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### The New Life Singers: A Study of Street Kids "Doing" Choir

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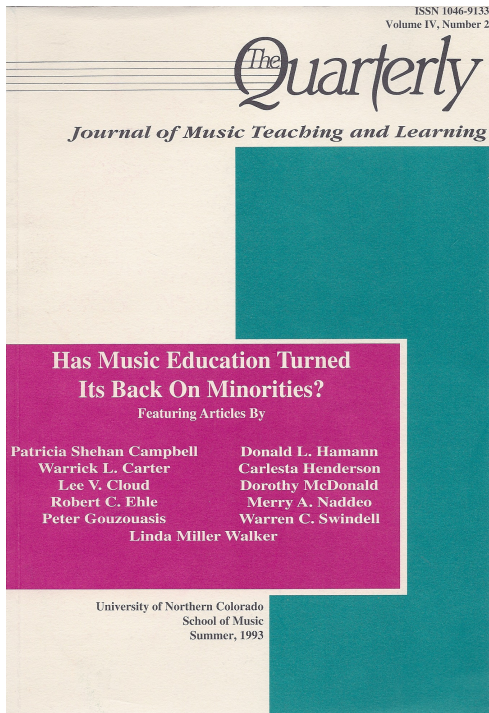
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*It is with pleasure that we inaugurate the reprint of the entire seven volumes of The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning. The journal began in 1990 as The Quarterly. In 1992, with volume 3, the name changed to The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning and continued until 1997. The journal contained articles on issues that were timely when they appeared and are now important for their historical relevance. For many authors, it was their first major publication. Visions of Research in Music Education will publish facsimiles of each issue as it originally appeared. Each article will be a separate pdf file. Jason D. Vodicka has accepted my invitation to serve as guest editor for the reprint project and will compose a new editorial to introduce each volume. Chad Keilman is the production manager. I express deepest thanks to Richard Colwell for granting VRME permission to re-publish The Quarterly in online format. He has graciously prepared an introduction to the reprint series.*

# The New Life Singers: A Study Of Street Kids “Doing” Choir

**By Merry A. Naddeo**

*Hoboken, New Jersey, Public Schools*

A troubled national economy such as that now being experienced in the United States is the cause of considerable social stress. Vast numbers of people find themselves without a means of making a living and, predictably, economic hardships place the heaviest burden on the poor and uneducated. The frustrations such hardship creates are often conducive to erratic behavior, including the mistreatment of those dependent on an ineffective and demoralized family provider. Young people who find themselves in such difficult situations and who are old enough to escape will often leave home. These young people are then forced to survive alone, often leading to a life on the streets and an abrupt end to traditional educational opportunities.

In recent years it has become evident that for many people, the streets, subways, and public transit stations have become quasi-substitutes for the traditional home. Young people who have fled their homes are particularly vulnerable, for with few marketable skills and little or nothing to sell but themselves, they are easily led into prostitution or illegal drug dealing. These young

people soon discover that the life offered by the streets becomes difficult at best, and often more horrific than the situation from which they escaped. Because they are old enough to be moral and electoral beings, and yet young enough to be “saved,” the group viewed as most worthy of efforts at social reform is young people between the ages of 18 and 21. Countless religious and charitable agencies have accepted the challenge of aiding and rehabilitating this group.

Many ethnographies address the ways and culture of young street people. A 1976 statistical survey on runaway youth, conducted for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, concludes that more than 500,000 families experienced runaway episodes within a one-year period. It also finds little or no difference between black and white families or between white-collar and blue-collar families as to the rate of actual runaways. Wooden (1976) describes the dangers facing runaway youth who have limited financial resources, no acquaintances in a strange city and little or no knowledge of life on the street. He describes the organized activities of pimps at the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York City and how these pimps use other juveniles to lure new arrivals, male and female, into lives of prostitution. Agnelli (1986) reports, in the findings of the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues, that 30 million children were living on the streets of the world's cities, with over 20,000 in New York City alone.

Hancock (1988) studied a population of youth living on the streets by placing himself in the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New

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*Aware of the limited opportunities available to talented low socio-economic public school students, and the despair festering from within those confines, Naddeo is presently focusing her efforts on establishing a public school for the performing arts in her community.*

York City, slowly infiltrating this population, gaining their trust, and establishing a personal relationship. The picture that emerges through his data is that "They want to see themselves as being part of the American society, in some way 'winners,'...But they do not demonstrate that they possess the ability or expressed will to move out of their chosen setting" (p. 97). Hancock found that many are illiterate and addicted to drugs. His study "is a simple attempt to see what would happen if an educator approached that setting to learn about it."

Finding runaway behavior to be an increasing phenomenon, he suggests that "...it remains for educators of today to explore what it might mean to be educators in the future" (p. 98).

In spite of the problems our large urban areas face with the rehabilitation/education of this ever-increasing population, virtually no documentation is available to suggest that the potential benefits of a group musical experience in this rehabilitation/education process has been seriously explored. Given the greater challenge of motivating street kids in an organized group experience, I decided that a study of this nature, with a population already having "fallen to the risk," could benefit the more disadvantaged populations of our inner-city schools. Research to benefit music educators, who are finding it increasingly difficult to challenge and reach the low socio-economic inner-city population, should be given a higher priority.

It would be highly unlikely for one to gather a group of street kids on a corner in midtown Manhattan, and in any case such improbable circumstances would provide no access to a piano, so I contacted "The Inn of the Good Shepherd" (a pseudonym for the agency). I was given the name of a person to whom I should submit a written proposal outlining my plans. It took approximately six weeks for an interview to be set up in order to further discuss the intended study and be given the op-

portunity to address any concerns the organization might have after reading the proposal.

After receiving verbal approval for my program at this interview, I was able to try my hand at challenging a diverse group—which included myself and various staff members—to come together and perform the complex task of rehearsing and performing as part of a choral group in this setting. The main purpose of The Inn was not education, however, and certainly not music education. The goal was to rehabilitate street kids who, after vari-

ous attempts at survival in the streets, had sought a different road—one that could possibly reconnect them to mainstream society. Since therapy and rehabilitation was the language under which the institution functioned, I believe I had convinced the interviewer and those who reviewed the written proposal that a choral program in some manner fit under a therapeutic label. In the past, I had experienced success with a choral program in a low-socioeconomic-area public school, and the self-esteem of

some of the children was elevated as a result of their achievement in this area.

### The Institution

The institution within which this study was conducted had existed in some form for over 20 years at the time of the study. It had grown to become one of the largest and most comprehensive charitable agencies caring for street kids in the United States, offering a variety of programs to serve young people under 21 years of age and claiming to have cared for more than 100,000 of what it terms "exploited kids." According to the founder of this organization, these young people found themselves in this category through no fault of their own, but through the inability of their parents and society at large to offer the proper environment for healthy growth. He stated that they were basically lonely and unable to establish

[K]ids who can claim few worldly possessions often regard their talent (in sports, music or other arts) as their only wealth—the *one possession* that cannot be denied or taken from them.



proper human relationships. Through its therapeutic programs, the institution has attempted to undo the damage it felt was inflicted by parents and society, and, in the founder's words, to help these kids "pick themselves up, develop the self-esteem they sorely lack, and start a new life."

The institution cites six major programs for the youth it serves, including computer training, culinary training, and sports. When I proposed a choral program which anticipated a therapeutic rather than a musical outcome, I was directed specifically to The Inn's long-term program, a 12- to 18-month term for youth between the ages of 18 and 21 who are considered committed to rehabilitation.

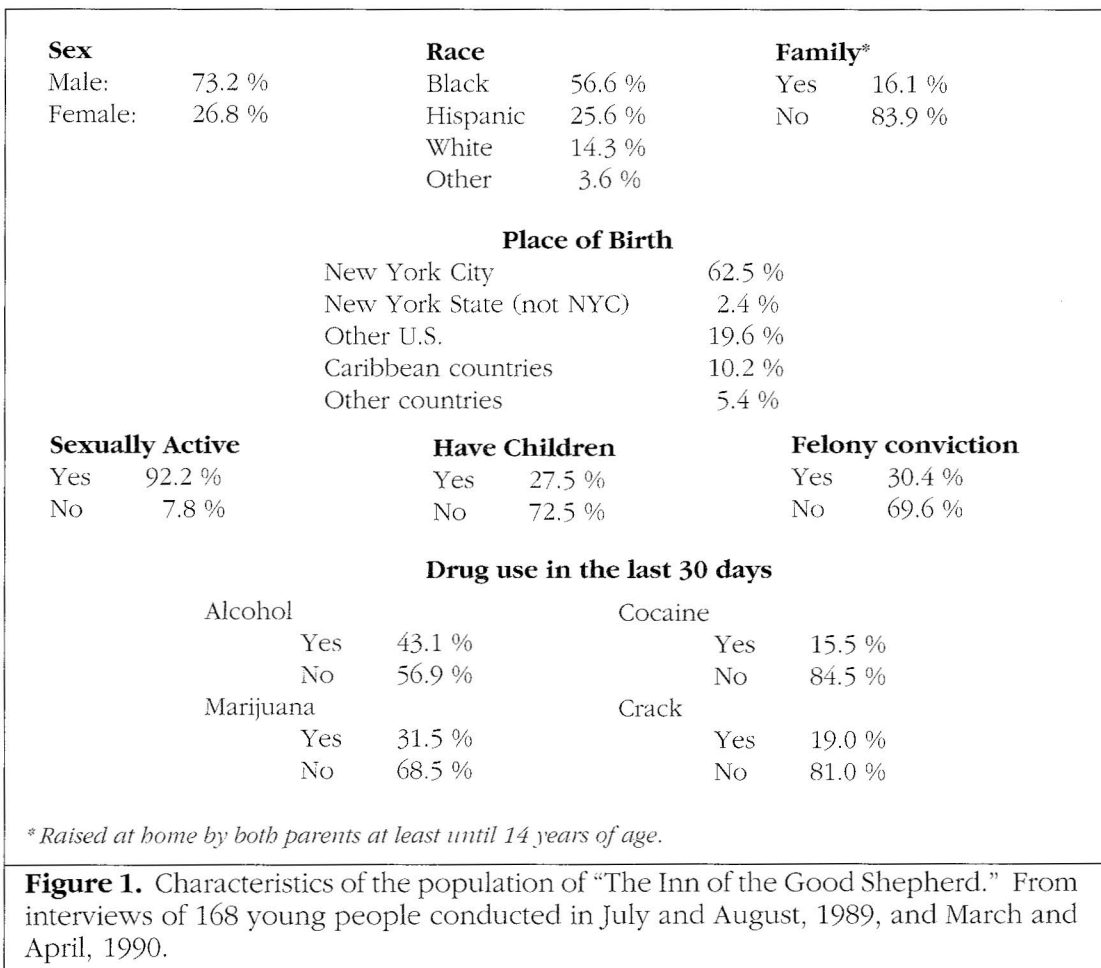
### Population

After a few weeks of contact, I understood that these young adults could not be compared to any student population with whom I had previously come into contact. Figure 1

was compiled from interviews conducted at the institution during a period coinciding precisely with the time frame of this research. The figure presents an overview of certain characteristics and habits these young people might possess. This group, however, is apt to present itself in an unrealistic light when answering questions, as concluded by Cohen and Hodges:

It is possible that interview and questionnaire techniques are more likely, when applied to L.L. [lower lower class] respondents than when applied to respondents of the other strata, to produce caricatures in which the halftones and shading present in the subject are obliterated in the image. (1963: 333)

A complete description of each participant and his or her relationship to the choir program is beyond the scope of this article. The following descriptive analyses of two participants have been included, however, not to indicate that they were in any way typical of



the population, but as a way of offering two distinct pieces of a 20-piece puzzle. These two young people were involved in 20 group rehearsals, three performances, and countless other individual and small-group encounters in the course of the eight-month study. Their names have been changed to protect their identities. These accounts are based on my observations and those of trusted informants and are in no way the product of formal interview techniques.

### **Martha**

Martha was a 21-year old black woman, rather skinny and hyperactive. She was constantly in motion, her legs always jiggling, and she was unable to stay put throughout an entire rehearsal. She came and went from the auditorium an average of four times during each rehearsal; however, she always managed to be one of the last to leave because she enjoyed the popular sheet music brought in for solo work. Martha was not one of the initial participants in the program, but approximately six weeks after the choir had begun I observed her sitting in the back of the auditorium singing along without the sheet music. This particular session was the last before our first performance, and the singers were rehearsing on the stage. They were working on some "spirituals," which by their very nature are repetitive in melody and words. It was during these spirituals that Martha left her seat in the back of the room and joined the others on stage. She said she would not be able to sing with the group during the performance but would like to join and be part of future events.

Martha lingered after the rehearsal and told me that several years ago she had taken a few piano lessons from someone in her church and that she desired to continue. Although her schedule was erratic because she worked on an ambulance at night, we were able to start meeting early on Monday evenings in the auditorium for piano lessons. (All the residents were either working at steady jobs or in active pursuit of employment. Most took classes at night at the institution in preparation for the G.E.D. exam.)

Martha was quickly discouraged with what she felt was her slow progress on piano, although she was doing extremely well, playing

two hands together with little restraint. She was highly musical and, in time, could have mastered the basic principles of piano playing.

Martha often mentioned that she was looking for a two-bedroom apartment (wanting to get out of the facility as soon as possible) for her grandmother and herself. Once when the group was arguing over what it took to be successful, Martha said, "It all boils down to who your mother is." Martha indicated to me that her mother had been abusive to both her and her grandmother, and that she wished to "rescue" her grandmother from this situation. I cannot recall seeing Martha relate to or associate with any of the other kids outside of the singing experience. She was a loner but always seemed to find me—even when I came to the institution unexpectedly.

Martha had a very extensive vocal range with a dynamic lower register and was able to put real "style" into any song she sang. Martha mentioned that she wanted to develop basic skill on the keyboard so she could eventually gain entrance to a college music program.

Unlike many of the female residents, Martha did not seem overly concerned about clothes and never took to "primping" as many of the other girls did. She often wore very short shorts, however, that attracted the boys' attention to her shapely legs. I had heard rumors about Martha's former street life and had learned from more than one source that she had worked for a pimp and took drugs for a while. Martha went to great lengths to convince me of her devotion to religious mores and her commitment, based on her faith, to avoiding the advances of men.

Although she no longer lives in the institution and is back out on the streets, Martha has kept in touch. She phones me at least once a month, and we have met in the city. She continues to express her hopes for a musical career and a commitment to a chaste life.

### **Andre**

Andre was a 21-year-old light-skinned Hispanic man with no audible accent or voice inflection stemming from his background. He was handsome and intelligent and displayed an effeminate demeanor. At times he had a tendency to employ a lisping speech pattern. He was president of the Residents' Council, a

group of the more popular residents voted by their peers to take part in making minor decisions with the staff members. When I first met Andre, he made a dramatic, sweeping entrance into the auditorium wearing a cape ornamented with an abundance of gold chains. On occasion he wore a temporary gold cap attached to one of his front teeth—although this gold cap was not worn as frequently as time went by. Andre took extreme care in dressing himself and had many beautiful clothes. My impression of him was that he was extremely self-confident. He possessed a beautiful voice that could rival many of the better popular singers of our time and had amazing natural stage presence.

Andre claimed that he had once been a student in a high school of performing arts in New York and that for reasons relating to his after-school work as a model, he eventually dropped out. When he was no longer in school he became involved in selling and the “occasional use” of drugs. I was also told by a reliable source that he was using an alias and had no communication with his family; he feared being tracked down. A native New Yorker, he had spent more time on the streets than the other residents with whom I had contact. Andre often stayed away from The Inn for as long as two weeks at a time. This did not seem to concern the organization as long as bi-weekly appointments for counseling were kept and his other obligations to the organization fulfilled. Andre was astute enough not to cut contact off completely with the institution.

Initially very faithful to the choir, Andre impressed me with his talent. At one point he asked if I had any contacts who might be able to film a video for him. At that time he was employed by a legal firm; according to his account, he took an edited copy of the video that we eventually filmed to his employer, who agreed to manage him. He once showed me copies of the contract he had signed.

My purpose in coming to the institution was not to prepare Inn residents for record contracts or other aspects of the professional music business; so there were many evenings when I came home feeling guilty because I was playing a part in fostering expectations that I felt were unrealistic. ... Instead of thinking in terms of their G.E.D.s or further education that could secure what are considered “routine” careers, was I inadvertently encouraging them to reach for a “star” far beyond their grasp?

The choir program offered Andre the opportunity to attract attention to himself and his talent. After a few choir rehearsals, he requested that I spend time training him on a one-to-one basis, and he proved to be such a charismatic performer that several members of the staff often made it a point to observe his private practice sessions with me. Here they heartily applauded him, offering him further encouragement.

Having made staff members aware of his special talents, Andre was able to use his influence and position as president of the Residents’ Council to gain permission to produce a variety show. This, he said, was to raise money and to attract positive recognition for the institution. He set up an audition schedule and later a rehearsal schedule for those he accepted as performers. Having rejected all but two acts from the choral group, he sought after and attracted a great deal of “talent” from outside the institution. In doing so, Andre denied his true status in the institution as a resident, and represented himself as a paid member of the staff. This alienated many of the other residents; the staff, either unaware of this ploy or not wishing to become involved in exposing his lie, supported him in his project until its completion. This further alienated many in the choir. Several of the residents voiced disapproval of the type of males Andre seemed to be attracting, and the manner in which this attraction was made evident.

The variety show eventually took place,

and Andre had his moment when the spotlight shone entirely on him and his friends. These friends did not include residents of the institution, as the two acts from the institution initially chosen by Andre had withdrawn due to the tensions created by the production. The last time I spoke to Andre, he told me that he had submitted a copy of the video we had made for a spot on "Star Search" and would be appearing on the show very soon, and that he had signed a record contract with R.C.A. Andre, however, had proven to be less than completely accurate in his statements in the past. Particularly in regard to Andre's variety show, I was reminded of Wagner's (1977) comment:

A "promising" student...is only "more promising" than his or her fellows...As a result, for every student who hustles to the top of the institutional pile, another student is coaxed, led, or shoved to the bottom. For every successful hustler, there is a victim. (p. 131)

### Rehearsal

I hoped to demonstrate that the participants in the choral program could relate to a genre of music that they would not likely be inclined to search out on their own. The choir rehearsals themselves were not conducted with vocal improvement as the main focus, however, but as a means of improving self-esteem through musical accomplishment.

Figure 2 (next page) shows the content of a rehearsal that was videotaped and analyzed. It is graphed to represent as accurately as possible the sequence of the two major activities—singing and the transitional periods between songs. These transitions included the distribution of new music, explanations of how to follow the music, correction of past errors, encouraging remarks made to members of the group, and acknowledgment of participants who chose not to appear on camera. Although each rehearsal lasted between 45 to 50 minutes, the videotaped document lasted only 36 minutes because of time used in turning off and repositioning the camera.

Goffman states, "during any spate of activity, participants will ordinarily not only obtain a sense of what is going on but will also...become spontaneously engrossed, caught up, enthralled" (1974:345). Therefore,

the critical junctures of this rehearsal were those instances when the music stopped. The individuals who comprised the group were able to organize themselves successfully through these periods, despite many moments at which the flow of activity could have ruptured into chaos or even violent behavior. It was remarkable how these kids instinctively knew how to order their behavior to bring about a successful choir rehearsal, even though they had a minimal amount of success with structured group learning experiences in the past. As McDermott (1976) would no doubt point out, order was maintained not as an accident, but due to the collusion of the participants themselves in not allowing the order to become disrupted.

### Performance

The choir program attracted a faithful group of volunteer participants from an unlikely source who displayed commitment to a task. Since for these kids, this experience included adjustment to many previously unknown factors, their commitment to singing and their display of group cooperation can legitimately be described as a major accomplishment.

Could it be that for a performer, the opportunity to display his or her talent allows parts of his or her better nature to emerge? The choir (named "The New Life Singers" at the suggestion of one of its members, who felt this appellation represented what the group was trying to achieve through its music) gave its first performance following an Easter Sunday brunch offered to all residents of the institution. The choir presented four songs as part of an Easter worship service. Several of the singers purchased new outfits for the occasion; others, unable to afford new clothes, dressed in the finest they already owned. I interpreted this to mean that the singers felt secure about their "offering" of music and good about themselves. One member of the group told me that this was the nicest Easter she could remember. I tried to slip out quickly after the service to get home to my own son, but the kids kept detaining me. They did not want this moment to end.

At The New Life Singers' second public performance, at a barbecue for volunteers, five songs were presented to what appeared

minutes		7:15 P.M.
1	Martha singing Tyrell standing behind piano, observing	"Killing Me Softly With His Song" Solo (Martha)/2 mins 26 secs
-	Nan & Tyrell sitting in front row as observers	
2		
-		
3	===== 7:30 P.M.	
	START OF GROUP REHEARSAL	(11 secs.) Directions for Song
-	Starr, Angie & Martha standing behind piano	"My Lord What a Morning"
4	Tommy, Nan & Tyrell sitting front row	"Swing Low, Sweet Chariot"
		Partner Song
-	(4 mins. 26 secs.) SINGING SEGMENT #1	
5	< Music stops to assign parts; Tommy stands	
	< Baby cries briefly	
-	< Tyrell stands	
	< Kelly enters with baby in stroller	
6	< I teach "Swing Low" part (playing piano, no singing)	
	< 2 parts put together; singing resumes	
-	< Music stops; Nan asks to join "Swing Low" singers & stands	
	< Music resumes; Kelly sits	
7	< Jackie & Amil enter	
-	< Boy blocks group from camera	
	< I introduce Jackie to group; Angie kisses him; Tommy hands out music for new piece	
8	< Background music starts after 8 secs.	(42 secs.) TRANSITION #1
-	Entire group standing; Kelly sitting	Repetition:
		"My Lord What a Morning"
9		"Swing Low, Sweet Chariot"
-	< I play wrong chords	
	(2 mins. 32 secs.) SINGING SEGMENT #2	
10		
-	< Kelly stands, back to camera	
	< Applause	
11	< Baby cries; Angie imitates; baby continues; Tommy hands out music for new piece	
	< Music begins; baby stops	
-	< I ask Andre to join us; Martha leaves	
	(52 secs.) TRANSITION #2	
12	"The Clouds"	
-	< Nan becomes lost twice; looks to Angie	
	(2 mins. 29 secs.) SINGING SEGMENT #3	
13	< Angie gets Nan back on target (3rd time)	
-	< I explain to Nan & Tyrell how to follow music	
	(36 secs.) TRANSITION #3	
14	< Amil leaves; takes Tyrell with him	
	All singers behind piano, facing me	"The Clouds"
15	(2 mins. 19 secs.) SINGING SEGMENT #4	
-		
16	1 male singer joins (9)	
-	Singers make C-shape around piano	
	< Kelly's baby leaves stroller, walks away	
	(1 min. 2 secs.) TRANSITION #4	

Figure 2. Choir Rehearsal: Videotaped Documentation

17 "Rockin' Jerusalem"

18 - < Angie & Jackie laugh- - - - - Song is interrupted due to errors by new singers

19

20 < Angie leaves; Martha re-enters (4 secs.) Cameraman giving himself instructions  
*Singers remain in C-shape* "Like An Eagle"

21 - < Angie returns

22

23 < Disruptive noise from back of room; Kelly turns

24 < I turn, stop music, look toward disruption

25 < Music resumes; noise stops

26 (10 mins. 18 secs.) SINGING SEGMENT #6  
 Rehearsed in small sections with stops  
 & drilling of different vocal parts

27 < Kelly turns to attend to her child

28 < Voice to Kelly: "Give up;" she throws music in the air and leaves

29 < Kelly returns

30 < Andre comes in & talks to Kelly; Kelly leaves again

31 < Two babies slide off stage

32 < Andre enters again, sits next to me on piano bench

33 = = = = =

34 *Choir repositions as audience* "With You I'm Born Again"

35 < Andre comes over to suggest Duet; take 1 (Amil & Angie) / 2 mins. 43 secs.  
 "moves" to Angie & Amil

36

37

38 < Martha leaves for mikes; Angie makes suggestions to Amil

39 "With You I'm Born Again"

40 Duet; take 2 (use of dummy mikes by Amil & Angie) / 3 mins. 2 secs.

41

42

43

44

45 = = = = =



to be the amazement of several staff members who had missed the debut, as well as that of the guests. Upon completion of our prearranged numbers, several members of the group were determined to continue singing. By this time, two months after our debut performance, we had expanded our repertoire and so were able to perform two more group numbers. There are no words to describe the energy exerted by these singers as they endeavored to continue the performance. If only momentary, an elusive "something" beyond the music motivated them to continue. Maslow writes, "I want to report that the easiest way of getting peak experiences is through music" (1971: 169). He further reports that experiences of this nature tend to cause those who have shared them to become brotherly and loving in a way that dispels dominance. The often reported reciprocal interdependence of performers and audience could also serve as an example of loving communication. That these singers were affecting their audience was attested to by the rapt attention and rousing applause given them.

### The Issue of Talent

*Ability is of little account without opportunity.*

—Napoleon Bonaparte

The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines talent as a mental or physical aptitude; a natural or acquired ability. Yet the term "talent" remains ambiguous and complex. "It is elusive, fragile, manifold, fast-moving, luminous, tantalizing and incredibly beautiful, like aurora borealis on a cool September night" (McClelland, 1958:18). According to Raina (1981), talent is the most valuable asset a country can have. Taylor (1978) states that it is essential for our nation to become concerned about all of its potential human resources, and especially to be aware of the waste and loss of such resources in individuals. Modern research has demonstrated that failure to actively identify and give opportunity to an outstanding talent may hamper general mental and personality growth in the individual that possesses it (Misra, Patel, Raina, & Mittand, 1981).

Were there any individuals among the participants in my study that I considered as having outstanding musical talent? Two of

the group did indeed possess a high degree of natural musical ability; the others I consider average or slightly above average in ability. Three months after the termination of this study, Andre claimed to be earning his living performing and singing. Andre was not without a highly developed imagination and his claim could not be proven or disproven. But based on Andre's performance in the choir, this might be possible—after a considerable amount of training and building of repertoire, which at that time he did not have.

Martha also possessed a high degree of natural ability, but she did not display the stability necessary to enable her talent to develop. As noted previously, she sought out piano lessons; she also wrote lyrics and music, but she did not have the skill to record her musical ideas on paper.

Does presenting a discussion of talent and categorizing individuals according to their abilities have any significant bearing on the outcome of this study? I believe it does. This is because the term "talent" and the desire to possess such a treasured commodity became a driving factor in these young adults' lives, as well as in the more limited context of these rehearsals. In every rehearsal, one or more of the participants tried to impress me with what they believed was their extraordinary "gift." I have found, through many years of working with disadvantaged youth, that kids who can claim few worldly possessions often regard their talent (in sports, music, or other arts) as their only wealth—the *one possession* that cannot be denied or taken from them. This, they believe, could become their very key to success. Sometimes overlooked by such individuals is the necessity of seizing the opportunity to develop their abilities and the amount of effort this entails.

When the choral program began, it was regarded by several of the participants as the very opportunity to learn and expand what they believed were their natural talents. Because I am a classical and church musician, however, with little experience or connection with the rock world, a number of the singers became disillusioned with my ability to help them. Martha brought me several tapes of

...I feel obliged to raise the possibility that for an extreme population such as recovering homeless or runaway youth, a program such as this may present positive results (i.e., increased self-esteem, peak experiences) when evaluated within the limited context of the choir; but when evaluated within the broader context of rehabilitation, negative results may be noted.

herself singing an original rock song *a cappella* and requested that I transcribe and arrange it so that she could “bring it to a record producer.” I tried my best, but neither of us was satisfied with the outcome.

Andre had more insight into what I could actually offer and was able to make better use of my qualities and connections. Through one of my contacts, he was able to procure for himself an edited tape of his singing, with a title, fade-outs, and other professional touches said to have been requested by “Star Search” talent scouts.

My purpose in describing these two cases is to illustrate the extent to which these subjects believed in participation in the choir as an avenue to breaking away from former life patterns, and the role I played in encouraging this. It often distressed me when I thought about the expectations that these kids seemed to carry with them, and it further distresses me to qualify these expectations as being unrealistic. My purpose in coming to the institution was not to prepare Inn residents for record contracts or other aspects of the professional music business; so there were many evenings when I came home feeling guilty because I was playing a part in fostering expectations that I felt were unrealistic. What was becoming evident to me was that there was a fine and dangerous line between encouraging them to feel good as a result of their musical accomplishments as a group, and paving the way for future disillusionment.

Nonetheless, talent was a very real concern to the kids at the time at which I was working with them. Many were loners who had problems trusting, and their only hope seemed to stem from within themselves. By participating in a program in which they could excel as a group, many found the courage and initiative to imagine what their

own individual talents could bring.

For some time now, educators involved in the arts have been struggling to present proof of the need to expose students to and encourage their participation in the performing arts. The powerful and often emotional image of kids on stage in plays, concerts, or dance recitals is frequently presented in support of such programs and, indeed, these experiences do have the capacity to present powerful moments and peak experiences for children. After such an experience, the participants often retain an image of themselves in a spotlight, and this image tends to stay with them long after the applause has died and the real spotlight has faded.

But what then becomes of this image? How does the student categorize this positive experience; how *should* he or she categorize it? Is this image categorized differently by young people without much positive reinforcement in other areas of endeavor and without even minimal positive parental involvement in their activities, than by those with several options available to them and a supportive home situation? What responsibility does the teacher in charge of such programs have in guiding the way a particular student categorizes his or her experience and in directing or misdirecting the students' feelings about their talents?

I initially set out to be an “enabler,” with the intent of increasing the self-esteem of the participants in a group choral experience. During the program, I observed that the participants exhibited feelings of accomplishment through their work in the group, basked in the praise and applause they received, and sought to continue the experiences with me, at the institution, and elsewhere. I could have completed my evaluation at this point, noting an increased level of self-esteem among participants in the choir,

but I was compelled to consider whether and to what extent encouragement and praise given by me in the context of the choir served as an interference in the process of rehabilitation for some of the participants. Instead of thinking in terms of their G.E.D.s or further education that could secure what are considered "routine" careers, was I inadvertently encouraging them to reach for a "star" far beyond their grasp? Was I helping to set them up for future disappointments? Was this the reason Andre left the institution before finishing the program? Was this the reason he felt it necessary to convince me that he'd already found stardom? Why is it that Martha continues to call me to set up a time to have a piano lesson, even though she is back on the streets, moving from place to place, and has no access to a piano for practice?


The isolated and incomplete follow-up data on these two subjects, collected months after the end of the program, does little to supply answers to a disturbing question raised by the research: "How much did accomplishment in the choir interfere with the rehabilitation of the participants?" As a result of my work with this group, I feel obliged to raise the possibility that for an extreme population such as recovering homeless or runaway youth, a program such as this may present positive results (i.e., increased self-esteem, peak experiences) when evaluated within the limited context of the choir; but when evaluated within the broader context of rehabilitation, negative results may be noted.

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