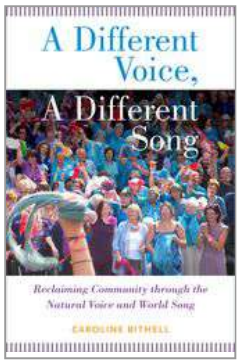

A Different Voice, A Different Song: Reclaiming Community through the Natural Voice and World Song
Caroline Bithell

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Singing the Songs of Others

Caroline Bithell

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Abstract and Keywords

Chapter 5 investigates the place of world song in natural voice and community choir circles in greater depth. It explains why songs from elsewhere play such a prominent part in the repertoire and how they help the movement achieve its broader aims. Drawing on interview and questionnaire responses from choir members as well as voice practitioners, it examines the different orders of attraction associated with songs of varied provenance and the meanings that may be attributed to them in their new environment. More particularly, it explores the appeal and dynamics of singing in a language that is not one's mother tongue. These issues are explored in greater detail with reference to two cases studies: songs from the ecumenical community of Taizé and polyphonic songs from the Republic of Georgia.

Keywords: world song, songs from elsewhere, natural voice, community choir repertoire, language, Taizé, Georgian polyphonic song

A World of Song

On a bright Saturday in May 2009, I take a trip to the Welsh seaside town of Llandudno, where four community choirs from across North Wales—each directed by a member of the NVPN—are coming together to stage a joint concert to raise funds for Sing for Water. The short profiles in the printed programme are revealing for what they say about each choir's musical tastes and sense of identity, while the performance itself offers an instructive insight into the choirs' working repertoire. Coastal Voices, based in nearby Abergele and led by Sara Brown, sings "close harmony songs from around the world". The repertoire of Lleisiau'r Byd/World Voices from Porthmadog, co-directed by David Gunn and

Christine Eastwood, ranges “from Jazz to Native American, African to Eastern European, Far Eastern to English Folk”. The members of Dolgellau Choir/Côr Dolgellau, directed by Roxane Smith, “enjoy all sorts of music, from cheesy songs from the sixties to deeply spiritual songs from Eastern Europe”. Bangor Community Choir, led by Pauline Down, again sings “a cappella harmony songs from all over the world”.[1] Each choir performs a set of five or six songs before joining the other choirs in a grand finale of a further three songs. This composite programme features three gospel songs (“Lord, Don’t Turn Your Child Away”, as learnt from Northern Harmony;[2] “The Storm Is Passing Over” from Ysaye Barnwell’s *Singing in the African American Tradition*; and Nick Prater’s arrangement of “Love Like a River”[3]); five African songs (including two from South Africa); three songs from Eastern Europe (one Bosnian, one Croatian, one Greek); an arrangement of the Cuban classic “Guantanamera”; a shape-note song; a harmonisation of an Italian folk song by Helen Chadwick; an arrangement of an English folk song from the Copper Family repertoire; a Welsh folk song; five arrangements of contemporary popular songs (including Dee Jarlett’s arrangement of Labi Siffre’s “Something Inside So Strong”); and **(p. 141)** new compositions by Nickomo, Ali Burns, Ros Thomas, and David Gunn (all members of the NVPN).

CDs recorded by established choirs are a further indication of the breadth of repertoire and varied provenance of the songs that circulate in the natural voice world; at the same time, they reflect the distinctive identities of individual choirs. WorldSong, founded by Chris Rowbury in the city of Coventry (West Midlands), is an example of a choir explicitly dedicated to world music. Its ten-year anniversary CD, *WorldSong Live: A Decade in Harmony, 1997-2007*, includes songs from France, Norway, Croatia, Macedonia, Poland, Georgia, Ukraine, New Zealand, Japan, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Hawai’i, and Wales, together with a Shaker song from the United States, four spirituals, the gospel song “Lord, Don’t Turn Your Child Away” in an arrangement by the Jubilee Quartet, the Rev. Robert Lowry’s “How Can I Keep from Singing?” as popularised by Pete Seeger, “Unison in Harmony” by Jim Boyes, and a setting of a Latin liturgical text by Helen Chadwick.

The repertoire of Global Harmony in the Devonshire town of Totnes in southwest England combines world music with new compositions, including pieces by choir members whose song-writing endeavours have been encouraged by their director, Roz Walker. The CD *Songs for Today* (2002) features songs representing different genres and moods as well as different parts of the globe. Here, we find four African songs, a gospel song, two Georgian songs (a love song and a song of friendship), a Croatian love song (“Plovi Barko”), a Russian church song (“Tebye Pajom”), a Spanish lullaby (“A La Nanita”), and a French drinking song. These are balanced by ten contemporary compositions: “This Great Sky” by Ali Burns, a song from Nickomo’s Harmonic Temple collection, one song each by members

of the American ensembles Libana and Northern Harmony, and six songs written by members of Global Harmony.

Bristol's Gasworks Choir presents yet another orientation, giving pride of place to lively and sumptuous arrangements of popular songs by its directors Dee Jarlett and Ali Orbaum. *The Best of the Gasworks Choir* (2005) includes arrangements of titles by The Beatles, The Zombies, Sting, Tracy Chapman, Mike Scott, Johnny Nash, Tom Jones, Labi Siffre, and others. These are interspersed with a sprinkling of songs from further afield—a Georgian song, a South African song as popularised by Miriam Makeba, a Nigerian song, a Sephardic folk song, a gospel song and a Scottish song (the last four also arranged by either Dee or Ali).

Taken together, the foregoing examples illustrate the extent to which songs from a surprising variety of "other" cultures have entered the repertoires of individual choirs in different parts of Britain. In the previous chapter, we gained an insight into how these songs are sourced and disseminated. We also found answers to some of our questions about how "world songs" mesh with the NVPN ideology and help the movement achieve its aims. It is worth reiterating that it was the musical material—crucially, songs from outside the **(p.142)** British tradition—that first claimed Frankie Armstrong's attention and then led her to elaborate the principles and methodology that are now at the heart of the natural voice endeavour. A set of further questions now presents itself. How exactly do the songs work to produce the more discrete benefits to which the movement aspires? What exactly do comparatively privileged and secure Western singers identify with when they encounter a fragment of the life of a Central African forest dweller or a Bosnian shepherd? What is the appeal of singing in a language one doesn't speak or understand? What new meanings do the songs and the act of singing them acquire? In what ways might they contribute to a change in consciousness for those who enter into their deeper recesses?

In engaging in a more comprehensive and grounded examination of these matters, I seek to identify the different levels of attraction the songs might hold for choir leaders and for choir members and workshop participants. I also consider the rewards they bring, as reported by individual singers. In terms of primary sources, I draw extensively on personal interviews and questionnaire responses. As applied to quotations included in this chapter (where I do not limit myself to data from the British cohort alone), "Unicorn questionnaire" denotes responses received from a survey circulated (by email) to all attendees following the 2007 Unicorn Natural Voice Camp; most of these were UK-based. Citations referenced as "Giving Voice questionnaire" relate to delegates at the 2007 Giving Voice festival held in Aberystwyth, Wales, who took part in the three-day workshop led by members of Theatre Zar (Poland); these included participants from different parts of Europe as well as the United Kingdom. Citations referenced as "Corsica questionnaire" relate to a Village Harmony camp held in

Corsica in 2004, where the majority of participants were from the United States and were active in community choirs organised along similar lines to many community choirs in the United Kingdom.

The Attraction of Songs from Elsewhere

Scenes from Frankie Armstrong's story, as recounted in chapter 3, revealed that her adoption of Eastern European songs was founded not simply on her aesthetic attraction to the sound but also on her recognition of the social and psychological potential of the material for British and American singers. Additional insights into the attraction of songs from elsewhere can be found in the explanations of other voice practitioners who have been drawn to songs from non-Western cultures, often independently of (or prior to) their association with the NVPN, and have discovered the value of using such songs—specifically, songs in foreign languages—in their own practice.

Sarah Harman identifies several reasons for using "a lot of material from other cultures" when she first started working with community choirs. **(p.143)** Accessibility and the ease of achieving pleasing results quickly and painlessly were high on the list:

> Those songs came out of traditions where *ordinary* people were singing them, they were *easy* to pick up, you got *glorious* harmony very, very quickly, which certainly in my folk tradition you didn't get.…And, for me, it was that—it was their accessibility, it was the instant beautiful harmony.

What the songs were about and what they could tell us about the lives of those who sang them in their place of origin was of almost equal importance:

> It was also that those songs were about things that either resonated with the people that I was teaching…*or* they were introducing a whole other culture and introducing ideas, they were broadening people's perspectives and making them think about what it might be like to be somebody else living in another culture—so part of the political work, if you like.

Broadening people's ideas about music by introducing a relativist perspective was also part of Sarah's mission:

> And also there was something for me…about people's rules that they've got in their head about what is a good harmony and what is a bad harmony and the whole idea that, if you lived somewhere else, what you thought was a normal, everyday, ordinary harmony would be completely different—if you lived in Bulgaria, your idea of what was a weird harmony would be very different—and I think, to give people a chance to suddenly go, "Oh, so I see, that's not weird or wrong, it's just something unusual for me."
>
> (Harman interview 2008)

Already, then, we have a series of prompts to guide our investigation, which I now pursue in the following order: first, the opportunity to explore and appreciate new sound worlds, free of one's own cultural constraints or prejudices, and to take pleasure in new experiences; second, the opportunity to enter, if only fleetingly, the lives of others, to empathise with their concerns, and to come to an understanding of shared life experiences; and third, the discovery of resources that are unavailable in one's own culture but that fulfil a present need.

Entering New Sound Worlds

Some of the less-familiar musical styles embraced by natural voice choirs and choirs of a more specialist bent, such as Eastern European choirs, and by people who attend Village Harmony camps and Giving Voice festivals, **(p.144)** introduce a whole new layer of sound features in the form of harmonies, intervals, timbres, and other vocal effects characteristic of a particular culture. The pleasure of discovering sound worlds that are so unexpectedly and fundamentally different from their own was vividly conveyed by many of the musical explorers I surveyed in the course of my research. When asked, "What do you feel that you gain from learning repertoire and singing styles from other parts of the world?", many of my respondants spoke of the thrill they derived from these new opportunities and went on to reflect on the way in which what they learned had enriched their approach to singing in general. Charles, a nineteen-year-old American student writing after attending Village Harmony's Corsican camp, remarks:

> People…tend to use one way of singing for their entire lives…not even thinking about it because they don't need to. Actually learning music from throughout the world shows you so many drop-dead-gorgeous singing traditions, exposes you to music that moves you down to the very marrow…And it makes you exercise so many different ways of singing that you start to figure out the ways that work best, not just the ways that you've always done it. Overall, it's sort of like feeding the addiction you never knew you had for the chocolate that nobody else has discovered yet.
>
> (Charles, Corsica questionnaire 2004)

The allusion to "addiction" and the suggestion of forging a pioneering path might also catch our attention here. Anthony Johnston, a Bristol-based teacher and choir leader who attended the same camp, adds the notion of personal risk-taking to the mix:

> As a singer, I get a whole different sense of what it means to sing in terms of what timbre and what volume to use. I have to stick my neck out more in order to sound more authentic. I am required to put more of myself on the line when I sing world songs, to reveal myself more. In order to sound

> more Georgian, Bulgarian or Corsican, I need to explore singing in different ways, using my voice in new and different ways....

He goes on to talk about overcoming the constraints of the culture in which one has grown up:

> As a musician, my sense of what melody, harmonisation, and rhythm are is challenged too. The rules of Western music, spoken and unspoken, are questioned, broken down and seen for what they are—constraints. I gain a far more expansive idea as to what is possible in vocal music, the harmonic textures, what notes can stand next to others that you would never hear in mainstream Western music.
>
> (Anthony, Corsica questionnaire 2004)

(p.145)

Anthony's reference to "questioning the rules" of Western music may have an unwelcome ring for a music teacher at pains to instil the rudiments of Western music theory into his pupils. It does not take a rampant revolutionary, however, to point out the artificiality of the equal tempered scale or the absurdity of any assumption that the modern Western musical system—or what Christopher Small dubs "the logical daylit world of tonal harmony" (1996: 11)—is the only "correct" one. Since the question of "naturalness" is central to our explorations, a short diversion is in order here. In his essay "On the Musical Scales of Various Nations", British mathematician and phonetician Alexander John Ellis (best known in musicological circles for his elaboration of the cents system) observed that "the Musical Scale is not one, not 'natural'...but very diverse, very artificial, and very capricious" (1885: 526). Early scientists devoted much energy to the business of equating musical intervals with mathematical laws. Yet the scale that is achieved by dividing the octave into twelve equal semitones no longer corresponds to mathematically accurate ratios and therefore, in Anthony Storr's words, has "distanced Western tonal music still further from nature" (1992: 54). Moreover, while it may come tantalisingly close, this scale cannot be fully mapped against the harmonic series and so loses any claim to naturalness on that count: the fifth harmonic, for example, is a pure third (plus two octaves) that is flatter than the contemporary major third, while the infamous seventh harmonic falls inconveniently between A natural and B flat. Another slippage occurs with the Pythagorean comma that denotes the difference between twelve perfect fifths and seven octaves (in other words, the degree to which the note arrived at via the cycle, or circle, of fifths is sharper than that produced by the octave series). These acoustic enigmas give some indication of why the *modulatory* freedom that the equal tempered scale makes possible results in what Small refers to as "a type of mistuning...that other cultures would find intolerable" (1996: 35).

This does not mean that the “correct” solution is easily to be found elsewhere. Even a cursory tour of musical scales from different parts of the globe reveals a diversity that is clearly rooted as much in culture as in nature. While the octave, the perfect fourth, and the perfect fifth are found in most musical systems, other pitches fluctuate. Many systems employ what in Western parlance are known as as “microtones “or “expanded intervals” (intervals that are respectively smaller or larger than a semitone or 100 cents), and neutral thirds (somewhere between 300 and 400 cents) are especially common. What is in tune for one person may therefore be out of tune for another. Questions of consonant and dissonant intervals are likewise related to culture rather than nature, and even within a culture they are not necessarily stable over time. Charles Rosen notes, for example, that in Western music “thirds and sixths have been consonances since the fourteenth century; before that they were considered unequivocally dissonant” (1975: 24). Adopting an approach akin to that applied earlier to the question of presentational versus participatory **(p.146)** music, the only legitimate conclusion to be drawn is that, from a universal perspective, no one system is more or less “correct”, no one interval more or less “in tune”: they are simply different.

To return to the quotations that served as our starting point for this section, Charles and Anthony’s references to using the voice in new ways point not only to vocal exploration or experimentation as an end in itself but also to its centrality in the quest for a more “authentic” sound. Here again, there are useful perspectives to be gained from digging a little deeper. Songs from folk traditions, or from art music traditions in the non-Western world, are clearly not composed with the European bel canto voice in mind. This is in part for the pragmatic reason that a particular style of voice production and projection will develop to some extent in response to the environment in which the voice operates. Outdoor environments make different demands from indoor settings, and large, public spaces differ considerably from intimate, domestic ones. The inhabitants of forests develop musical structures and vocal styles that are very different from those of mountain dwellers or coastal peoples. Consider, for example, Louis Sarno’s explanation of why the distinctive yodels of the Bayaka people of the Western Congo Basin are an efficient musical choice in the acoustic environment of the primary rainforest they inhabit: “Yodels…are the most natural and effective way to use the voice in this environment, because as the voice resonates through the trees both high and low notes hang in the air at the same time. A single voice thus creates a chord” (1995: 70). Tony Backhouse reminds us that the evolution of the Western operatic style was a necessary response to the demands placed on the singer by the increasing size of both opera houses and orchestras (2004: 6).[4] Styles that develop in this fashion then become ingrained in the identity of the music (and often, by extension, of the national or ethnic group) and established as the “right” way to do things. In this way what are seen as the music’s most important defining features stay with it

even when the environment changes, functioning as a marker of authenticity. This has three implications that are of relevance here. First, the preferred or approved vocal style in a modern society may no longer be quite so fit for purpose as it was at an earlier point in history. Second, assuming or insisting that a vocal style that has developed in one environment should be retained in new and sometimes radically different environments, as if it were independent of physical contingencies and functional imperatives, is less than logical. And third, working with repertoires from many different cultures of origin *requires* the use of a more varied vocal palette.

The criteria according to which a voice is evaluated also vary from one culture to another. Seemingly aesthetic preferences are often, as suggested in chapter 2, based on different underlying values. Outside the Western classical tradition, matters of intention, conviction, and communication might carry greater weight than conventional assessments of what may be considered a **(p.147)** "beautiful" or "pleasing" voice. The pure, ethereal tone often associated with Early Music or the sound of an English cathedral choir may be admired by but, at the same time, be devoid of meaning for a listener on the other side of the globe. Similarly, as Tony Backhouse points out, some of the greatest gospel singers have "hoarse, rough voices" that appeal to listeners in their own culture for reasons that might not be immediately obvious to an ear acclimatised to cathedral choirs:

> I've heard people with lovely voices and a tonne of technique leave a congregation cold, while someone with less technical ability can light a fire under the audience through the sheer feeling and integrity of their performance. Expression, not technique is what matters here.
>
> (Backhouse 2004: 3)

Backhouse's observation correlates with my comments in chapter 4 on the positive audience reception to community choir performances that engage and provoke a visceral reaction in the listener that is independent of any objective assessment of musicianship on the basis of technique.

Not only do different cultures have their own norms and notions of what constitutes a "good" voice, but there may also be greater variety within a culture (when compared with modern Britain, for example) in terms of the range of vocal styles and techniques that may be employed. For a singer who has not undergone a formal, classical training, it is often easier to find these other voices because he or she does not have to struggle to undo set patterns, whether mental or physical, and let go of his or her notions about the "right" way of doing things. Some of the techniques found in Western popular music, jazz, and rock (e.g. belting and twang) come close to some of the sounds found in non-Western music. In this regard, Backhouse's reference to the inclusion of

“moaning, growling, screaming, grunting and a whole range of effects and colours foreign to the Western model” in the “hard lead” voice in a gospel ensemble (2004: 3) points to the utility of the kinds of warm-up exercises I described in chapter 4, above and beyond simply opening up the voice.

Entering the Lives of Others

Sarah Harman’s desire to use material from outside the British heritage in order to broaden people’s musical experience was linked explicitly with the humanistic project of promoting greater understanding and appreciation of other cultures. This dimension also surfaces frequently in the responses of participants in choirs, workshops, and summer camps in which world songs feature prominently. In the context of his experience as a participant in Village Harmony’s Corsican camp, Anthony expands on the idea of “meeting other people” through their songs: **(p.148)**

> Each country’s songs have their own unique flavour, being born out of the people’s relationship to their everyday existence; their work, daily struggles, their joys, celebrations, rituals, customs, their history, their stories, and their relationship to the land. By singing songs from around the world, I feel as if I am meeting the people who sing or would have sung those songs. I meet something of who they are—their lives, their land, their soul.
>
> (Anthony, Corsica questionnaire 2004)

Rosa (part of the American contingent visiting Corsica with Village Harmony in 2004) voices similar sentiments:

> When I sing music from a certain place, I feel more connected with its people and their ancestors and more able to understand what they feel. It gives that place a certain familiarity and makes my world closer and more connected.
>
> (Rosa, Corsica questionnaire 2004)

It is interesting to note Rosa’s repetition of the word “connected”. This theme of connection also appears frequently in the responses to my Unicorn Camp questionnaire. Rina, for example, reports “a sense of connection to far away places and peoples that I will probably never visit”. Others emphasise the idea of sharing fundamental human experiences across the geographical divide, in spite of obvious cultural-historical differences. References are made to feeling “a sense of sharing and solidarity” (Jane), gaining “a clarity about how much humankind have in common” (Gill), and “sharing hopes and dreams, knowing that we are all one, though facing different problems and similar joys!” (Angela).

Clearly, this kind of realisation helps to bridge some of the gaps between cultures, beyond the realm of “the music itself”.

Zarine prompts us to extrapolate further when she speaks of:

> A shared sense of humanity; a feeling that sound is healing and expressive from a heart-mind perspective rather than solely a mathematical-intellectual perspective; that voices joined in song or improvised sound and rhythm create a connection that is familiar and unselfish but is often hidden in daily (industrialised countries/urban) activities.
>
> (Zarine, Giving Voice questionnaire 2008)

Here we have the notion that engaging with songs from elsewhere can provide us with insights and resources that are not so readily available in our own society, providing us with a different kind of tool kit for approaching problems that require solving or ills that require healing. Another Unicorn respondent pursues a related theme, that of rediscovering a sense of vitality and groundedness that some no longer find in their own culture: “I think we are quite removed from our cultural heritage in this country, so often songs from other cultures seem more alive, more strongly connected to spirit, to the earth.” **(p.149)**

The notion that music serves as a bridge between cultures takes on surprisingly graphic dimensions in other accounts provided by British and American singers fresh from the experience of learning songs in their place of origin, some of which also suggest an opening-up and merging of identities. Seventeen-year-old Meiling is especially eloquent on this subject:

> I think that singing…transcends so many borders, so by learning international music you are given a common language with which to speak and connect to people you may have never considered it possible to communicate with before.…By figuring out you have so many voices within you, you figure out that we all have so many people within us; so I am no longer just an American, but I recognize that the fibre and essence of the Bulgarian, Georgian, South African and Corsican people is somewhere inside me also.
>
> (Meiling, Corsica questionnaire 2004)

This suggests that what might, on the surface, be viewed in an uncomplicated way as a singing holiday does more profound existential and moral work by prompting participants to question assumptions about their own national identities, and particularly, to reject the notion of identities as monolithic, static, or divisive. Heidi (an educational fundraiser at an American university) makes a similar comment:

> Singing the traditional songs of cultures other than our own puts us empathetically in other bodies, looking out of other eyes, singing out of other throats. It helps us to imagine ourselves in other times and places than within the narrow confines of our own life histories.
>
> (Heidi, Corsica questionnaire 2004)

By extension, songs from elsewhere offer the possibility of reinventing oneself—of imagining the self one might yet become.

Deeper Resonances: Lost Pasts and Present Yearnings

At this juncture I wish to probe more deeply into the connection between two of the threads that have emerged thus far: on the one hand, the idea that we might find in other cultures some kind of salve or solution for a problem in our own lives, and on the other, the idea that properties of the music are liberating at the level of both the intellect and the psyche. Earlier, we established the appeal of music that breaks free from the constraints of European classical harmony. At an intellectual level this applies primarily to singers schooled in the rules of composition. Singers who have not had this training will not be in a position to identify specific harmonic procedures that transcend or defy these rules. Yet they, too, experience a powerful sensory thrill—which they often **(p.150)** characterise in strikingly visceral terms as "spine-tingling" or "making the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end"—that allows them to share the same joy of singing unfamiliar combinations of tones, such as so-called discords, parallel fifths, or tritones. This physical "buzz" is often linked with an enhanced sense of well being and an immediate feeling of being re-energised. Joan Mills makes a connection between early music and non-Western styles. In her youth, she says, she found early music "very exciting" in its use of parallel fourths and fifths:

> I think there's something about intervals—the space between certain notes meeting certain notes—that just…somehow causes something. It somehow feels like a chemical *rush* in the body.

Some years later she heard Simha Arom's recordings of Aka music, "and absolutely," she says, "my ears lit up…when I heard that." The same thing happened when she heard Marcel Cellier's *Mystère des Voix Bulgares* recordings and when she first experienced singing Balkan songs with Frankie Armstrong:

> That tingle would happen, that buzz, that extraordinary reaction….It was the *sound*, first and foremost…it was just the fact that this note touches this note and just this exciting buzz of the way they fit together.
>
> (Mills interview 2005)

Jackie Roxborough links the pull of certain harmonies with the affective experience of connectedness:

> Particularly the harmonies, I think, really sell it to people and it allows them to feel their personal vibration and their frequency of their voice—not a pitching, but a real sense of belonging. It's the community again, isn't it?
>
> (Roxborough interview 2007)

Joan Mills also makes a link between notions of musical harmony and human community when she says:

> I *loved* these songs and I *loved* the way that they required other persons to lean on and to be kind of locked into in a way that my solo culture of folk tradition—they're all solo songs and you're alone there singing those. And suddenly here was this community of other people.
>
> (Mills interview 2005)

For Nick Prater, too, "the key word is community". Singing and dancing—together with eating, drinking, and fire—lie at the heart of every culture, he observes:

> And I think the reason that we as Westerners, or as English people, are really drawn to these other kinds of music is because they represent a still cohesive **(p.151)** community that we've lost, so that's what they offer us.…We're left with a bit of English folk tradition and that somehow doesn't pull us together in that way.
>
> (Prater interview 2007)

Similarly, Nina Chandler, who performs Georgian songs in the United Kingdom as a member of the female *a cappella* trio Kviria, alights on the word "connection"—alongside the notion of "loss"—in trying to explain the affinity she feels with Georgian singing in particular:

> I think for me, it's about a culture that I feel I'm distant from.…Somehow singing in that language gives expression to a longing for something that we don't have at the moment in our twenty-first-century technological [life], whizzing about, being busy.…It's a connection with something that I think we've lost.
>
> (Chandler interview 2009)

This nostalgia for a lost past that is imagined as more innocent, natural, and nurturing than the present fuels many revival movements. The past to which revivalists turn is usually, however, their own. Why, then, do the singers we have heard from in this chapter not join the current wave of the English or British folk resurgence? Some of the above interview extracts hint at the way in which the English folk tradition is felt to be lacking. Several of the people I interviewed

share the view that the English folk tradition is not well suited to the community choir context. Both Sarah Harman and Joan Mills pinpoint one important reason: the predominance of solo songs and the comparatively thin pickings when one is looking for songs in harmony. Joan goes on to talk about the way in which songs from other parts of the world were sometimes incorporated into the theatrical productions of Cardiff Laboratory Theatre. “And why are we not singing a British song there?” she asks. “Because there isn’t one.” They might be looking for a song that had an aura of antiquity or ritual, she explains, and this might be suggested by the *sound* of a particular song, regardless of its original meaning or function as well as its provenance. The type of theatre they were making also needed something “to evoke community”. Again, she says, this need was best met with a polyphonic song (Mills interview 2005).

Next to harmony, rhythm is a musical feature that is often cited as part of the attraction of songs from elsewhere and this, too, is sometimes presented as a feature lacking in music found closer to home. When I interviewed Margaret Walton and Lynn Yule, both members of Bangor Community Choir, they spoke about their choir’s reactions to some of the British folk songs they had learnt. “I don’t think they’ve been terribly popular, actually,” Margaret ventured. “I think the choir enjoys the exotic—you know, the African and the Georgian and the Bulgarian...and the spirituals as well: they enjoy those.” When choir members have the opportunity to request favourites, says Lynn, **(p.152)** “it’s nearly always the African stuff we go back to,” and Margaret adds, “I think it’s the big rhythmic stuff that people enjoy” (Walton and Yule interview 2007). Some choir leaders have sought to remedy the dearth of multi-part material in the British tradition by making their own arrangements of English, Scottish, and Welsh folk songs, and it is interesting to note that some of the bolder arrangements have also introduced more varied or complex rhythms. Many of the new compositions that have emerged in recent years are also more adventurous in their use of rhythm as well as harmony (see chapter 9).

There are, though, further dimensions to the kind of antipathy that is sometimes expressed in British society at large towards songs in the vernacular. For many, the English folk tradition it is a source of embarrassment that lends itself to easy parody (typically, an exaggeratedly nasal form of voice production and a finger stuck in one ear, with the singer imagined as sporting an unkempt beard and baggy homespun jumper). For others, it simply appears dull and uninteresting. Sue Harris comments that, in the early days of the community choir movement,

> there was a real resistance to English traditional song—I think maybe partly the way it had been put over when we were at school or maybe to do with very classical-type arrangements of English folk song through Vaughan Williams and people like that.
>
> (Harris interview 2009)

Even some who grew up with the English folk tradition became uncomfortable with the way it seems to revel in melancholic and ultimately tragic tales of a woman's lot; it certainly did not fit well with the rise of second-wave feminist consciousness in the 1960s and 1970s. African and Balkan songs, by comparison, were experienced as invigorating and uplifting, even if in reality their subject matter was not always so very different.

Finally, as a number of British practitioners emphasised in interviews, when people have had negative experiences of singing in the past these were usually associated with singing in English. This, then, brings us to a more detailed consideration of questions of language.

The Politics of Unintelligibility

"I much prefer singing songs in other languages," says Barbara. This avowal seems surprising even before she goes on to comment: "Strangely, I also find it easier to learn the words!" (Unicorn questionnaire 2007). It is one thing to be drawn to the exotic, but why would someone relatively new to singing choose the considerable challenge of learning song texts in unfamiliar languages, which often contain sounds that do not have an equivalent in English? The answer to this question is complex, but it points to a number of **(p.153)** ways in which singing in a language one does not speak or understand can be experienced as liberating.

First and foremost, as already suggested, learning new songs in a foreign language can free the singer from inhibitions and sensitivities associated with past experiences of singing more familiar repertoire in English. In chapter 4 we encountered Frankie Armstrong's proposal that "getting outside the structure and content of our daily language…can help us to get away from fears of the old patterns of self-criticism and negative judgement that so many of us carry (Armstrong and Pritchard 2005: 18). Jackie Roxborough pursues a related theme when she describes how many of the aspiring singers who find their way to her groups have felt alienated by the more conventional teaching methods they have been exposed to in traditional choirs or choral societies and, as a result:

> They often are very self-conscious about singing songs in their own language, so as soon as you use, say, some of the African [songs] particularly—there's rhythm there, it uses the body, it uses their voice in a different way, their throat production is different, and it begins to free people up from their own language.

She elaborates on how this therapeutic or emancipatory dimension also has a profound impact on an individual's sense of identity:

> And that to me is really where the voice and identity starts to open up a little bit as people lose the restrictions in themselves and actually find the identity they've been looking for through singing and through voice.

(Roxborough interview 2007)

She refers to working with people in their forties or fifties who have come to her to “find their voice” in a very literal sense. Initially, they are “incredibly nervous” but, after six to eight weeks, “suddenly we’re getting completely different personalities coming through and identities”. In this scenario, what began as a quest for an as yet unexplored singing voice takes on more existential proportions.

Others welcome the opportunity to be free, at a cognitive level, of the literal meaning of the words. Ann Chamberlayne, who had belonged to more conventional classical choirs before discovering her local community choir, says:

> Words, to me, get in the way a lot of the time, which is one of the reasons I really enjoy singing the world songs because I don’t understand the words, so the music and the rhythm can speak to me. I think it’s one of the reasons that I’ve loved singing….I’d rather sing something that doesn’t have words I understand.
>
> (Chamberlayne interview 2007)

(p.154)

Chris Rowbury similarly attests to the way in which being freed of the distraction of words allows him to shift his attention to other dimensions:

> I’m not a word person, so I like the foreign lyrics because I use the sounds of the words as a vehicle for the musical expression. But if I understand the words they get in the way, the semantics of it gets in the way.
>
> (Rowbury interview 2008)

He enjoys being left with “just the sounds of the words….It sort of slightly takes you out of yourself”. Here, then, we also have a suggestion of a transcendental quality, where the ego is momentarily set aside.

Variations of these themes appear in many of the responses to my Unicorn questionnaire (2007). Jenny, for example, speaks of “a chance to let go into my voice when I am singing sounds that are unfamiliar or words that don’t carry associations for me”. Sally picks up on the notion of “being taken out of yourself” when she remarks: “Sometimes it is releasing….I notice my own language can get in the way of numinous experience.” For another respondent, the emphasis is more on not liking to sing words that make her feel awkward or uncomfortable: “I get a bit hung up on the meanings of words, so unless they really jump out at me in a poetic way, I feel a bit silly singing about some things in English.”

The distancing process that takes place through language choice does not negate the lexical meaning, but it filters it through a different lens and repositions the speaker in relation to the utterance. Joan Mills reflects on the different cognitive processes at work when the brain is not preoccupied with literal meanings. Thinking back again to her first experience of learning a Balkan song in one of Frankie's workshops, and why this was "kind of freeing", she muses:

> We were learning it phonetically, obviously, and she *would* tell us what the song was about…but…the fact that it wasn't in English and it wasn't recognisable I felt very strongly made a difference to how the song was *perceived* by us; and…very early on I thought: "This is going through a different bit of the brain now, this is *not* the same as when you learn the words of something that you know. I'm actually learning sounds, effectively."…And there is something different about the way…it buzzes in the body.
>
> (Mills interview 2005)

The palpable difference in the overall sound when people sang in a language that was not their mother tongue was one of the things that impressed Frankie most forcibly when she began teaching Balkan songs. In her account of the voice workshop she established in London in 1975, she recalls deciding in the second week to teach an English song. She was immediately struck by the group's "muted response":

> Quite a lot of them…dropped back into their previous habits of vocal use, which they didn't when they sang Balkan songs with words that they didn't know.…It **(p.155)** was so dramatic.…It was much easier to get people to explore vocal qualities using songs in languages they didn't know.
>
> (Armstrong interview 2008)

Some singers are nonetheless able to carry over the new ways of experiencing sound that they discover through singing in other languages into their interpretation of English songs. David explains:

> I really enjoy the opportunity to explore the emotiveness of song and sounds through melody and breath that singing in a language I don't understand brings. When words become sounds I feel it frees the voice to explore the emotional texture of song. I then apply this to my English language singing, thinking about an expression of the sound rather than the words to convey the meaning of the song.
>
> (Giving Voice questionnaire 2008)

Sarah Harman highlights yet another dimension:

> There's something to be said for moving people away from a language that they think they're really comfortable in, into a language where they have to work much harder at the sound....It shifts the anxiety, I find, the anxiety that is in everybody when they're learning a new song....If you take it to a place where people don't *expect* to know what they're doing, they somehow *seem* to find that easier to live with. If they think it's in English, they think if they understand the words then they've got the song.
>
> (Harman interview 2008)

In this case, the anxiety attaches not to past trauma that might be reawakened but to apprehension when faced with a new challenge. Sarah also comments that working with foreign text enables people to "come into the song in a very different way."[5]

Songs from Taizé

In chapter 3, we learnt of the simple chants emanating from the ecumenical Christian community of Taizé in France that are popular in some natural voice circles.[6] The use of language in this repertoire is illuminating in the context of our present discussion. Of the sixty-four pieces included in the collection *Songs from Taizé* (Taizé 1984), forty-two are settings of Latin texts. (Favourites include "Jubilate Deo", "Dona Nobis Pacem", "Da Pacem Domine", "Confitemini Domino", and "Veni Creator Spiritus", together with several settings of the Kyrie and Alleluia.) Other pieces are presented with multiple versions of the lyrics in different languages—usually English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, and Dutch, with Welsh, Russian, Eastern European, and Asian languages also putting in occasional appearances. Thus, while the songs are all from the Christian tradition, the collection has the appeal of being a **(p.156)** multilingual resource. It was one response to the increasing numbers of young people from all over Europe who were finding their way to Taizé in the early 1970s.[7]

Another facet of the response was to embrace Latin as a neutral and quasi-universal language. The foreword to the American edition of *Music from Taizé: Volume 1* (People's Edition) explains that songs were needed that would enable people not sharing a common language to participate directly and as easily as possible in the activities of the community. It goes on to describe how, with the help of musician Jacques Berthier, "different methods were tested, and a solution found in the use of repetitive structures—short musical phrases with singable easily memorized melodies—and some very basic Latin texts", thus obviating the need to stop and teach a song before it could be sung (Taizé 1986: 3). *Music from Taizé: Volume 1* is available in different editions. The People's Edition contains the basic melodies for the canons, acclamations, responses, and refrains. These are predominantly settings of Latin text, with English translation, supplemented by a small number of new compositions with English lyrics by Berthier. The Latin refrains "bear up under constant repetition better than any

vernacular" because of "the natural 'color' of the language" (ibid.). In the introductory notes to the Vocal Edition, Brother Robert stresses that the fact that Latin is no longer spoken as a living language means that it is "a foreign element for everyone, and hence neutral"; no one is either favoured or disadvantaged (Taizé 1982: vii). Furthermore:

> Experience has clearly shown that the repetitive style quickly runs the risk of making words from one of the living languages threadbare, whereas the "neutral" nature of a word or short phrase from a traditional liturgical language (for example, the Greek *Kyrie*, the Aramaic *Maranatha* or the Latin *Gloria*) is perfectly suited to the function of a response.
>
> (Taizé 1982: x)

In the Vocal Edition, the acclamations, responses, and refrains that are presented in the People's Edition with a single melody line are scored for four voices and supplemented by verses for solo cantor, together with keyboard and guitar accompaniments. Here, a variety of living languages is used for the verses, where the words do not need to be memorised by the whole assembly and do not run the same risk of becoming "threadbare" as a result of over-repetition.

The rationale as formulated in Taizé itself about the use of Latin is, interestingly, borne out by some of the comments made by British singers in my interviews and in questionnaire responses. Speakers of English and of many other European languages often find Latin easy to sing because the phonetics are predictable, making the words easy to read and pronounce. At the same time, even if many of the words are familiar to churchgoers, whether active or lapsed, and to those who attended schools where Latin still had a place in the **(p.157)** curriculum, they allow the singer to distance him or herself from their literal meaning. One of my respondents, for example, states quite bluntly that "some words in English hymns make me puke [but] I can sing Christian words in Latin quite happily" (Unicorn questionnaire 2007).

Text and Meaning in the Vernacular

The preference for songs in a language one does not understand or speak is, then, not as contrary as it might at first appear. Moreover, when we survey different music cultures, we find that a variety of devices are used, in polyphonic singing in particular, that obscure the semantics of the text. Even when singers use their mother tongue, they might deliberately obfuscate the lexical meaning as a means of marking the boundary between initiates and non-initiates. More broadly, the psychoacoustic experience and the quality of interaction with one's fellow singers often take precedence over the meaning of the lyric. Tullia Magrini (1995) has written about the intriguing case of the North Italian ballad tradition, where the long narrative ballads formerly sung by women were

refashioned as polyphonic songs to be sung by men. In the process, the text—which in female circles had fulfilled an important educational function—was devalued in favour of the harmonic experience. Often only a few stanzas were retained and these might be repeated several times in the course of a single rendition. In performance, the songs no longer told a story. They became above all a demonstration of male stamina and social cohesion.

A similar phenomenon is found on the nearby island of Corsica. Here, male singers of polyphonic songs sometimes speak of the song text as a “pretext”; the logical development of the narrative (such as it is) is frequently disrupted as individual singers enter at different points in the line, take breaths in the middle of words, or repeat a syllable following a pause. Of far greater interest is the opportunity that multipart singing offers to engage in collective activity that has social, psychological, and spiritual dimensions and that reinforces the affective bonds between men who are obliged to live and work together—thereby linking, once again, musical harmony with social harmony. The texts themselves often consist of a single stanza (or a few at most) that might once have been part of a longer song—a lament or a lullaby, perhaps—but has been adopted into the male *paghjella* tradition for reasons that include having combinations of words that are deemed “singable” on account of their phonetic qualities.[8] As one singer explains:

> For the *paghjella* we keep those extracts…which are particularly spectacular or which in their consonances work well for singing, that is to say, those in which the configuration of the alliterations, the marriage of vowels [and] consonants make for something which is very singable.
>
> (Bevilacqua interview 1994)

(p.158)

In the *paghjella* tradition, there is no strict one-to-one correlation of lyrical and musical component. Texts are essentially interchangeable: any number of different stanzas can be sung to the same musical variant or *versu*, while any single text might be sung to different *versi*. In the words of another singer, “The *airs* were very much specific to a particular village whereas the *texts* could circulate. The text doesn’t cause any problem” (Pasquali interview 1994). This alerts us to the danger of assigning disproportionate significance to song texts in other cultural contexts.

These examples also help to explain why the literal meaning of a song lyric can often appear to be startlingly at odds with the style or mood of the musical setting. In Georgia, too, different texts drawn from entirely different genres may be associated with the same melody. Edisher Garakanidze, for example, writes: “Most songs are constituted by their musical material; for the singers, it makes no difference which text they sing to the given melody” (quoted in Ninoshvili

2010: 82). This dispenses with any notion that the melody expresses the feelings suggested by the words and explains why an ostensibly sad song (from the perspective of the text) might be sung to a rousing melody, or vice versa. In cases like this, Chris Rowbury observes, it is not necessarily helpful for singers to be given a literal translation of the lyric before they begin to work on the song. He cites the example of a Georgian song that is “so gorgeously beautiful. It’s like a church song really. It *pulls* your insides out.” Yet the lyric is, on the surface, a rather banal tale of a woman going to fetch water from the well (interview 2008).

Vocables in Georgian Song

The case of Georgian polyphonic song is especially interesting for the high preponderance of vocables—that is, “nonsense” syllables, strings of non-lexical phonemes, or words-without-meaning—that are no more intelligible, in conventional terms, to a Georgian-speaker than they are to a non-Georgian. In this case, the likeness to pre-verbal babbling and the functions that may be ascribed to it applies to insiders and outsiders alike. Lauren Ninoshvili’s doctoral dissertation, “Singing between the Words: The Poetics of Georgian Polyphony”, is founded on the assertion that the vocable is “as common a feature of traditional Georgian song as the fully interpretable lexical item” (Ninoshvili 2010: 13). The study offers rich insights into the workings of what we might call —by analogy with Timothy Taylor’s (1997) notion of strategic inauthenticity— strategic unintelligibility. Here we find some songs in which refrains built up of vocables alternate with texted verses, and others (notably trio songs from Guria) where the middle voice alone carries the text while the other voices sing sequences of vocables that correlate, in terms of their vowel preferences, with the vocal register proper to that voice-part. In other songs, **(p.159)** again, the entire lyric might be constituted of either vocables or archaic words that are no longer understood; some linguists believe these to be the names of ancient deities to whom the songs once acted as invocations. This is the case in some of the songs still sung in the remote mountainous region of Svaneti, for example.

If vocables offer non-native singers of Georgian songs relief from the complex consonant clusters found in the spoken language, they are more singable for native singers, too, albeit for other reasons. Being comparatively rich in vowel sounds combined with alliterative consonants (as, for example, in this bass line for the Gurian song “Chven Mshvidoba”: “aba delo dela va dilo andil lauo da / aba delo delo dela da adilovo dilan dila / aba delo dela ladi lan dila udovo dilandilav da”), but devoid of the complex consonant clusters found in Georgian speech (as, for example, in the word *ganbrtsqinvebuli*, meaning “radiant”), sequences of vocables provide more sonorous material than lexical utterances. Ninoshvili notes that vocables help Georgian singers to “maximize vocal sonority and ‘lighten’ a lexicon that is full of consonant clusters and otherwise ‘heavy’ syllables” (2010: 20). She also relays Malkhaz Erkvanidze’s proposal that the highly sonorous vowel patterns found in vocables help singers to access the

harmonic spectrum in a way not permitted by the phonetics of natural Georgian speech (95).

Ninoshvili argues for viewing the Georgian vocable as

> essentially like a shifter: culturally, socially, and politically valuable precisely on account of its multi-purposeful indexicality...or ability to mean different things to different people and accomplish different kinds of work in radically different historical and cultural contexts.
>
> (Ninoshvili 2010: 27)

She concludes that, “far from indicating an absence of sense, vocables appear as a *multiplication* of sense in an increasingly varied, crossed and re-crossed interpretive topography” (157). This way of theorising vocables may also be related to more general arguments about semiotic fluidity. First, we might assert that words have value and do important work even if they are unintelligible; and second, we might remind ourselves that meanings are not monolithic and that different layers of meaning can co-exist. It is also the case that, whether the literal meaning of the words can be discerned or not, songs also signify to listeners in other ways. Musical features, more than textual features, identify them with certain places and position them in a nexus of knowledge and imaginaries associated with those places. In this way, songs can make powerful statements that are understood by those who recognise the musical language. South African songs during apartheid are a case in point: it was not necessary to understand the words of a song in order to read its performance as an expression of resistance or a statement of solidarity. **(p.160)**

Ours or Theirs? Of Boundaries and Crossings

In the following chapter, we will continue our examination of music’s malleable meanings in the context of local realities; we will also consider critical questions about authenticity and appropriation. Here, by way of concluding this stage of my discussion, I shift for a moment from the eclectic, multilingual repertoire of the natural voice world to the repertoires and practices that characterise parallel and sometimes overlapping fields of musical activity in twenty-first-century Britain. This brings to the table important perspectives that might usefully be borne in mind as we continue to explore the dynamics of British singers’ engagement with the songs of others.

A perusal of the programmes for the 2011 end-of-year recitals by second- and third-year undergraduate students who were taking solo performance in voice as part of their music degree at the University of Manchester (my home institution) reveals noteworthy, if largely predictable, trends. Of a total of 136 pieces, fifty-nine were sung in English. Of these, approximately half were songs from musical theatre and other popular works by twentieth-century American composers, such as Bernstein, Sondheim, and Gershwin; the other half were songs in a style

closer to the art music end of the spectrum, with British composers Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten putting in the most frequent appearances. Of the remaining seventy-seven items, twenty-seven were sung in German, twenty-six in French, twenty-two in Italian, and one each in Latin and Norwegian. Here, the most popular composers were Handel, Mozart, Schubert, Schumann, and Fauré. We might reasonably assume that these works were learnt from scores (albeit also with reference to recordings), and they were, for the most part, delivered in the classical style in which students of singing are trained in the academy. But the fact that fewer than half of the items were in English (the first language of all but one of the performers) is, if not surprising, surely worthy of comment: it is not considered at all unusual, in this context, to sing in languages that are not one's mother tongue. At the same time, the choice of the foreign language is restricted to three major Western European languages: French, German, and Italian. This, again, is significant if read as indicative of what is considered part of a shared cultural heritage that is now as much "ours" as the songs with English texts.

Above all, that these songs are included in the canons of art music, where they become naturalised as self-contained "works", would seem to legitimise them as "ours" and exempt them from the kinds of critique that might accrue to other cases of musical crossover. Singing an Italian aria does not, generally speaking, seem odd; it certainly does not attract accusations of cultural appropriation or political incorrectness in the way that singing a song in an African "tribal" language might. Even in the case of an arranged folksong, the emphasis is on the composer and not on a particular group of people from whom we might otherwise consider the song to have been "taken". For some, **(p.161)** this state of affairs is simply normal and goes unquestioned. Speaking at a conference at Cecil Sharp House in London ("Out of This World: English Folk Song in the Community Choir Repertoire," May 15, 2011), Sally Davies, director of Cecil Sharp House Community Choir, commented that it is not customary for an English pianist to be asked why he or she plays Debussy, or for a vocal ensemble to be asked why it specialises in medieval Spanish songs. She therefore finds it strange that people constantly ask her why she is interested in Georgian music. To many, there is something puzzling and suspect about an attraction to music from a distant, supposedly mysterious corner of the globe, particularly if it is music that was once dismissed as primitive and that now falls under the shadow of cultural-imperialist scruples about plunder and profit.

Defining "our" music and "not-our" music, then, is not as straightforward as it might seem. Nicholas Cook represents a progressive voice from the ranks of British musicology in his explorations of the ways in which, as he puts it, "the 'Whose musics?' cookie crumbles" (2004: 9). In his introduction to *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*, he describes it as

> charting a transition between two quite different conceptions of “our” music: on the one hand, the Western “art” tradition that was accorded hegemonic status within an overly...confident imperial culture centred on Europe at the turn of the twentieth century (a culture perhaps now distant enough to have become “their” music rather than “ours”), and on the other hand, a global, post-colonial culture at the turn of the twenty-first, in which “world” music from Africa, Asia, or South America is as much “our” music as Beethoven.
>
> (Cook 2004: 9)

Cook turned the tables further by titling a talk he gave at City University in 2008 “Classical Music as World Music”.

The past decade has seen a dramatic increase in the number of people in Britain who have access to West African drumming and dance classes, samba, salsa, flamenco, or tango classes, steel pan, and community gamelan groups—offered as leisure-time activities by community arts programmes and often supported financially by the arts councils and local authorities. In the world of project funding, chances of success are significantly increased if an educational component is included in the form of a hands-on workshop. In this way, ordinary members of the public—and more particularly those who may be identified as under-privileged or at risk of exclusion—are able to try out many different kinds of music. At the same time, there are notable differences in the way in which popular music imports are treated. Salsa is an interesting case in point for the way in which it has been incorporated into the category of “lifestyle” that encompasses health and fitness as well as recreation. Having long featured prominently among the fitness classes offered by municipal sports centres and private gyms, it was joined more recently by the zumba **(p.162)** craze that swept the country following its launch in the United States. While the choice of music is central to zumba’s identity, the promotional branding foregrounds lifestyle elements in inviting the reader to “cut, customize and create your own look” and “party yourself into shape” via “zesty Latin music, like salsa, merengue, cumbia and reggaeton”. In a triumph of the marketing strategist’s equivalent of name-checking, zumba is officially defined—and trade-marked—as “an exhilarating, effective, easy-to-follow, Latin-inspired, calorie-burning dance fitness-party™ that’s moving millions of people toward joy and health” (http://www.zumba.com, acc. March 12, 2012).

If we imagine those involved in a musical event as occupying a series of concentric circles spreading out from the live musicians as the nucleus, the questions that might be asked about ownership or entitlement also change according to placement. Being a passive audience member, dancing at a club night, or exercising at the gym is more neutral than being a performer on stage. It is when non-native musicians actually play the music, thereby embodying it in

a more intimate way and drawing greater attention to apparent incongruities, that questions of legitimacy become more insistent. But here too, they take on a different weight and tone depending on the context in which the music is presented. If in some cases non-ethnic performers are viewed almost as imposters, in others their appearance is accepted more straightforwardly as part of a celebration of global rapprochement or some kind of historic coming-together of the "family of man". It was largely in this spirit that cultural spectacles were being prepared in the run-up to the 2012 London Olympics. The planned programming also leant heavily on London's status as one of the world's most multicultural, multilingual cities, serving as home to communities from over ninety different countries who between them speak a total of more than three hundred languages. Winning the Olympic bid offered an ideal opportunity to celebrate this cultural diversity, and London was promoted in Olympic-related advertising as "the most multicultural city in the world". Significantly for our present interests, in combination with the emphasis in contemporary cultural policy on inclusion and participation, the Olympics focus prompted the launch of a new spate of amateur choirs and might be assumed to account at least in part for the increased presence of songs from elsewhere in the working repertoires of more established choirs as well.

This new, more visible eclecticism and its attendant blurring of the boundaries between local and global, classical and popular, comfortingly familiar and exotically foreign was evident in the one-day Voices Now extravaganza held at London's Roundhouse in March 2012. Part of Music Nation, a "countdown event" for the London 2012 festival, Voices Now presented itself as a showcase for "some of the UK's best choirs" and culminated in a première of Orlando Gough's *Making Music Overture*, commissioned by Making Music (the leading national organisation for voluntary music) as part of the **(p.163)** Cultural Olympiad. The broad range of choirs represented included school and youth choirs, several community choirs (some directed by NVPN members), Maspindzeli (London's Georgian choir), a rhythm and blues choir, The Pink Singers (Europe's longest-running LGBT choir), a choir for homeless people, the City Shanty Band, the Finchley Chamber Choir, and the BBC Singers (a fully professional choir in the classical tradition). Songs from the world repertoire included (predictably enough) several items from different parts of Africa, such as "Senwa Dedende" (from Ghana), "Denko" (from Mali), "Iqude Wema" (from South Africa), "Dinasi Ponono" (also from South Africa), and the more widely known "Shosholoza" (a song about the train carrying miners from what is now Zimbabwe to South Africa). Also featured were a selection of Georgian songs, including "Lechkhmuri Makruli" (a wedding song), "Aghdgomasa Shensa" (a church song), and "Benia's Mravalzamier" (a feasting song); "Gole Gandom" (an Iranian harvest song); "Come Along, My Friend", arranged by Tony Backhouse; "My Peace" from the Taizé repertoire; and long-time international favourites such as "Kalinka", "La Bamba", and "Santa Lucia".

If asked, each of these choirs would, no doubt, have an intriguing story to tell about how the different songs found their way into its repertoire. As we saw in chapter 4, some world songs are freely circulated in published songbooks (albeit with their sources not always fully credited). At the other end of the spectrum, a specialist choir like Maspindzeli is far more likely to have learnt its songs directly from a native singer, quite possibly in the country of origin and as part of the kind of ethically informed transaction that in other contexts would be labelled “fair trade”. A singing community of the latter kind might be seen to share something of the rationale of the Suyá people of Brazil who “perform exogenous songs [or other people’s music] to reproduce the pattern of their own history” (Neuman 1993: 272). The particular history of the singing journey of a choir such as Maspindzeli serves further to illustrate the way in which, to adopt Mark Slobin’s terms, a choice to follow up an affinity might lead to belonging (1993: 56). Before we pursue that path, however, the time has come to plunge once more into the bottomless—but hopefully now less muddied—ocean of world song, this time to follow the trail of particular bodies of song that are among the most popular, and most firmly embedded, in natural voice circles.

Notes:

(1.) Quotations are taken from the Sing for Water Llandudno Souvenir Programme. The event was organised and hosted by Sara Brown and her choir, Coastal Voices.

(2.) Northern Harmony is a touring performance ensemble that is under the umbrella of the association Village Harmony. A new formation, made up of approximately sixteen young singers (most from the United States), is put together for each European tour, which features a combination of concerts and workshops. A typical programme will combine material from the Balkans, Georgia, Corsica, South Africa, the gospel and shape-note traditions, and early music.

(3.) The arrangement can be found in Nick Prater’s songbook *Heaven in my Heart*, where Nick notes that the song was originally recorded by the Fairfield Four and appears in Tony Backhouse’s book *A Cappella: Rehearsing for Heaven*. Nick’s arrangement includes further additions.

(4.) Interestingly, Sarno goes on to say that (in his estimation) the well-honed voices of the Bayaka, with their “astonishing power and purity” and lack of tension, “rival and surpass the voice of any opera singer” (1995: 70).

(5.) It is interesting in this context to note composer Karl Jenkins’s explanation of his use of nonsense words or invented languages for the compositions in his Adiemus series. “The human voice,” he observes, “is the oldest instrument and by removing the distraction of lyrics, [I] hope to create a sound that is universal and timeless” (quoted in Taylor 2000: 18).

(6.) Several features of Taizé chants make them suitable for natural-voice-style groups. Rounds feature prominently in the repertoire, as do short, repetitive songs scored for soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. Some practitioners run weekly or monthly groups devoted exclusively to the Taizé repertoire. Early morning Taizé sessions are often to be found on the programme of camps and residential gatherings. Barbara Swetina's book and CD compilation *Cantiones Sacrae: Sacred Songs, Rounds and Chants for Singing in Community* (1993) includes several Taizé songs together with a selection of chants from the Gregorian tradition and from the fourteenth-century Llibre Vermell from the monastery of Monteserrat in Catalonia.

(7.) The Council of Youth, held in 1974, attracted around 40,000 young people from 120 countries.

(8.) The *paghjella* is the most common form of three-part polyphonic song that is still found in Corsica.