Project Title: Enabling adult non-singers to become singers: Theory and practice
Principle Investigator: Dr. Andrea Halpern, Professor of Psychology
Funding Agency: UK Arts and Humanities Research Council
Award Amount: $44,801
Award Period: April 2016 – January 2019

Singing is gaining support in popular culture as well as academia for its numerous benefits for wellbeing throughout life. Unfortunately, many adults exclude themselves from singing claiming to be ‘tone-deaf’ or label themselves as a ‘non-singer.’ This project aims to engage those who are disenfranchised from singing through specifically designed intervention programs in order to allow more people to enjoy the health benefits of singing. The evidence as to how one improves their singing ability is scarce. The project will involve several professionals in the field including teachers, music psychologists, a software designer, and a composer-animateur. With this award, they will aim to move beyond just pitch accuracy as a measure of ‘good’ singing, and accurately reflect the multifaceted nature of singing as a means of expression and communication.

Professor Halpern will be undertaking the experimental portion of the project with the hopes of developing an app that offers potential as a scientifically validated, self-help tool for singing improvement. As part of the grant arrangement, Professor Halpern – an accomplished amateur singer herself- will periodically travel to London to work with the project staff at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. When she is not there she will be actively overseeing the project through regular videoconference calls. The experiment will randomly divide subjects between an auditory image training group or a control training group. Recent evidence tends to suggest that auditory imagery, or the ability to imagine music in one’s own mind, may play a significant role in improving singing ability. The training will be presented on an app which participants can use in their own homes. Professor Halpern hopes that this will lead to a wider availability of assessment and remediation tools that could provide the first step towards changing someone’s self-perception about singing and increasing his/her skills. This could help such people to make the transition to singing with others, and thus enjoy the benefits that singing confers.

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