, psychotherapists, and counsellors, alongside teachers of the Alexander technique, shiatsu, and other body-based disciplines. As we saw in Frankie’s case, work in these areas, even when it is not directly concerned with music, can be a source of valuable insights that may be applied in natural voice work. Those who have worked in the field of community or co-operative development, for example, have become adept at managing group dynamics, while those who have trained in counselling or stress management are equipped with an understanding of the ways in which an individual’s creative energy can become blocked and with a toolkit for helping to release these blocks. **(p.90)**

Music therapists share with other kinds of therapists the humanistic goal of helping individuals realise their full potential. Community music therapy is now a recognised movement within contemporary music therapy, and it also embraces some of the guiding principles of community music—participation, accessibility, equal opportunity, empowerment, and enabling individual

creativity. Juliette Alvin, writing in 1966, characterised music therapy as “a rational discipline which adds to music a new dimension, binding together art, science and compassion” (1991: 3). Alvin and other pioneers in the United Kingdom (among them Paul Nordoff, Clive Robbins, and Mary Priestley) worked within the broader context of the post-war promotion of health and education for all; they thus may be counted as early champions of musical democratisation. As Brunjulf Stige expresses it:

> Music therapy...has challenged restricted notions about what music is and about who could and should participate in music. In this way, music therapists have contributed to a better understanding of how music may link to human values such as dignity, respect, and quality of life.
>
> (Stige 2010a: 13).

While Alvin and others experimented with ensembles and music clubs as well as working intensively with individuals, the practices that were subsequently formalised focused largely on one-to-one work. As music therapy became increasingly professionalised in the 1980s and 1990s, clinical work within conventional therapeutic boundaries took precedence: music therapy became affiliated with medicine, special education, and psychotherapy, and much of its literature dealt with music’s effect on individual pathology and symptomatology (Stige 2010a: 10).[16] In Britain, as in many other parts of Western Europe, professional music therapy is now part of a formalised process involving patient assessment procedures, goal-oriented treatment programmes, and appropriate forms of evaluation.

Community music therapy, on the other hand, is less a unified theory and practice than “a broad perspective exploring relationships between the individual, community, and society in relation to music and health” (Stige 2010a: 15–16). Community music therapy functions as a way of “giving voice to the relatively disadvantaged” within a broader agenda of promoting empowerment and participation (11). Grounded in a psychosociocultural as opposed to a biomedical model, community music projects are not usually treatment oriented; rather, they are designed to promote health and prevention, and may be offered in collaboration with other sectors such as education and social care (Stige et al. 2010b: 282). Stige’s characterisation of the post-2000 international community music therapy movement as a form of practice that “goes beyond conceptions of music therapy in community settings to also embrace music therapy *as* community and music therapy *for* community development” (Stige 2010a: 10) clearly chimes with the kind of work undertaken by many **(p.91)** natural voice practitioners who, whether or not they have had formal training in music therapy (or, indeed, any other therapy), are clearly using music in ways that are

broadly therapeutic, while remaining firmly positioned in the realm of “community”.

It is easy, then, to see how readily some of the principles of music therapy and community music therapy can be adapted to working with open-access choirs, and more particularly, with individuals who may feel vulnerable or challenged, where the ability to maintain a positive and nurturing environment is crucial. Working with specific client groups (e.g. the mental health or primary care services) requires one to be interested in, and good at, working with people as much as music, and in some cases to have specialist knowledge of particular health conditions. Unlike a professional choir conductor, the leader of an open-access choir is not there simply to direct the musical activity, impart musical expertise, and develop musical competence. He or she is also there to build community and to foster what Stige calls a “culture of care” in which self-care, care for others, and professional care “seem to be linked in many ways” (2010c: 269).

Teresa Verney is a natural voice practitioner who combines a solid classical music background with training as a therapist. Prior to her entrée into voice work, she had worked as a professional freelance musician, and had also spent fifteen years as a social worker before retraining in hypnotherapy and psychotherapy. She grew up in what she describes as “a very classically orientated family” and later won a place at Birmingham Conservatoire, where she studied oboe, piano, and voice. Her first job as a professional musician, however, was a profound disappointment, and—playing cor anglais in the hot, dusty orchestra pit of a theatre—she found the working environment uncongenial. A major turning point came in 2000, when a brochure from Cortijo Romero, a residential centre in Spain that offers alternative holidays, dropped through her letterbox. A course entitled “Find Your Voice”, led by Frankie Armstrong and David Burbidge, caught her eye. She describes the week she spent in Spain as “life-changing”:

> The impact of Frankie’s approach was enormous and none of my previous training experiences had ever touched me so deeply. For the first time I was not judged and every sound I made was “good enough”. I found my own very special voice and with it I was able to express many emotions that had been hitherto suppressed.
>
> (http://teresaverney.com/, acc. December 23, 2011)

This was her entrée into a world that would allow her to deploy her musical skills in a more rewarding setting. Part of her immediate reaction was to say: “Well, if this has had this effect on me, what on earth is it going to have on other people?” Informed by her training as a therapist, she now embarked on a mission “to integrate the idea of using your voice as a way of working

therapeutically” **(p.92)** (interview 2008). Alongside the regular weekly singing groups she now runs, she also offers individual sessions in which she takes people’s personal stories as a starting point for helping them find their voice. This work, she says, has convinced her that “[working with] the voice as a therapeutic tool is far more affective than spending many hours talking through life experiences” (www.teresaverney.com, acc. May 1, 2009). The overriding advantage of natural voice work in general, she observes, is that “you can pitch it at any level you want or at any type of person or client group you want—anything. It’s completely all-encompassing, because almost everybody loves to sing” (interview 2008).

The Circle Dance, Summer Camp, and Alternative Community Connection

The journey that led Nickomo Clarke to the NVPN took him along pathways that appear only tangentially in Frankie’s story but are equally important to the overall picture. I tell Nickomo’s story in a little more detail here since it also provides the background to my case study of the Unicorn Natural Voice Camp in chapter 8. Nickomo shares with most of his fellow practitioners a strong childhood attraction to music. The Beatles were his most profound influence, and he later developed a passion for the blues and African music. Bulgarian music also features in his story: he tells of how his parents took a trip to Bulgaria and brought back a record that made a deep impression on him. At secondary school, he played in a band which, he says, was “almost like a skiffle band ten years too late”, and in his undergraduate years he was in a traditional folk band which played in folk clubs in South Wales. Although he first entered college to study music, he found himself uncomfortable in an environment where creativity was discouraged in favour of a strict academic approach (“it was almost stifling my love of music”) and he eventually graduated with a degree in philosophy before going on to train as a primary school teacher (interview 2007).

The path that would eventually lead him to the natural voice world began when he discovered circle dancing. In the context of what would take on the attributes of a scene in the United Kingdom, “circle dance” refers to folk dances (mainly from different parts of Europe) danced in circles as opposed to couples or sets. A selection of such dances was introduced to the Findhorn community in Scotland in the mid-1970s by German dancer and choreographer Bernard Wosien (1908–1986). Wosien believed that the dances contained important cosmic and spiritual symbolism (the circle, representing unity and wholeness, offered protection against the forces of chaos) and thus had the potential to nurture and sustain community (for which Findhorn offered fertile ground).[17] Circle dance or “sacred dance”, as it came to be known in Findhorn, spread throughout Britain and beyond, transmitted by a growing network of **(p.93)** teachers via weekly dance groups, weekend workshops, and summer dance camps—a format that would later be followed in the natural voice world.[18] The circle dance scene has its parallel in the Society for International Folk Dancing (SIFD), and many of the

same dances constitute the repertoire of SIFD teachers. In the SIFD world, however, the dances tend to be approached in a more athletic manner and participants generally have minimal interest in the esoteric dimensions, whereas in Findhorn and elsewhere sacred dance/circle dance continues to be viewed—in part, at least—as ritual and spiritual practice. The circle dance repertoire also includes newly choreographed dances set to classical, contemporary popular, and New Age music, whereas the SIFD repertoire consists entirely of "authentic" (if stylised) folk dances accompanied by traditional songs and melodies.[19]

From the outset, many people were drawn to circle dance as much for the music they danced to as for the dancing itself, and several musical ensembles were formed in different parts of the country to provide live music for dance sessions as an alternative to the music recorded on cassette tapes that circulated in the 1980s. The core repertory consisted of dances from Eastern Europe, and for many singers these served as their first introduction to songs from this part of the world. The dance camps established in the 1980s that had circle dance as their main focus were the direct inspiration for the dedicated voice camps that arrived later, beginning with the Unicorn Natural Voice Camp in 1998.

It was at his first-ever circle dance event, a day workshop in Bristol led by a teacher from Findhorn, that Nickomo met James Burgess, with whom he would later collaborate as part of the Unicorn Camps team. Through the weekly circle dance group that Nickomo then joined, he heard about the Glastonbury camp that he attended in 1986.[20] It was here that he met (among others) Colin Harrison and Nick Prater, who would become long-standing friends and collaborators. Colin Harrison—who would later be a key player in the launch of the NVPN—was one of the leading circle dance teachers in the United Kingdom at the time and also taught material from his one-time home of South Africa. (Nickomo and his partner, Rasullah, would subsequently join Colin and his then partner, Anne Monger, to form a four-person team teaching South African songs and dances.) Nick Prater was part of two groups, Gnawa and Prana, which were active on the festival circuit, teaching chants as well as performing. Gnawa was a drum and dance group that had formed in Stroud under the guidance of Ghanaian master-musician Ben Baddoo. Prana, taking its name from the Sanskrit word meaning "breath" or "life-force", had grown out of a self-development and healing group based in West Wales and drew its musical and spiritual influences from the "Medicine songs of the North American Indians", the "ancient teachings of India", and "the impulse of the New Age" (1991: 1). In that first Glastonbury encounter, Nick appeared as a kind of role model for Nickomo: "I remember watching Nick Prater teach this **(p.94)** song and it was kind of like I could see myself doing that" (interview 2007). When Nickomo later drew up the programme for the first Unicorn Natural Voice Camp, Nick (by this time specialising in gospel singing) would be invited as one of the core teachers.

Inspired by their revelatory experiences at the Glastonbury camp, Nickomo and Rasullah offered to host a Tarot group that James Burgess wished to start. Nickomo wrote some chants to help explain the Major Arcana, and before long the group had become the Bristol Chant Group, singing Prana chants, Taizé chants, and songs from the circle dance and universal peace dance repertoires that would be disseminated further through the songbook and tape/CD set *Chants for Sharing*.[21] Using this same material, Nickomo also began offering song sessions at some of the new summer camps that were springing up in the late 1980s, including Dance Camp Wales. This, together with the success of the South African package he developed with Colin Harrison, expanded his audience and eventually led to the birth of the Unicorn Natural Voice Camp.

Dance Camp Wales became an important meeting ground for those working at the intersection of music and dance. It also served as a critical turning point for Jackie Roxborough in the way that the Cortijo Romero “Find Your Voice” week had for Teresa Verney. Jackie is another practitioner who began her career in the classical world, where she spent several years performing and teaching classical guitar after completing a degree in music at Huddersfield. Later, her work with contemporary music brought her into contact with extended vocal technique, which presented itself as a form of liberation. In 1992, she found herself at Dance Camp Wales and it was there that she met “this whole culture…of natural voice”. The experiences at the camp were her “baptism into global music”, particularly, “a baptism by fire into African music” as she was faced with the unexpected challenge of mastering the cowbell part in the percussion group directed by Ben Badoo. It was the South African singing, however, and the contrast it provided with the kind of choir experience with which she was more familiar that really got her “hooked in”. “It was a real moment of, gosh, this is a real joy singing this music and also having to move your body. You can’t stand still!” (interview 2007). The training she underwent with a teacher of Postural Integration in Los Angeles the following year equipped her with further skills that aided her project of “opening out” and freeing herself from the constraints of being a classical musician. Along the way, she also acquired qualifications in business applications and information technology, and holistic massage, relaxation and stress management, and these were among the many strands that came together in her own voice work. At the time of our interview in 2007, she was running a number of singing groups, including Birmingham International Voices, a group she had set up by invitation of the director of the College for International Citizenship to bring together musicians and singers from different parts of the world. She had also established the United Kingdom’s first female Muslim performance group, the **(p.95)** Muslim Women’s Collective. She went on to develop several new projects, some under the auspices of Ulfah Arts, a not-for-profit organisation devoted to using the arts to bring about social change, working in particular with Muslim communities. What is of interest here is the way in which Jackie’s chance attendance at a summer camp at which she was

first introduced to “global music” in company that was not, in itself, ethnically diverse led to such extensive, direct collaboration with members of Britain’s resident ethnic communities.[22]

The new Unicorn camps, in their turn, provided road-to-Damascus-style moments of revelation for a younger generation of voice practitioners, as exemplified by Bruce Knight. Bruce recounts how, after enjoying his first taste of African, Bulgarian, and gospel songs at singing sessions in Cambridge led by Rowena Whitehead (his musical activities to this point not having extended beyond “a bit of karaoke” as a teenager), he picked up a leaflet for the first ever Unicorn Natural Voice Camp and booked a place “on a whim”. His stay at the camp turned out to be a life-changing experience, introducing him to a world he had never before imagined:

> From the very start I was totally into it, completely blown away by the whole experience of camping around fires. The whole subculture was very new to me and for the first time in my life I experienced physical spine-tingles from songs and enjoyed spiritual, “holy” moments in the big top singing a lovely song, and getting a wonderfully sublime feeling.
>
> (Knight interview 2008)

He was especially excited by the South African songs he learned with Colin Harrison and Nickomo and the gospel songs taught by Nick Prater. The camp also alerted him to the fact that there was a countrywide network of community choirs that operated along similar lines to Rowena’s group in Cambridge and that some people managed to earn their living doing this kind of work. This realisation planted the seed that would later lead him to establish his own choir in Leamington Spa, abandon his career as an environmental scientist, and go on to become part of the Unicorn teaching team.

Meanwhile, Kate O’Connell was instrumental in grafting a natural voice branch onto the sacred dance tree that had taken such firm root in Findhorn. Kate had initially trained as a drama/movement teacher at Dartington. In the late 1970s she went to live at Laurieston Hall, an intentional community near Castle Douglas in southwest Scotland, and it was there that she first encountered Frankie Armstrong.[23] She recalls the immediate impact Frankie had on her: “I went to one of her workshops and she got us all making a great loud noise and I walked out of the workshop and went: ‘Oh, I can do this.’ And that was it. That was how I started.” Kate also makes an explicit link with the women’s movement and the growth of feminist consciousness: “We’d come from being sweet singers at school [and] suddenly there was this women’s movement, Frankie Armstrong, natural voice, ‘yes, we can sing out!’ and it all just **(p.96)** came into focus” (interview 2008). The experience inspired Kate to start running her own workshops at Laurieston. Later, she was invited to become part of the music

team at Dance Camp Wales, co-leading the choir and, as part of a small ensemble, playing live music for dancing.[24] By this time, she had moved to Findhorn and with her partner Rory had launched a resident band to provide live music for sacred dance. Kate inaugurated the Midsummer Festival of Sacred Dance, Music and Song in 1992, seeing it as a way of "bringing the dance camp energy back to Findhorn". Kate's greatest achievement there, in her own estimation, is to have staged the international singing conference and festival Songs of Heaven and Earth (1996) in partnership with fellow Findhorn resident Barbara Swetina (who also taught Taizé chant at Dance Camp Wales). Among the invited teachers were Helen Chadwick, Edisher Garakanidze (from Georgia), Ysaye Barnwell (of Sweet Honey in the Rock fame), and Noah Pikes (from the Roy Hart Theatre). A number of NVPN members were among the more than two hundred delegates drawn from across the globe. Kate also responded to Nickomo's call for teachers when he was setting up the first Unicorn Natural Voice Camp and has attended almost every year since.

Ali (Alison) Burns also lived at Laurieston in the 1980s, and it was there that she took her first steps in songwriting, initially writing songs for the annual Women's Singing Week. Thanks to the numbers of people who passed through Laurieston, Ali's work quickly became known and she began to receive invitations to lead workshops in other parts of the country. In the early 1990s, she attended one of Frankie's training weeks, where she met other emerging practitioners, and she went on to play a central role in establishing the NVPN (interview 2008). Jules Gibb emphasises the "phenomenal" nature of what she terms "the Laurieston effect", observing that it was at Laurieston that she herself "became a voice worker"; many of the other singers she met there also went on to direct community choirs (interview 2011). For Rowena Whitehead, Laurieston Women's Singing Week, at which she was invited to teach, also functioned as an important "plug-in". It allowed her to meet other teachers and to assemble a substantial body of additional material to use with her own choirs (interview 2007). Kirsty Martin refers to the first Laurieston Women's Singing Week she attended as "the epiphany" and "the home-coming I'd been looking for all my life really". In her years of travelling, she explains, she had been looking for "this sort of feeling and this sort of community" but had never found it in one place before. Now, she knew that "that musical feeling was possible" (interview 2008).[25]

The World Music Connection

The first proper stirrings of the natural voice phenomenon coincided with the rise of world music. We have already seen how the circle dance and camp scene, **(p.97)** on the one hand, and the more specialised workshops hosted by the Centre for Performance Research and led by overseas artists, on the other, gave for those who were so inclined to the opportunity to participate directly as singers, musicians, and dancers in the musical traditions of other cultures. The burgeoning of the world music industry also played its part. When Rowena Whitehead, for example, was launching her first singing group in Cambridge,

she was working with a music venue called The Junction. Her role included programming world music nights and bringing in visiting musicians, some of whom she would also accompany when they undertook residencies in schools. It was in this way that she not only encountered such artists as the British Asian singer Samia Malik, Zimbabwean singer and mbira player Chartwell Dutiro, and the group Black Umfolosi, but was also able to train with them (interview 2007).

Other future practitioners had spent time living overseas and therefore had more sustained encounters with these “other” musics. David Burbidge was exposed to a range of music in his childhood years, which were spent in a series of foreign locations because his father worked for the United Nations. He still has vivid memories of fruit sellers in the Tatra Mountains in Poland who advertised their wares in song, and of folk song and dance in the Cypriot village he once called home. Likewise, Sally Davies (director of the Cecil Sharp House Choir and Hackney’s Wing-It Singers), was exposed to music from many different cultures during her upbringing in an international children’s village in Switzerland, where her parents were house parents. (The village had been set up at end of the Second World War as a home for displaced children from all over Europe and then continued on as a home for orphans.) The children were encouraged to keep their traditions alive, and so national dancing and singing were much in evidence. Sally recalls “pretend[ing] to speak all the languages...making the sounds” and how she especially loved the “slightly funny intervals” and “gutsy” sound of the Hungarian songs, alongside which the English offerings seemed somewhat lacklustre (interview 2008). This fascination with other sounds and styles accompanied her into her adult life. Also graduating from Dartington, where she majored in dance, she toured for several years with a variety of fringe theatre companies, writing music as well as performing. She later spent ten years as musical director and composer for Green Candle Dance Company. Many of the company’s shows centred on a particular geographic location, so she would research and listen to the music of places like Zanzibar and Brazil and then write music sparked off by her explorations. She went on to study for a master’s degree in ethnomusicology and composition at Kingston University. Eventually, in 2000, she was introduced to the NVPN and two years later began to work with community choirs. While she continues to use world songs in her work, Sally now specialises in original arrangements of English folk songs that are clearly influenced by the various musical idioms she has become familiar with through her research as well as her own life experiences. **(p.98)**

Dessi (Dessislava) Stefanova and Polina Skovoroda-Shepherd are both highly proficient musicians who had undergone extensive training in the musical traditions of their respective national cultures before establishing a new life in Britain and being drawn into the natural voice orbit. Both women balance professional performing careers with their natural voice work, which focuses on specialist choirs and workshops dedicated to their native music. Dessi Stefanova

is the founder-director of the London Bulgarian Choir, the Swiss Bulgarian Choir, and a professional vocal trio, the Dessibelles.[26] The London Bulgarian Choir gained national exposure when it won first place in the Open Category of the BBC Radio 3 Choir of the Year competition in 2006, and in 2009, it performed with rock band Doves at the BBC Electric Proms. The choir can also be heard on the soundtrack of *The Virgin Queen*, Paula Milne's dramatisation of the life of Elizabeth I, and on the Microsoft video game *HALO 4*.

Originally from Thrace in central Bulgaria, Dessi began her training in Western classical music at the age of six. At the same time, she was part of the children's folk music and dance company Zagorche, which was based in her hometown of Stara Zagora. After moving to the capital to study linguistics at Sofia University, she gained a place in the Philip Koutev National Folk Music and Dance Ensemble, with which she sang professionally for three years before moving to the United Kingdom in 2000. The London Bulgarian Choir, which she established not long after her arrival, resulted from an auspicious encounter with the natural voice network. She was alerted to an NVPN fundraising weekend at the Round Chapel in Hackney, and within ten minutes of arriving, she recalls, was asked if she would like to teach a song as part of the programme for the following day. There she also met a member of the London Georgian choir (later renamed Maspindzeli), who urged her to start a Bulgarian choir. Although she intially found it difficult to believe that anyone in London would want to sing Bulgarian songs, she soon had a fledgling group up and running and before long the choir blossomed into a community that became as important to Dessi herself as to any other member.

In addition to her busy schedule of running weekend workshops around the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe, Dessi has taught at the Unicorn Natural Voice Camp, at summer camps organised by the Vermont-based association Village Harmony (both in the UK and overseas), at the SOAS World Music Summer School, and at Laurieston Hall's Harmony Week. She has also been engaged to run sessions at music education conferences, such as MusicLearningLive. In addition to the repertoire itself and an intimate knowledge of the cultural context of the songs she introduces, one of the most valuable things Dessi has to offer is at the level of vocal technique and timbre as she guides her students through a series of exercises designed to bring them closer to the Bulgarian sound.[27] **(p.99)**

Polina Shepherd, who enjoys an international profile as a performer of Russian and Yiddish songs, grew up in a musical household in Siberia and later trained at Kazan State Conservatory in Tatarstan. Currently based in Brighton, she performs with several ensembles including the Eastern European–style brass band Fanfara, the Merlin Shepherd Quartet, and the Sound & Light Cinematic Duo. She also does solo work as both singer and pianist and composes her own songs. She has established several community choirs, including the Brighton and

Hove Russian Choir (winner of awards at the Russian Song Competition in London in 2010 and the Maslenitsa Competition in 2013), the London Russian Choir, the London Yiddish Choir, and, at University College London (UCL), the UCL East European Choir. The latter, which was active from 2010 to 2013, was co-directed with Bulgarian singer and fellow NVPN member Eugenia Georgieva, who subsequently launched a new Bulgarian choir, Veda Slovena, also based at UCL.[28] Like Dessi, Polina also teaches at the SOAS World Music Summer School and leads weekend workshops in different parts of the country, as well as teaching internationally: Austria, Switzerland, Eastern Europe, and Brazil are among her regular ports of call. Again, her teaching includes expert instruction in vocal style and technique, with an emphasis on ornamentation and improvisation. Together with others who teach their traditions to foreigners, both Polina and Dessi offer valuable perspectives on the questions of cultural exchange to which I return in later chapters.

The NVPN as Community of Practice

The fact that individual practitioners have found their way to the natural voice and community choir world by many different routes and from many different starting points should not surprise us. Unlike music therapists, for example, natural voice practitioners do not undergo a formally accredited training programme, and there is no established career progression model. Apart from Frankie's training weeks and other privately run short courses an individual practitioner might invest in, much of their learning takes place on the job, with the help of a strong but informal peer-support network. Natural voice work has, in any case, only very recently been consolidated as a body of practice, and many of the teachers, performers, and practitioners we encountered in this chapter are among the pioneers who have contributed to its development.

As their stories show, the knowledge and skills acquired in a range of other professions have been of direct relevance to the kind of musical work undertaken by NVPN members. The profile and approach of the leader of an open-access, non-auditioned, non-sight-reading choir will inevitably differ from that of the conductor of an amateur classical choir or choral society in interesting ways. These differences relate to the choice of musical material, the **(p.100)** teaching method, and the choir's perceived purpose or function. The notion of music as action rather than object implies, a priori, a different way of working. So, too, does a greater emphasis on participatory as opposed to presentational performance. Working from scores requires a particular facility on the part of the conductor, and, if the choir's main focus is on formal staged performances, then an appropriate level of polish and refinement must also be achieved; this in turn demands a certain kind of discipline. In the case of natural-voice-style choirs, the main activity may be singing, and the choir may at some point perform for others, but there are other goals and values at stake as well. This results in a rather different emphasis in which any "objective" notion of musical quality, or the assumption of musical "perfection" as the ultimate

goal, is not necessarily the prime or sole consideration; compromises may be made in respect of such musical “standards” so that other goals may be achieved and other values are *not* compromised in the process. The achievement of these other goals requires its own kind of training and sensibility.

In the survey of “ingredients” and “connections” that has formed the basis of this chapter, it is interesting to note not only the recurrence of particular themes and experiences that were to become part of the natural voice jigsaw but also the significance of multiple meetings and crossings of ways that fed into shared histories and long-standing collaborations, with different kinds of milestones serving as muster points for those not only of different backgrounds and preferences but also of different generations. With respect to common experiences and defining moments, several intriguing threads emerge. Moments of conversion, liberation, and empowerment abound, often described by the speakers as an “epiphany”, “revelation”, or “baptism by fire”. Not surprisingly, Frankie Armstrong has been directly responsible for many such conversions; similar life-defining moments were also orchestrated (albeit unintentionally) by Helen Chadwick, Nick Prater, and Ben Badoo. Laurieston Hall has featured as a beacon for a number of individuals, as have summer camps such as the Glastonbury camps, Dance Camp Wales, and the Unicorn Natural Voice Camp, alongside Kinnersley Castle and later Wortley Hall. In addition to functioning as fertile ground for informal, collective music making and for sharing resources, these have also been a step on the way to finding community or finding one’s clan, with some of those attending then seeking to recreate that community spirit in their own locality. Circle dance has also been identified as an example of parallel network, a decade or so ahead of the natural voice network, which has both provided ways in and suggested ways forward.

In the early days of the natural voice enterprise, Frankie and Darien’s training weeks and the reunions held at Kinnersley Castle fulfilled a crucial function in bringing both established practitioners and practitioners-to-be into contact with one other, allowing them to see themselves, for the first time, not as lone operators but as part of a peer group of like-minded professionals. Rowena **(p. 101)** Whitehead describes the week she spent at Kinnersley in the mid-1990s with fourteen other trainees as an “ecstatic” experience. She had already been running her own singing group for some time but only now did she discover that “other people were doing what I did and stuff that I’d evolved on my own was happening elsewhere and it was wonderful”. From then on, the annual reunions offered by the Kinnersley gatherings, the Laurieston singing weeks, and the Unicorn camps provided her with the “luxury” of having “a sort of staff room—somewhere to go to talk about what you do and people who know what it’s about” (interview 2007). Nickomo was not part of the close-knit group that had originally formed around Frankie, but he found his way to the infamous Kinnersley party at which the NVNP was conceived via his friend Colin Harrison. Like Rowena, he was “astonished to meet a whole bunch of people who did the

same thing that I did. It was a revelation!” (2007a: 23). He recalls his now legendary pronouncement: “This is the peerest peer group I’ve ever been in!” (interview 2007).

A useful point of reference here is Eugenio Barba’s notion of “third theatre”, a term adopted to cover the growing constituency of theatre makers that existed between the two more visible poles of official, subsidised theatre and the avant-garde. Barba’s description of this middle world might well be applied to the NVPN in its formative period:

> The Third Theatre lives on the fringe, often outside or on the outskirts of the centres or capitals of culture. It is a theatre created by people who define themselves as actors, directors, theatre workers, although they have seldom undergone a traditional theatrical education and are therefore not recognized as professionals. But they are not amateurs.
>
> (Barba 1985: 193)

Barba had identified, in Susan Bassnett’s gloss, “a new phenomenon…that of a collective turning to theatre not as a profession but as a way of life” (1989: 18). The metaphor he chose to characterise these collectives of in-between practitioners was “floating islands”. This, too, would seem an apt descriptor, not only for the scattered individuals and groupings we have been concerned with here, but also for the sanctuary-like places where they come together. The sense of collegiality that is especially evident at the network’s annual gatherings at Wortley Hall has been strengthened by the steady expansion of the NVPN newsletter and website. The level of consolidation arrived at by the annual gathering of 2013 was marked by the adoption of the descriptor “community of practice”, defined by Etienne Wenger as “a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (2002: 4). Wenger identifies three characteristic dimensions of such communities: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. The latter is, of course, especially apposite in the case of the NVPN. The members’ area **(p.102)** of the website now includes a page titled Community of Practice that carries notices about resource-sharing, regional networking meetings, and opportunities for “learning visits” to observe other choirs in action. It also lists details of experienced NVPN members who now offer their own training sessions for voice leaders.

The coming of age of the organisation itself been paralleled by a significant shift from what may have seemed like the diversions of niche or alternative contingents in the 1980s towards a more mainstream, middle-class identity by the early years of the new millennium. On returning to Britain after spending ten years in New Zealand, Nick Prater noticed a change in the types of people

attending his workshops and choirs. What had previously been “quite a minority thing”, attracting (in his experience) mainly “the long-haired hippies”, now had a far wider appeal, pulling in “just ordinary people really getting into singing” (interview 2007).

This sea change is also reflected in the numbers of practitioners who are now able to make a living from running choirs and other voice-related projects. Income may be comparatively modest, but job satisfaction is high. Many of my interviewees spoke of the deep pleasure they derive from seeing so many of their choir members and workshop participants transformed by their singing experience. Dee Jarlett (co-director of Bristol’s Gasworks Choir), when asked if she has a “best memory” relating to her work in this field, responds: “There are so many! It’s such a lovely job. I just love the fact that singing makes so many people happy.” She describes how when Naked Voices (a smaller *a cappella* ensemble of which she was a part until its dissolution in 2008) was invited to perform, they would always run a workshop before the concert and then invite the participants up on stage during the evening show:

> It’s inevitable that wherever we go, those people in the workshop come out absolutely ecstatically happy because they’ve *loved* the afternoon’s workshop, and then they come to the gig, they *love* the gig and they *love* singing on stage and everybody’s happy.…And what a great job to be in, to make people happy! What could I ask for more?
>
> (Jarlett interview 2007)

She compares this with her previous experience of teaching computing skills, where her students “might be satisfied or they might learn something but they didn’t come out with huge smiles on their faces, which they do after they’ve been singing”. Polly Bolton also compares the personal satisfaction she derives from her present work with past experiences—in this case, the pressures of a “gigging” lifestyle, and more particularly the “paranoia” associated with the performance world and the sense of desolation she would often feel returning home late at night after a solo gig. Leading a workshop, by contrast, leaves her with “a fantastic feeling”: “You drive home and you think: actually, I’ve done something really good today. I feel good about what I’ve done, where I’ve been, **(p.103)** and how I’ve earned my pennies” (interview 2009). On her webpage she has written in a similar vein:

> I have spent many years dabbling in the music business, and have worked with some of the best folk and jazz musicians in the country. I have recorded several albums and have travelled and toured on and off for three decades. Nothing has given me more musical satisfaction, however, than the voice work I do now.
>
> (http://www.naturalvoice.net/pages/polly_bolton.html, acc. May 1, 2009)

This satisfaction rests not only in passing on musical knowledge but in becoming an agent of personal emancipation or collective transformation at a more radical, existential level.

Katherine Zeserson (member of the *a cappella* vocal ensembles Mouthful and Human Music, a familiar presence at Sing for Water, and, since 2002, the director of Learning and Participation for Sage Gateshead) alludes to the extensive range of skills that voice practitioners bring to the job:

> Being a voice worker is a bit like working for a roadside rescue firm—people are so pleased to see you. You engage in psychical midwifery, alchemy, psychology, body work, musical direction, teaching, information sharing, artistry, poetry, dance, consciousness-raising, leadership, philosophical enquiry, challenging, directing, nurturing, healing, partying.
>
> (Zeserson 2005: 125)

The manner in which these various components begin to take shape in a choir rehearsal or workshop is the subject of my next chapter.

Notes:

(1.) The details in this section are drawn primarily from an extensive personal interview with Frankie in 2008 and from her autobiography, *As Far as the Eye Can Sing* (1992). These are supplemented with additional data from her website (www.frankiearmstrong.com), her contributions to Armstrong and Pearson 2000 and Hampton and Acker 1997, and more recent conversations.

(2.) Frankie notes that she finds the designation “chest voice” problematic and now prefers to refer to this voice as the “basic voice”.

(3.) Frankie’s initial motivation for this visit to the United States was her desire to observe the work of Archie Lineburger, a highly respected, blind, group therapist in Philadelphia. Once there, she received invitations to perform at folk clubs, coffee houses, and other festivals across the United States and was able to extend her stay.

(4.) The Singers Club began life as the Ballads and Blues Club, founded by Ewan MacColl and A. L. Lloyd.

(5.) The Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp was established in 1981 as a protest against the British government’s decision to site American cruise missiles at the RAF base at Greenham Common near Newbury in Berkshire. At the “Embrace the Base” initiative of December 1982, 30,000 women joined hands to form a chain almost ten kilometers (six miles) long that encircled the entire base. The following April, an estimated 70,000 people formed a human chain that covered the twenty-three-kilometer (fourteen-mile) stretch from

Greenham past Aldermaston, where the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment had been built on the site of former RAF Aldermaston, to the Royal Ordnance atomic weapons factory at Burghfield, near Reading. Frankie took part in the encircling of Aldermaston and Papworth Common, as well as the Greenham base.

(6.) Kinnersley Castle, the family home of NVPN member Katherina Garrett-Adams, plays host to a range of residential events.

(7.) When I interviewed Frankie in 2008, she and Darien had just completed their twenty-third training week. They have run similar courses for voice practitioners in Australia.

(8.) Over the course of her career, Frankie has also worked with a number of theatre companies, including Welfare State International, Opera Circus, Compass Theatre, and the Graeae Theatre Company (with which she toured to India).

(9.) Short biographies of the teachers and practitioners who receive more than a passing mention in the book, together with links to their websites, can be found on the book's companion website. The NVPN website also carries profiles of all its members. For an additional account of a personal vocal journey told in the practitioner's own words, see Goodman 2000.

(10.) Yvette's folk-related work—in this instance pertaining to her position as an academic associated with the Centre for Archaeology, Anthropology and Heritage at Bournemouth University—also includes The Singing Landscape Project, supported by a Knowledge Transfer Fellowship from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (see http://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/caah/culturalresourcemanagement/folkmaps.html, acc. July 6, 2013).

(11.) Sarah's published songbooks include arrangements of English folk songs and original compositions in three- and four-part harmony for community choirs.

(12.) In 2013, Côr Cochion listed on its website the following campaigns as being among those to which it lent its support: Amnesty International, Liberty, Cymru Cuba, Nicaragua Solidarity, Campaign Against Arms Trade, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Voices in the Wilderness, Women for Peace, Medical Foundation for Victims of Torture, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Greenpeace, Unite, Searchlight, and Colombia Solidarity (see http://www.corcochion.org.uk/, acc. July 6, 2013).

(13.) When Frankie later moved to Cardiff, she and Sarah worked together in a community music programme which Sarah ran and for which Frankie became a tutor.

(14.) Folkworks, now part of The Sage Gateshead, was established in 1988 by Ros Rigby and Alistair Anderson as the folk-music development agency for the North of England.

(15.) The Magdalena Project was launched with the International Festival of Women in Experimental Theatre held in Cardiff in 1986. Magdalena ‘86 (as the event came to be known) was staged in association with Cardiff Laboratory Theatre, of which Magdalena’s director, Jill Greenhalgh, was then a member. Vocal work featured prominently, with workshops led by (among others) Helen Chadwick, Kozana Lucca, and Ida Kelarova, and this set the trend for future festivals, with some overlap in both workshop leaders and clientele between Magdalena and the projects curated by the Centre for Performance Research.

(16.) In 1958, Alvin had founded the Society of Music Therapy and Remedial Music, which in 1967 was renamed the British Society for Music Therapy (BSMT). The Guildhall School of Music and Drama went on to establish, in 1968, the first full-time course that trained qualified musicians as therapists, initially under Alvin’s direction. The Association of Professional Music Therapists (APMT) was formed in 1976; its membership was open to qualified therapists only. In 1982, the Department of Health and Social Security finally established a career and grading structure for music and art therapists, recognising them as members of a paramedical profession, similar to speech therapists, physiotherapists, and occupational therapists.

(17.) The Findhorn Foundation—today styling itself a spiritual community, ecovillage, and international centre for holistic education—had its beginnings in 1962, under the spiritual guidance of Eileen Caddy, one of its three co-founders. The programme of workshops and other events offered by the Findhorn Foundation community association attracts approximately 3,000 residential guests annually.

(18.) The circle dance network is now represented by the organisation Circle Dance Friends Company Ltd. (http://www.circledancenetwork.org.uk, acc. July 6, 2013).

(19.) Readers familiar with the Balkan dance scene in the United States will recognise points of contact with both the SIFD and circle dance ethos.

(20.) What are referred to (here and more generally) as the Glastonbury camps should not be confused with the world-famous Glastonbury Festival. They are two completely separate ventures.

(21.) So-called Taizé chants originated with the international ecumenical Christian community based near the village of Taizé in Burgundy, France (founded in 1940). Home to over a hundred monks of thirty or more nationalities, Taizé attracts more than 100,000 visitors a year and is widely

known for its distinctive repertoire of simple, meditative songs, sung in harmony. The nature of the Taizé repertoire and its appeal in the natural voice context is explored in greater detail in chapter 5.

(22.) Jackie was also involved in establishing Kissing It Better, an initiative directed at improving the patient experience in hospitals and care homes that began as a pilot project in Walsall before going national (see http://www.kissingitbetter.co.uk). Her brief here was to develop activities for patients (particularly those with dementia and Alzheimer's) that would use singing to engage them through reminiscence. At the same time, she expanded her work in the corporate sector, becoming the main voice trainer for the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), the UK's largest teachers' union. "All of this," she says, "came out of my Natural Voice approach and I'm ever grateful to the Natural Voice Practitioners' Network for enabling me to evolve such a platform for myself" (pers. comm. July 21, 2012).

(23.) Laurieston Hall was established as a community in 1972. Between Easter and October, it hosts a programme of residential courses and workshops managed by the co-operative Laurieston Hall People Centre.

(24.) Kate and I ran the choir at Dance Camp Wales together for several years, starting in 1988. I also played and sang in the ad hoc circle dance band, together with Kate, Rory, and others.

(25.) It is, of course, noteworthy that these references are specifically to the Women's Singing Week. In the NVPN as a whole, women significantly outnumber men.

(26.) Since leaving Bulgaria, Dessi has also performed with London-based Balkan groups Izvor and Dunav, the British-Bulgarian story-telling company A Spell in Time, the medieval ensemble Joglaresa, and the New York–based worldbeat fusion outfit Balkan Beat Box, in addition to appearing as a soloist on numerous film soundtracks. She is also the music director of the choral performance project Whispering Woods.

(27.) Dessi also holds a master's degree in music from London's School of Oriental and African Studies and has completed Estill Voice Training to Level 3.

(28.) Eugenia performs with a variety of professional ensembles and is the artistic director of the Perunika Trio. Her voice can also be heard on film soundtracks, including *The Virgin Queen*.