

SONGSOURCING

AN INNOVATIVE INVITATION



Michael Stillwater

SongSourcing™ is a unique method
supporting creative expression
which may serve as a complementary
and integrative educational practice.

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*“Forget your perfect offering.
There’s a crack in everything,
that’s how the light gets in.”
- Leonard Cohen*

Within current education, music is often neglected in favor of basic academics. In society music has been relegated to the *specialists*, the singers and musicians who we hear on radio, live performance or recordings. While this no aspersions are intended upon those artists who create the music of our times, the fact that we relegate music to ‘experts’, rather than allow it to come from ourselves, is ultimately detrimental to our happiness, to our health, to our creative flow in life- even possibly to our own sense of who we are.

What if a way were possible for children and adults to connect to the experience of the music within them without the rigors of traditional music training required? What if anyone could easily reconnect to the song inside of them, by expressing how they’re feeling and what they’re thinking in a free-association manner?

We are calling this *SongSourcing™*, connecting back to the source of the song inside. It’s the practice of spontaneous singing, and allowing the inner song to come out. SongSourcing is a creative, expressive educational method for anyone to reconnect to their inner self through creating song ‘in-the-moment’, in a way in which anyone, regardless of their musical background, or no musical background, can find easy, familiar and immediate.

Our obsession with perfection has depleted one of our greatest sustainable resources- our creativity, both individual and collective.

Ever intent on looking good, we tend to avoid risking the possibility of being seen in a less-than-favorable light, or exposing our vulnerable, often awkward, unkempt blundering through the field of the moment. This pre-occupation with looking good has literally frozen our instincts and placed our natural artistic soul in cold storage.

In her groundbreaking book, *The Artist's Way*, author/artist Julie Cameron inspired millions to bring forth their natural artist, and has written extensively both on our tendency towards perfectionism and the relationship between spirituality and artistic expression. (quote from Julia Cameron)

Further developing a dimension of this field, Michael Stillwater's *Song-Sourcing* delivers specific tools and encouragement for an often-overlooked area of creativity rich in healing, harmony and potential for whole-brain integration- the art of *spontaneous songmaking*.

Spontaneous songmaking occurs whenever a new song is born without thinking or preparing, without memorizing or re-creating a song you ever heard before.

It is a pathway for direct connection to your internal muse, an access portal to your feelings and wisdom, a practice to experience the power of Now. When shared with others, spontaneous singing is a way of sharing story and establishing empathy at a profound level, a form of collective expression.

Spontaneous songmaking may serve as a spiritual practice which reinforces living in the present moment, a mindfulness practice of being directly aware of one's own process. Such is the state of 'beginners mind', a term derived from Zen Buddhism. It may also be conducive to a state of prayerful contemplation, in which the practitioner surrenders their need to control the expression, allowing one's higher self, or divine, to guide the words.

*“There’s a songwriter in everyone-
and SongSourcing helps release the barriers to this experience”
-Donny Pike, composer (The Lettermen)*

Children engage daily in this activity everywhere, without any instruction necessary. Listen to a child, particularly when he or she believes they are unobserved, and you’ll hear songs emerging with free-associative lyrics drawn from their internal and external worlds. The melody may be one they have heard before, or making up in the moment- but what marks the song as spontaneous is the free-flow of words, giving expression to what they are feeling or thinking in that moment.

Singing is a natural human activity; when people stop singing, it’s as if a piece of their soul has gone missing.

With the advent of western technology, after thousands of years of tribal and community life, singing has increasingly been marginalized into a specialty for recognized experts, those relatively few gifted voices heard on radio, whose CDs are purchased and songs downloaded from the internet.

As a current reflection on this phenomenon, the most-viewed television broadcasts are singing contests in which a single gifted voice emerges as the winner- though in order to achieve this triumph, countless other voices must be judged as somehow inadequate in a seemingly endless variety of ways.

While it is truly pleasant to hear the beauty and power of the winning singer, there can be even more satisfaction derived from playing a judge-at-home- refining one’s own critical ear to become highly sensitive to all the ways someone can sound less-than-beautiful.

But as we refine our *outer critic*, our *inner critic* is of course paying close attention- possibly further reinforcing an internal edict that we ourselves

would never dare to be humiliated by singing in front of others like these poor contestants, and risk such public embarrassment.

Not to disparage the important role of the inner critic or censor, it is designed as our guardian and protector, programmed through personal experience, often at an early age, to avoid embarrassment, ridicule, and ultimately, escape from being rejected for 'not fitting in' - thus ensuring survival and comfort within society. No one disputes the beneficial intention of our inner critic, guiding our words and actions in a way which is truly not harmful to ourselves or others.

But what happens when our inner critic is programmed by limited input, drawn, for example, from a solitary incident in our young lives? How often are simple choices made early in our life, perhaps from being misunderstood, or of expressing ourselves in a way which upset a significant person to us, establish an unquestioned inner rule or principle to avoid ever experiencing such misunderstanding or upset again?

The experience of people who have shut down their creative lives due to early childhood experiences is well known and widespread; to the developing mind, if the experience is that our creative expression doesn't fit in, if we are 'drawing outside the lines' or singing 'out of the box', we may make an internal executive decision to desist from all creative activities, avoid further embarrassment or uncomfortable comparison with the other children, and adhere to the narrow path of acceptable expression- whether that leads to excellence in academics or poor results, we would not be indicted for creative irregularity.

At the same time, the venerable craft of songwriting is assigned to masters of the art, which no doubt leads to marvelous songs for us to hear. But what about the inherent capacity of humans to make their own songs? Songs which may be quite simple, but which express the authentic feelings and story of a person, even if just for themselves, or perhaps together with a partner or friend.

This is not meant to dismiss the tremendous contribution made by great artists of singing and songwriting. But what would happen if people once again discovered their innate connection to their own song, their expression of the Great Song, the undercurrent behind all songs? What energy might be generated, what power released if everyone were to enjoy the experience of letting their own songs be born and expressed?

Spontaneous songmaking is a practice, a creative expression in which a person allows a song to 'come through' without the intervention or supervision of their inner critic, the censor who dwells in us all.

Because it is in-the-moment, what is required is full attention and presence, without involving the weighing or choosing aspect of the mind, regarding what word or melody to use-

Exploring Spontaneous Singing with Daniel Siegel, MD

It's a fascinating question- what brings us joy in life? What brings vitality out of us? What brings us health?

One way to understand the basic process that brings us health is called *integration*.

Integration is how you take separate things and then bring them together.

It's really a way of creating harmony in life. And when we have harmony we can be more flexible. We're adaptive, we have an inner sense of coherence, we're energized, we're stable. It's the essence of wellbeing.

What can we do in our lives to create integration?

Well, one of the things we can do is participate in playful, creative, spontaneous activities- like spontaneous song. Song is a really interesting process because it links a number of parts of our nervous system to each other. So it's a source of creating integration.

For example, in music you have the rhythm, which is resonating with our bodily selves- and you have the melody, which, higher up in the nervous system, the cortex, is what creates these patterns of song.

Thus music by itself starts to integrate our body with the higher areas of our brain, so it's a *vertical* kind of integration.

Then song contributes to this vertical part of integration by bringing the *left and right sides* of the brain together.

On the left side you have logic and linear thinking; you also have language.

Yet, the amazing thing is on the right side of the brain you've got a sense of the whole body, you have raw spontaneous emotions, and you have autobiographical memory. Memories are often encased within images, rather than language-based.

So when we participate in spontaneous song, often we're generating from our *imagination*, processes from the *right* hemisphere- but to bring them out and translate them into words we need to use the *left*.

So when you give yourself an invitation to participate in spontaneous song, you're actually linking the *stuff of the right* with the *process of the left* in a *bi-lateral* kind of integration.

But spontaneous song is even more than vertical integration plus bi-lateral integration. It's also something called *narrative integration*. Narra-

tive is the way we tell stories. Human beings are a story-telling species, and song is a wonderful way to combine stories with spontaneity.

In the spontaneous singing method, you may bring the themes of your life, (or the life themes of people around you if you're sharing a song), together with the details of the story. It's the telling of a sequence of events, and the inner experience of the people and the events, often in a way you've never thought of before. So narrative offers a different kind of integration in the brain itself.

There's even a fourth kind of integration, if you're sharing a song with other people- whether they're listening to you, or co-creating a song with you- then you have something called *inter-personal integration*. That's the way the inside of our minds become linked to the inside of other people. It's the way two minds or more become part of a *we*.

Spontaneous song offers all of these opportunities to promote integration- interpersonally, narratively, bi-laterally, and vertically.

And so it's a wonderful way to promote health and thriving with a sense of joy.

Creativity emerges out of integration.

As adults it's fun to participate in spontaneous song, but for children in schools, it's also extremely important to have the opportunity to go beyond reading, writing and arithmetic, and actually develop reflective skills, to develop what I call 'mindsight', and actually see the internal world. Thus in schools we can actually create this 'internal education' by offering all sorts of experiences where kids consider the 'inside' of themselves and the 'inside' of other people. These social and emotional skills that are developed simultaneously help promote academic performance and help people thrive. Spontaneous song would be one important way of accessing the inside world and letting it come out.

This is why I think what's offered through *SongSourcing*, Michael Stillwater's spontaneous singing method, is a great opportunity to promote internal education through a creative process of integration across multiple domains, supporting well-being in our lives.

Spontaneous singing is a great opportunity to combine play with growth.

Spontaneous singing is an incredibly creative act that may have correlations with what goes on in our nervous system. Part of a way of understanding what spontaneity may be about is how things in the nervous system actually begin to come together, how separate areas become linked as a functional whole.

We call that *integration*, and there's a lot of reason to believe that integration may be a key to thriving, to flourishing in life, to well being, even to creativity.

So let me just share with you one idea of how spontaneous singing may tap into the innate ability of our nervous systems to integrate themselves as they create wellbeing.

When you are offered an invitation to create a spontaneous song, to come up with themes, to just feel the rhythm of the music, and then come up with a line that is your main line, and then also refrains- what happens I think in the brain is that the music itself begins to integrate in its rhythm the body proper, that comes up into areas of the brain that are in the skull, to match with the melody that gets created by your own words that you create- and that's happening in the higher parts of the brain, the cortex.

So the first kind of integration that spontaneous singing may create is called ***vertical integration***.

Another kind of integration is that often the spontaneous songs we come up with have images in them, and describe emotions, and also are derived from autobiographical memory. All of those features actually come from the right hemisphere, but on the *left side of the brain*, the left hemisphere, what we have are words that are presented in a linear fashion, that are usually trying to find logical relationships among things that are being talked about.

So as a song emerges you have a ***bi-lateral*** form of integration, where the stuff of emotions, of autobiographical memory, even of our life themes, comes into play and integrates with the *language-creating left hemisphere*. So that besides just the vertical integration of the music itself, the actual use of words to combine our memories and our emotions is a bi-lateral form of integration linking left and right.

As if that weren't enough, you also have a form of integration called ***narrative integration***. And narrative integration has this feature where you are creating a story.

We are a story-telling species. And yet so often what so often happens in schools and business life, even in everyday living, is we don't have an opportunity to spontaneously come forward with a creative story that reflects not only what happened in our life, but also what our dreams are, what our hopes are, our disappoints- something that actually integrates lived experience, dreams and fantasies, with the themes of our actual life story.

So a spontaneous song can create *narrative integration* by inviting the individual to participate, either by themselves, which is amazing, but also to participate in collaboration with one or more people. And then you go even from narrative integration to a fourth kind of integration, which is called ***interpersonal integration***, where two minds become linked as one.

So in interpersonal integration, the co-creation of a song, you have *interpersonal integration-*

You're creating a story through the unfolding of the song which is *narrative integration*-

You're *linking left and right* as words are put to the emotions and the non-verbal stuff of autobiographical memory, and even your whole bodily sense is encoded in that right hemisphere, so you're bringing them together.

And then the rhythm of the music which comes from the body is linked with the melody which links the body itself with the higher areas of the brain which is a *verticle form of integration*.

There's a lot of reasons to believe that integration is essential for health. So the spontaneity of a song, like the spontaneity of lights going out right here, can make you suddenly start to create new things. So here we are, you thought we just had the lights go out. We did! But instead we continue with the story that I'm telling you.

So you have to improvise, and that invites the nervous system to integrate itself. Spontaneity goes along with health, creativity and a sense of vitality in life. What a wonderful opportunity Michael Stillwater is offering us with spontaneous song.

"At the heart of each of us, whatever our imperfections, there exists a silent pulse of perfect rhythm, which is absolutely individual and unique, and yet which connects us to everything else. "

- George Leonard

Why is this good for children?

In school settings, teachers of course are really busy. And they need to teach basic skills like reading, writing and arithmetic. We understand that, and those are really important basic skills.

But one of the skills that we could add to the curriculum is the skill of reflection, of children going inward, of having a kind of internal education that honors the invisible world of the mind, feelings, thoughts, and memories.

Yet when do children actually get the opportunity to explore their inner world- what's essential for social and emotional intelligence, what's a part of what I call 'mindsight'?

Well, spontaneous song is an opportunity in schools to invite children to go inward, to reflect inward on the energy and information flow that is the mind. To know what they're feeling, to allow memories to emerge, and to give themselves the freedom of creativity, so they begin to integrate their nervous systems in new ways.

Now, they're not going to be told they're integrating things, they don't need to know that! They need to know they can have the fun and pleasure of bringing outward what is inside- and to be honored for that vulnerability, for the risk they take, and then for the sheer joy that can emerge by seeing what comes up.

So a teacher can create an environment of safety, of honoring the internal world, and then allow all these different levels of integration to happen. And as they do, children will get more and more social and emotional intelligence. *Studies suggest that when they're learning that even with other practices of reflection, they actually do better in schools.*

They're going to feel better about themselves, and they'll also learn to honor the internal world of someone else.

And so spontaneous song is a joyful way to create these integrative foundation of mindsight, and to have kids learn to honor each other in schools.

The Great Song

Imagine a Great Song, forever invoking and celebrating a message of love and acceptance, harmony and freedom, singing across the universe, having neither beginning or ending- knowing only to sing and offer itself to anything that will listen. Within the Great Song are all songs contained, like a mountain spring from which multiple streams are born.

Because the Great Song is vast in knowledge, breadth and resonance, and vibrates with the essence of love, it requires translation to be heard, conversion to be understood.

Thus, to receive it in his or her own language, each person is provided with their own Core Song- their individual receptor, which translates or converts the Great Song into their own language, based on their capacity for receptivity, belief, and particular phase of life.

Upon hearing the Great Song, the effect is immediate and obvious, bringing some kind or combination of peace, comfort, courage, or liberation. By reminding the listener of their ever-present connection with a Source from beyond this world, it inspires a listener to go forth and share their gifts of love without fear. It encourages them to make difficult decisions in the face of adversity, to open their heart to receive love from others.

But if a person is ready to take the next step, they could express the Great Song through their own voice. This means singing their variation of the Great Song in a way unique to them. By doing so, they are healing themselves of limitations and beliefs of unworthiness, enhancing their joy, and amplifying the power coming through.

Those who begin to express the Great Song inspire others to open as well, which is how the Great Song finds its way ever more deeply embedded in the heart of the world.

Incredibly, the most effective method for reconnecting people to the Great Song is a simple children's practice which kids all over the world are engaged in, a practice which most adults forgot long ago.

This is the practice of *spontaneous songmaking*.

By this practice, which only requires getting 'out of the way' and trusting, allowing musical messages to be expressed with a healing or loving intention, people begin not only to enjoy the experience of feeling reconnected, but also begin to serve others in feeling reconnected.

I came away from SongSourcing with the joyful realization that at any moment, at any time, there is a song inside us, waiting to be shared.

-Deva Premal, singer/recording artist

I was completely delighted and surprised- mostly by the fact that I could do it, and by how it revealed hidden parts of my psyche. Engaging the singing voice in verbal free-association makes this a wonderful tool for self-exploration.

-Shivon Robinsong, Founder
Gettin' Higher Choir, Victoria, BC

SongSourcing gives me a daily practice I can do anytime, anywhere. With stunning simplicity it unlocks the intelligence of my own body, using my voice as healing medicine.

-Deva Vani, Music Director
Universal Spirit Center, San Diego

“Michael Stillwater is a remarkable teacher, inspiration, and role model for spontaneous song. My experience in his class was nothing short of feeling my whole system had been changed and transformed.

He takes people who, like myself, are shy and uncomfortable around singing, and makes everything alright. To be in his class, there’s no judgment. He reminds us we are all free to offer amnesty to our creative self, and that includes our singer and songwriter. That frees everyone and allows them to simply create and be spontaneous, which is exactly what Michael’s goal and mission is.

I have watched adults become childlike in their innocence and learn to play again, to be spontaneous, integrate, get out from a linear form of thinking, and get more into a creative, innocent, non-editing way of being. People within the workshops led have come from diverse backgrounds and created all sorts of remarkable songs and melodies. I always feel it’s something of a miracle.

Not only is this work invaluable for adults, especially educators that are teaching, inspiring, and influencing children, but this is a remarkable work for children themselves. Affirm in them their creativity, their spontaneity, that their voices matter, and that they can feel joyous and highly creative.”

-Elizabeth Lindsey
Anthropologist, Actress and National Geographic Explorer

“Being provided with this invitation, this background music that is so inviting, calling forth the wish to sing, calling forth the words and feelings also, made it possible for me to fully accept and express what I was experiencing in the very moment. But then, amazingly, because I was singing about it, and accepting it at the same time, the feeling would continue to transform- develop, change, and ultimately turn into a solution for me. I was basically just listening to my own words as I was observing my feelings. I didn’t feel I was doing anything- all of this was happening, and I was witnessing it. It was a very healing and integrating experience for me.

There were so many experiences because there were all these different ways of spontaneous singing that Michael taught us. But I think for me the most impressive and touching experience was just singing what I felt in that very moment. Though it actually wasn’t such a pleasant feeling, by singing it I somehow could embrace it fully and accept it, and be neutral to it, and by doing that the feeling changed and transformed, and actually a process started which turned into a solution. And all of this happened without any doing on my part, basically. I was just present, feeling my feelings, and letting the words come. It was a stunning experience and I’m very thankful.”

-Nicholas Graf von Stillfried
Phd Candidate, Physics/Biology



Michael Stillwater is an American artist, filmmaker and educator living in Switzerland.

To experience the *SongSourcing* method for yourself, one way is to participate in a SongSourcing seminar, also called Song Sanctuary. If this is not possible, you may download SongSourcing tracks to provide an inspirational harmonic and rhythmic background for experimenting with your voice and your song.

Listen to the SongSourcing introduction recording on the webpage entitled 'SongSourcing'. Visit the site for a complete schedule of SongSourcing seminars and Song Sanctuary retreats, or to download SongSourcing Trackpack One.

www.innerharmony.com

To view films intended to remind the viewer of their innate connection to the Great Song,:

www.songwithoutborders.net

Photography by Michael Stillwater To view more landscape and flower images::

www.stillwatercollection.com

