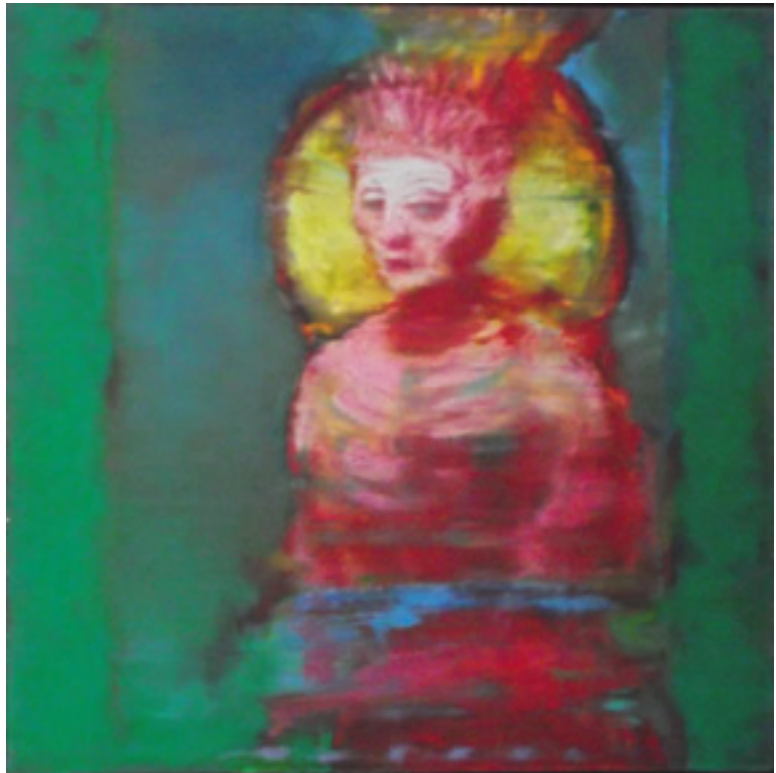


## **CHIAROSCURO: THE BODHISATTVA IN THE VOICE**

I am sitting at my piano teaching voice to a group of advanced students. They sound glorious; height and depth are present in the sound and each tone seems to be emanating from the space around them and not really coming from their mouths. This is the sweet spot: the human voice free of ego drive and full of generous invitation through balance.

My eyes move past the five women and focus on a painting hanging on the wall behind them. It is of the bodhisattva<sup>1</sup> and I have had it since 1991. The painting is large – about 4 feet by 5 - and the colours are vibrant: vertical emerald green banners on either side and the bodhi sitting in the middle, many hues of red, fuchsia, maroon, rose, orange and teal. She is blurred slightly as if trying to come into focus on a TV screen from another galaxy. Her face shines a bleached-out pink and behind her neck there is a golden yellow disk – unifying head and body. Today, that disk makes more sense than ever as it illustrates the glow of sound surrounding these women.



'Bodhisattva' by Richard Herman

It dawns on me that I have been calling in the bodhisattva for 20 years. That I knew nothing about her when I bought the painting from Richard Herman, that I had no understanding of the energy she was balancing on that canvas surface.

But today I am having a delightful “aha” as I feel the meaning of sattvic while hearing sattvic sound. Sattva is a Sanskrit word and its definition includes harmony, balance, joy, peace, serenity and intelligence.

As a voice teacher I work with cathartic release and a certain rough-and-tumble relationship to excavating the sounds of the body. I also work with what I call house-building techniques through the “*bel canto*” (beautiful singing) belief in the balance of light and dark – “*chiaroscuro*.”

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<sup>1</sup> ) A bodhisattva is a heroic “wisdom-being” in the Buddhist tradition and is motivated by great compassion to achieve enlightenment on behalf of all sentient beings.

My natural engagement with life has not been a sattvic one – I LOVE the rajasic – speed, motion and pain! But more recently - turning 50, learning to sing without too much misplaced effort, finding a life partner who does not fan my fire in the wrong way, watching my two teenage daughters push limits and assisting my students to find integration – the idea of balance has become reasonable, sensible, even intoxicating. But where to start in laying the foundation for balance?

## **DARK**

my hand is on samira's belly. she stands with her feet hip-width apart, a slight bend at her knees. we are working on "swoon" in the voice.

my job in this moment is to encourage her belly to drop so that her whole pelvic floor (anus included) will blossom towards the earth and allow her diaphragm to do what it can do with its eyes shut – inhale involuntarily without interference from the ego.

she laughs. despite being one of the juiciest belly dancers i've ever experienced, she is having a hard time releasing her guts on this particular day.

we know how to breathe – no doctor needs to startle a healthy baby into that first gasp as she emerges from her mother's womb. we are such beautifully designed breath machines. meant to thrive in air.

i encourage samira to let go of any feeling of responsibility through her upper chest and shoulders. to really feel the thrill and terror of the abdomen unlatching and the organs slipping downwards – an almost pre-toilet-trained state. i ask her to open her mouth a little wider – to really go soft through the lips and to veer towards a yawn so that the incoming breath is free of friction and completely quiet.

she starts to let go on the inhale ... and then her exhale quivers and releases from deep behind her sternum: a sigh, a shudder, undriven. she inhabits herself with ease and simplicity. this is the beginning of a trustworthy foundation based on loving gravity.

This is what I call the "spa" in the breath cycle. It could lead to sleep or to a beautiful inertia and ease, and as much as it is seriously missing from most people's breath diets, on its own it would not be enough for us, either to create from or to guarantee our survival. This full release could take a good 18 months to become a true, daytime resident in a new student's body and I suggest practicing it in the everyday: while waiting in the grocery store line-up or for transit, while talking to a friend, brushing one's teeth, or in riskier situations like an argument with a loved one or when asking for a raise.

The release of the pelvic floor allows the diaphragm to work involuntarily and encourages "rest and digest" in the autonomic nervous system, which regulates the intestines, heart, and glands. It asks us to un-gird our loins and to trust that the world is a place that would like us to thrive. And it reinforces for us with each breath that things are "okay."

However, this release into depth will also bring up what is dark within, and that may reveal fear, resistance or pain. And so I encourage the feeling of "getting it off your chest" when contacting low, embodied sound and if this requires some temper tantrums,

some trips into big broken sounds and the time needed to get used to the monsters in the basement, that is what we do ...with respect and patience. We allow the voice to express a part of the self -- and of our experiences -- that may have been shut down.

And typically, real relief comes with this. It is a step towards loving our own darkness, and like the mechanics of the *bel canto* breath, a first draft of trusting and valuing our shadow is going to take some time to foster. It takes both cathartic and technical means to find the deep comfort that gravity can bring as we drop into the breath. Or rather, let the breath drop into us.

Why does air come into the body? The answer I like to give is that it wants to come in ... as long as I am open. It is all around me and free. It is there for the asking. Even when I am asleep it comes into my body, over and over again, all night long.

we are yawning. it is the start of a group class and the release into our pelvic floors has led us to indulge in a festival of yawns. we yawn till our crotches explode, our yawns are so deep and full-bodied. once we get over the well learned gesture of hand covering mouth and let the soldiers in our shoulders stand at ease and imitate the cartoon character yawn that we all know – arms rapturously spread wide – i see a gorgeous “yawnga” spread through each body. the yawn is teaching the front of the chest to expand and the space between the shoulder blades to ease and to stop holding the world together. the lower side and back ribs bellow news of their release and twist after twist each yawn further liberates the cage of bone and muscle that protects our soft bits – lungs, heart, liver, trachea.

The yawn is also triggering a cornucopia of natural drugs which lead to empathy, alertness, consciousness, self-reflection and memory retrieval. Andrew Newberg says in *How God Changes Your Brain*, “Yawning may be one of the most important mechanisms for regulating the survival-related behaviors in mammals.” I and many other theatre practitioners have been waiting for the intelligent scientific support his writing gives the work we have been doing in the studio and on stage. Yawning has always been the first piece of homework I give to a class, along with sigh, belly-laugh, sob and orgasm. When we learn to sing in a free and integrated manner, when we go under the hoods of our bodies and mess with the breath engine we are also restructuring essential beliefs that we have about how to survive within our own unique narrative. The yawn helps to disturb that self-imposed and very personal status quo.

at this point in the class our love of gravity has been rekindled through repeated engagement with the drop of the pelvic floor. this gives the diaphragm permission to puddle, and now the intelligent swoon of the yawn is encouraging more and more space for the chest and mouth as well as freeing the sinuses. everyone needs a kleenex to wipe the flow from their noses and eyes. and everyone feels closer to taking up their own true space in the room, as the organs of the torso have become pretty toddler like. now a love of levity needs to be fostered as we begin to sing long tones while embracing the pitches i have begun to play on the piano.

## **LIGHT**

What’s up with my eyebrows? Why did I love seeing myself frown in candid shots from my late 20s and especially in my publicity pictures? Why did it seem virtuous to project jadedness and suspicion? I was raised a good evangelical protestant of Swiss and Scottish origin and have believed that hard work will get me into heaven or at least prevent me from being damned. I love working with my Dutch Reformed students

because I see that a similar value system has grabbed hold of their insides, too, and that it is possible for each of us to let go ... regardless of what inheritance or belief system we are dealing with. We can stop using those tiny muscles between our eyebrows for grip alone, as we negotiate our way through life.

traci is about to sing in front of the group. her ability to release is exquisite, as is her capacity to enter into difficult and frightening emotional terrain as a woman and an actor. she has worked to both release and hold this burden through study with richard armstrong and myself and she is now a certified fitzmaurice voice instructor. traci's early experience of life was loaded with darkness and danger. i think it is a miracle that she has survived. we are working on "good morning, heartache." it is a song that I would put into a primer called *architectural wonders of the song world*. its emotional bones are just that good.

The song begins by greeting *heartache*. The *good* is on middle C and the *mor-* of *morning* is on the G above, and so we sing a perfect 5<sup>th</sup>. It sounds neither sorrowful nor joyful and brings quite an open feeling to the beginning of the story. The second time we hear *good morning* it is now over a sixth and the melody is anticipatory, almost welcoming. The singer is not in an essentially depressed relationship to being down, though the word *heartache* is set in the minor. The song has three verses and progresses from seeing *heartache* arrive *with the dawn*, through to asking it *what's new* and ends by asking *heartache* to *sit down*. I understand from this that sorrow is a part of life and that gravity can provide ballast ...that because it *knew me when* there can be empathy and comfort in darkness.

despite her familiarity with darkness and her trust of downward release traci's face is used to gripping, the moment that work needs to happen – as can her throat when she is obliged to sing. she needs to look for space and light inside the tissues of her body. I ask her to open the inside of her mouth – like the yawn both wide and tall – and to keep it huge all the time. today this risks a sense of floating away from the earth so we have 2 other students hold her feet to remind her of "down" while she works like mad on "up". she keeps the air flowing from the base of her trachea (this feels a bit vomitrocious) while bringing the roof of her mouth up to the heavens. the sound frees and the space she is determinedly inhabiting as she lifts her soft palate feels as scary as the top of the ferris wheel where we were once stuck together during regina's *buffalo days* festival.

I believe that the top of the voice is never truly ours to control but if it is both anchored behind the sternum and cushioned in the pelvic bowl it won't get away from us and risk becoming hysterical. The shape and the freedom of its overtones feel chaotic -- like a bell ringing, a peal of laughter, the squeal of a young child, a whimper, even whining. A scream is meant to alarm, it offers release and -- in its most elemental form – it cannot be censored. It is both productive and helpless. My own fear around my head voice began to unknot during a lesson with Richard Armstrong in the early 90s. I was remembering a horrific scene from the movie *Seven*. In order to deal with the sin of sloth the murderer keeps his victim in a half dead state for a full year. This had become a recurring nightmare for me and I found myself singing the word "help" over and over again in the highest reaches of my voice while identifying with the very bright and undefended sound of Snow White's voice in the Disney animated film. In doing this I allowed what had been an unapproachable place of vulnerability and helplessness to be heard by the world.

Hope can feel terrifying. When things start going too well in a film we worry about what the next scene might bring. Anticipation can feel like nervousness. Sometimes we can't tell if we are excited or if we are afraid. But the pursuit of lift and optimism, of levity, is necessary to balance gravity. The painters of the renaissance worked with light and dark and this is where the very classical ideal of *chiaroscuro* comes from in the *bel canto* understanding of the voice.

At first, the muscles in the upper face feel like they need to “do” up while we “do” down in the pelvic floor and diaphragm. It feels like a contradiction and a lot of work. It IS a conscious choice and repeatedly looking for it eventually leads to the stamina necessary for holding paradox. I call that creative range. The voice in balance is akin to the energies a good martial artist needs, in order to do extraordinary things with his body. Think of Jet Li in *Once Upon a Time In China*, or Tony Jaa in *Ong Bak*, or Jackie Chan in *The Legend of the Drunken Master*. Each of these men has been able to manifest physical skill through marrying darkness with elegance ... or innocence or humour. Watching them allows us to see the things we are trying to do internally, as singers.

Mary is checking in with the group at the beginning of a class. She tells us that last week she went home wondering why I had been lifting my eyebrows so relentlessly at her while she was singing. I was also offering winks and goofy thoughts – a sort of facial comedy routine. She was certain that she had been mirroring this back. She explains to us that, once home that evening, she looked in the mirror to see what was actually happening on her face. Even though she believed she was lifting her eyebrows there was not much visible movement at all.

There are muscles on our face that we can move voluntarily and there are muscles which seem to respond only to what we are thinking and feeling. The ones we can control help us with a social smile (which is useful if we need to tell the world that we are “okay” or that we are not an enemy to be feared). We know what it is to receive a smile we do not fully believe. But the muscles that soften around the eyes when we are truly pleased or loving or surprised by a joke cannot be faked. The quality of sound a person makes is radically shifted when this “feeling” set is activated. The genuine and ringing sound that emerges from the sinuses and back of the mouth through the lift of the soft palate and loosening of our grip around the eyes is the light we are trying to access for the *chiaro* part of our singing. We can hear whether a friend is in a good mood simply by hearing her voice on the phone. That sound is open and vulnerable and it relates more to play than a socially learned interaction. I “feel” the vulnerability of play. My mouth opens to a pre-laugh state and this affects my face. When singing it is not enough to ask for the cheek muscles or eyebrows to lift – a reliable pleasure needs to be imagined; something funny needs to flit through the frontal lobe. Then my eyes soften their grip, a freedom comes across my brow. A touch of bodhisattva. A feeling of bliss. A state of grace.

Right now, in Toronto, this is a state of being that needs to be relearned by many of the people who come to me for lessons. My students are highly motivated, intelligent folk who don't want to waste their lives. But owning joy is hard. We are not sure it will help us survive.

There was a time in my own life where I had to consciously seek out joy in order not to wither and die ... things had gotten so dark. During that time I was doing yoga and had sought out some practical things like dosha-appropriate food and enough sleep. As I rose up out of every forward bend in yoga class, I began to crave light around my head. I

wanted this state to manifest so badly that I chopped off my large dark curly hair and bleached it platinum. I needed to be reminded of light and lightness all the time. I just had to let go of the pull towards drama. This need for light began to support my understanding of *chiaro* in the *bel canto* technique and further antidote the fear I had started to explore through identifying with Snow White's lovely voice. I started to revel in the lift of the eyes, the cheekbones, the soft palate. I thrived on a diet of classical "ooo" slides patiently taught to me by *bel canto* wizard Neil Semer. The widening of my nostrils began to feel orgasmic and I began to tolerate freedom in my throat and around my vocal cords as I sang. I began to enjoy feeling large and uncontained, even within the parameters of a narrow vowel. Height and depth began to marry with the ease of the inhale and I stopped needing to please the audience or guarantee my success as a performer.

jen has just done really really good work. she is in a group class and she is just coming to the end of a first draft of technique-building. for several years she has been diligently unearthing her emotional inheritance through excavating the sounds in her voice. throughout her process she has revealed this landscape to herself and to her classmates. in front of seven other women on a wednesday morning she has radiated her ability, and it is beautiful to hear. she bursts into tears. i ask what the tears are about. she tells us that it feels wrong to her to be able to do something so well without suffering and that she is afraid to show her success to the group. the group responds – they are ecstatic – she has the torch – she is lighting their way – allowing them to learn through the privilege of identifying with the insides of her body. the empathy that is building from months of getting under one another's skin is beginning to ease jealousy from our learned female body maps.

mary is in the same class as jen and i ask everyone to build on jen's work by playing with the idea that "something good might happen today!" each person rises to the challenge – risk and desire are used, to access personal light. i can hear the gorgeous flames that i see coming out of the top of the bodhisattva's head in the sound that mary makes. no issue with eyebrows here! later that day she sends me this email.

*On the way to work after class today, I saw a man on the sidewalk collapse to the ground and have a seizure. Three people got there before I could: one knelt down, put his hand on his feet and whipped out his cell phone. The other knelt down, took off his coat, lay it on the man and knelt down, awkwardly spooning him. The third placed her hands on his head.*

*It was this gorgeous moment of strangers holding--not gripping or pinning down--and simply being with someone in their pain. What an unexpected powerful moment of community.*

*Something REALLY good happened today!*

## **COMMUNITY**

How is it that we get under each other's skins? Two of my students have told me separately about a CBC report on the vagus nerve and a scientist named Dacher Keltner. He believes that people with high vagus nerve functioning are more empathic. I love the sound of this and start to research the vagus nerve on-line. We know that voice and emotion are intrinsically linked and this man's work on the human animal and emotion may illuminate what we are experiencing in the studio. It is September of 2008. I remember this because I am about to fall in love.

The vagus nerve is the longest of the cranial nerves. Its name is derived from Latin word meaning "wandering"- and it does just that – from the brain stem through the organs in the neck, thorax and abdomen. Under its purview are the pharynx, soft palate, cricothyroid muscle and the muscles of larynx. In the thorax, branches go to the trachea, bronchioles, lungs, the esophagus and the heart. In the abdomen, branches enter the stomach, pancreas, small intestine, large intestine and colon. It is both viscerosensory and parasympathetic. It conducts sensation from the epiglottis, base of the tongue, aryepiglottic folds, the upper larynx, below the vocal folds of the larynx, the pharynx, the external ear and external auditory canal, as well as the external surface of the tympanic membrane and the meninges of the posterior cranial fossa.

To travel to the voice box it wraps around the aorta to the heart and ascends.

We do speak from the heart.

I witness voice classes working together over months, and in some cases, years. We start each class by engaging with the drop of the *bel canto* breath and this leads us to about five minutes of yawning. Then we check in with one another through language. We look for and share our bottom line – how our body is feeling in the moment. We also share a bit about our ongoing life story and the points that connect to the work of singing, expressing and of breathing. We make sound, we access emotion, and then we name it as clearly as we can. As each person sings, we say how we have been affected by someone else's sound. We chart each other's transformations. We unearth our true self through making sound and we try to make eye contact while in this transparent state. We are building emotional chops and when we do that with each other, extraordinary community building occurs. A real animal trust develops and as well as delight in one another's successes. We *practice* the insides of our bodies and this spills out into threads that connect the individuals within the class. If I can identify how I feel, it is easier for me to identify with how others are feeling, too. There are creative spin-off projects which continue outside of the studio. In *Born to be Good* Dr. Keltner states that we are wired to thrive in groups. What I have seen when these tribes of singers meet regularly in my Toronto home fully supports this.

On a practical and selfish level I am giddy with excitement when it comes to the vagus nerve in that all the bits it affects are things I know to be essential for free vocal engagement from space in the mouth through to the freedom of the anus.

## **SELF**

The vagus nerve "does" pitch. We don't. Or rather, that's the way we are designed to work. The baby is born with perfect pitch. This is how she identifies her mother's voice. We are able to tune to a key or pitch system because we are able to attune to self and others. It is from this that humans created musical systems. The more we are able to identify with our true nature and name the truths around us, the more we can identify – without manhandling the cords – with an external source of pitch. Unfortunately, our way of speaking about musical notes is riddled with 'getting', 'hitting' and even 'nailing' pitch. This is punitive, not to mention violent. Self-worth often gets linked to the ability to carry a tune.

Children learn to match an external pitch at different ages. As a baby my daughter Oksana would squeal the same note that a student was singing while playing upstairs

with her nanny. Her older sister Magdalena found keeping pace with the words and melody of a song to be a real challenge until she was close to eight. They come from the same home but have experienced different circumstances – in particular around their parents' separation. They have entirely original bodies and personalities. Their sense of self has become conscious in ways specific to each girl. They both love to sing now and enter into it uniquely. They know that it keeps them sane, healthy – and thankfully they do so without their mother at the helm!

back at work with traci, I am sensitively bugging her to stay open - reminding her of the feeling in her mouth of a whole ferris wheel taking up residence. and I am also flirting with her like mad – trying to keep love and play alive in the dark and difficult moments. our conjoined efforts work. she is able to combine light and dark in the sound and there is a seamless and ease-filled transition between each note and around each pitch. she is staying open in her throat while meeting the outside suggestions of the piano and this loosening of grip around her vocal cords is partnering with inhabited resonance in the head and body. she is letting herself be heard without judgment. she is letting herself match the cues of the piano without fabricating pitch. she is letting her vagus nerve do that work and this is supported by love of both dark and light, through her body and in her resonators.

I drove my voice for the first two decades of my career – first in classical music to “get it right” and, if at all possible, appear to be perfect and then through big raging multi-phonetic sounds, under the guidance and care of my teacher Richard Armstrong, in order to express how angry I had been for such a long time. (Maybe about having to “get it right” from pretty early in life?) From the age of eight I had played the piano and was used to my motor cortex making pitch happen as I touched its keys. I thought voice was about the vocal cords behaving themselves? I did not know about my body and its breadth.

I have learned – both by being a student and through teaching – that singing is entirely different. It is a beautiful blend of the consonants gently “getting it right” and the vowels releasing as if we were mid-sigh, moan, groan, sob, guffaw, scream, or cry. The vowels are the emotion and we want them to ooze and fly from behind the sternum and through the resonators with the abandon of a baby. In a long tone or melody we get to slow down the vowel – wrestle it out of speech and bring it closer to what the baby does, what we each did, or still do when making love, playing sports, or are taken by surprise by joy, sorrow or violence. It has taken me a very long time to trust that by simply *being* I have value and that I don't have to *do* in order to validate my viability as a human animal.

## **INTEGRATION**

i need some very specific aggression in traci's sound as we continue to work on long tones – the release into sensual sorrow is there quite easily now and -- a bit tentatively – so is the release into unexpected joy. now, to support the functioning of her upper resonators (the gift that the young girl in the voice gives us) i need some self-possession behind her sternum to make things easier and more efficient.

traci is beautiful and she reminds me of one of those carvings on the prow of a ship as she subtly thrusts her sternum forward without compromising release into her vagina nor the softness of the back of her diaphragm and her anus. as she lets her sternum get stern I hear a vitality that lives right at the base of the trachea bring the more vulnerable parts of her upper and lower resonance into focus.



In order to integrate the *bel canto* ideal of *chiaroscuro*, light and dark need to meet a little productive rage. This fierceness needs discipline as its companion. The sound lives like a plumb line in the chest and feels proprietary...it owns itself. It is full of courage. When a man or woman is able to find this in his or her sound I experience it as social justice – the voice modeling fairness in its fine balance of masculine and feminine. In the painting of the bodhisattva I see a delicate column of maroon tracing the core of her torso. This vertical line beautifully represents how concrete the feeling of integration is in the voice and the light pink across her chest speaks to expansion and transparency not being sacrificed. Today I notice a splash of green high in her chest. It reminds me that calm and cool can partner with collected.

in class today, roselle was expressing her struggle as a young woman in her 20s with taking on the role of jackie kennedy for a new play. the restrictions and socializations she had to adopt in order to become this iconic woman were causing a recent neck injury to worsen. it was a duo class. both she and her friend samantha really understand the release into both light and dark but we were needing to haul ass a bit and get some strength behind the sternum in order to build up helpful sub glottal pressure. so we were letting ourselves express through sound the things that piss us off.

a wonderful character emerged for roselle – jackie chan kennedy. there was strength and humour as she balanced the yielding feminine of mrs kennedy with jackie chan’s martial arts moves, kicking the air. roselle then said that she had practiced martial arts for seven years before high school and missed having a place in her life to express her size and drive, in order to balance out her sensuality and sparkle.

## **BALANCE**

I say that a singer needs to be on the verge of laughing and crying, and capable of murder at the same time. That is how big and raucous the primary embodied energies or emotions feel when we first start to engage with them and then mix them musically. Inside, I am my own Greek Tragedy and in a way I need to become a god or goddess in order to find the capacity necessary to work with all of that. I need time to find clarity around what I am feeling chemically as air flows through me. As I do my job with words and melody, and really meet a song, the substance of expression and action of communication happens.

i am with fifteen students – all adults served by the south saskatchewan independent living community. we have been singing together for a full weekend and are nearing the end of our last session. I have chosen to work with the song “motherless child.” i used to pull this one out quite a bit in the early years of teaching – I found it to be a good way to explore and hold sadness. in the last 3 hours of singing we have touched upon accepting heartbreak and a love of “down” through “good morning, heartache.” We have also tangled with some social and personal rage to fire our sternums in “do right woman, do right man.” Now my desire with “motherless child” is to call in joy to provide light for the depth and determination we have been inhabiting in the other two songs and seek balance through practicing this dance of emotion.

it is a challenge and one worth rising to. each time the group or an individual singer can add in that tasty space around the eyes which allows for the softening and lifting of those muscles the song is no longer a lament but truly becomes a spiritual. we are moved and encouraged. we understand in the core of our being the value of the words “true believer”. the hope that we hear

in the voice of a speaker like Martin Luther King allows thought to become inspirational and nourishing. in MLKs oration he is like a *bel canto* singer – sorrow, anger and joy all mingling in the literal soundshape of his voice. he is carrying the complex message of what it is to be human and is not being devoured by any one element's getting the upper hand.

we end the session with a full sing-through of “motherless child” and our insides and our outsides feel washed clean through this oddly disciplined encounter with both joy and sorrow. we coin the word “jorrow”. we feel at peace and deeply fed. one woman says she feels “at home.”

It is dinner and I am back in Toronto and talking with my family about how much I love Richard Herman's painting and how funny it is to me that I have taken about 20 years to understand and appreciate it on a conscious level. My daughters' responses make me laugh out loud. Magda, almost 18, says she always thought it was a portrait of me and her younger sister, Oksana, echoes this. I find this impossible to believe because light has come in so late for me.

I dressed Magda in black when she was an infant – she chose pink at the age of three. Oksana arrived on the planet already an astute clown – for her an error while practicing piano was not a sin but a type of musical slapstick. Boy did I envy that ... once it had stopped making me angry! Both girls surprised me daily with their optimism at just being alive and that positive light began to bounce back and forth between us. Contagious. Life-saving. Innate.

In loving them I had to embrace more delight and play in my emotional repertoire. I could not stay jaded and defended. And so it seems reasonable that they might see reflected back at them something I could not yet truly name all those years. Their sweet and tender joy would lead me to identify and foster the light in my own voice. As I integrate this with my love of dark I begin to find balance as a woman and singer. Some *chiaro* with my *scuro*. A little sattva for my body. Learning to receive love in the “nik of time”.<sup>2</sup>

END

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Armstrong's nickname for the man I met just as I was learning about the vagus nerve and with whom I now live.