

SINGING AND BRAIN FUNCTION

John Daniel Scott

There are some amazing new discoveries being made about the brain and singing. Researchers can measure brain function in real time with magnetic imaging technology. New findings about the role of neurotransmitters, neural networks and brain systems are coming out regularly, ushering in a new era of understanding of how we think.

One of my favourite authors on this topic is Daniel Levitin, who wrote 'This is Your Brain on Music' and recently 'The World in Six Songs'. Before becoming a professor of neurochemistry at McGill University, Levitin worked as a music producer, producing numerous gold records. I have found his insights into the effects of singing on the brain to be very informative and confirm what I observe every day with my voice students; that people who sing are more likely to be happy.

Every day I go to work knowing that I have the best job in the world; playing music and singing with people. I notice a wonderful before-and-after effect on my students when they come for lessons. In almost every case, after half an hour or an hour of singing, students experience laughter, a brighter disposition and a general feeling of well-being.

Levitin cites a number of studies that show singing elevates the levels of neurotransmitters associated with pleasure. In one example, levels of oxytocin – the transmitter associated with pleasure, love and bonding – were measured before and after voice lessons. The levels increased significantly for both amateur and professional singers. Other studies have shown that the levels of Immunoglobulin A (IgA), which is helpful to the immune system, increased with choral singing, and levels of serotonin increase when listening to pleasant music. Why does our brain shower us with good feelings after singing? Levitin makes the case that our brains developed, along with singing and music, as a survival mechanism. Before there were governments or nations, tribes and groups used songs and dance to build loyalty to the group, transmit vital information and ward off enemies. Those who sang well, survived.

Consider that before written language emerged, critical stories were passed on with the oral tradition of song. The Hebrew Torah, the Greek myths, the Iliad and the Odyssey, were all sung long before they were first written down. So when we sing, we tap into something that is not only one of the most ancient of human practices, but we also tap into the activity that modern neurochemistry is now demonstrating to be profoundly healthy.

John Scott is a professional vocal coach in the San Francisco Bay Area, USA, and studied the Alexander Technique under John Baron. He began voice teaching after working as a producer and arranger for other singers in San Francisco after college. Reproduced with permission from: EzineArticles.com/?expert=John_Daniel_Scott

