



**San Francisco Bay Area Chapter**

**SPRING SYMPOSIUM**

**Foster City, California**

**April 15, 2007**

***The Effects of Childhood Sexual Abuse on the Adult Singing Voice:  
Implications for Voice Teachers***

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- 2:00-2:10 I. Overview of the Research (methodology etc.)
- 2:10-2:40 II. Adult Survivors of CSA: Review of the Psychology Literature  
A. Prevalence  
B. Likelihood of long-term effects  
C. Response to CSA: psychological, somatic, and memory  
D. Treatment and treatment philosophy
- 2:40-2:50 III. Exercises for Body/Voice Awareness (audience participation)
- 2:50-3:50 IV. CSA and Singing  
A. Themes from case studies  
B. Effects of CSA on specific components of singing  
C. Effects of singing on CSA sequelae
- 3:50-4:10 V. Break
- 4:10-4:35 VI. Considerations for Voice Teachers  
A. Touch and breathing  
B. Theoretical lesson scenarios  
C. Recommendations
- 4:35-5:00 VII. Discussion/Questions

Adjourn

## **ABSTRACT**

*This qualitative, holistic, post-factum, phenomenological reflection study explored the relationship between the adult singing voice and childhood sexual abuse (CSA) through case studies and a review of the literature in Vocal Pedagogy, Psychology, Speech-Language Pathology, and Music Therapy. Although a search of the literature yielded no reference to the effects of CSA on the adult singing voice, information in each discipline regarding separate components of CSA and/or singing was examined. From this information, effects of CSA on the singing voice were inferred. These inferences were compared to essential themes derived from case studies.*

*The research indicated that adult singers with a history of CSA could present symptoms associated with posttrauma that were directly counterproductive to singing. Furthermore, symptoms of both posttrauma and therapeutic treatments for posttrauma could be impacted by the act of singing. It was determined that to be prepared for the inherent potential each condition/activity carried to effect change in the other, professionals who teach (treat, coach, etc.) singers with a history of CSA would benefit by having the knowledge both of the mechanical/psycho-physical aspects of singing and of the dynamics of posttrauma response. Currently, singers seeking help must bridge multiple disciplines. However, professionals teaching/treating singers could promote optimal treatment strategies by supporting an interdisciplinary exchange of information regarding CSA and singing.<sup>1</sup>*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The successful completion of this research was due to the vision and support of my former voice teacher, mentor, and dissertation committee chair Dr. Janette Ogg, Professor of Music/Voice at Shenandoah Conservatory, Winchester, VA. In addition, I am especially grateful for the courageous generosity of the participants of the case studies. The heart of the research lies in their stories and I am honored to be instrumental in letting their voices be heard. This afternoon's presentation fulfills their requests to tell their stories to voice teachers and I am grateful to SFBACNATS' Executive Board for making this possible. Appreciation is extended to Sue Field, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President of Programs, for overseeing arrangements and to her husband and daughter for undertaking video responsibilities. The listed psychological support resources were recommended by Audrey Howitt, MS (counseling/psychotherapy) and our meeting space graciously provided by The Peninsula Jewish Community Center. I express additional thanks to our president for preparing the Power Point slides and organizing/completing numerous behind-the-scenes chores.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**

Grace Johnson holds degrees in Voice Performance (DMA Shenandoah Conservatory of Shenandoah University, 2004), Vocal Pedagogy/Performance (MM UNC-Greensboro, 1990), and Music (AB Coker College, 1972). Before her recent move to join her engineer husband in the Silicon Valley she was a Visiting Assistant Professor of Music/Voice at Guilford College, Greensboro, NC. She has spoken to numerous adult and teenage groups about CSA recovery. Under the auspices of North Carolina Family Services she served as a puppeteer for sexual abuse prevention programs. Currently she teaches Voice at The Gorin School of Music in Mountain View and PreK-8 General Music at St. Stephen's Episcopal School in San Jose.

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<sup>1</sup> Grace Weber Johnson, "The Effects of Childhood Sexual Abuse on the Adult Singing Voice" (DMA diss., Shenandoah Conservatory at Shenandoah University, 2004), iv.

## RELATIONSHIP OF CSA TO SINGING VOICE

### Components of Singing and Possible Effects of CSA Sequelae

SINGING	EFFECTS OF CSA SEQUELAE
Posture	Lessened awareness; Muscle tension; Problem with mirrors
Breathing	Tight abdomen; Asthma/PVCD
Phonation	Laryngeal tension; Neurological (?); Onset/release; GERD/bulimia
Resonance	Proprioception: Numbing/Lack of secondary vibrations
Classification	Possibly strong emotional reaction
Student/teacher relationship	Difficulty with trust
Performance demands	Inappropriate anxiety level; Epilepsy; Memory

### SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING BREATHING

Breath management required for singing presents a complex dilemma: (1) Abdominal involvement necessary for singing can be compromised by CSA sequelae; (2) The successful execution (of breath management) can either relieve or complicate the severity of CSA effects.

- In regard to the first: abdominal body armoring employed to protect the CSA survivor from psychological pain can impede the descent/contraction of the diaphragm during inhalation.
- In regard to the second: breath management necessary for successful singing carries the potential for a negative emotional/psychological reaction. The release of abdominal muscles can jeopardize the psychological protection provided by body armoring.

Furthermore, deep breathing is used as a therapeutic tool used for relaxation, but deep breathing used for relaxation is contraindicated for people with PTSD because it can increase anxiety and exacerbate symptoms of PTSD.<sup>2</sup> In addition, if deep breathing does relieve anxiety, a performer may be denied facilitative anxiety (excitement).<sup>3</sup> *Because of the complexities regarding breath management for singing, a CSA survivor may need multi-disciplined support while learning and practicing it.*

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<sup>2</sup> Babette Rothchild, *The Body Remembers: The Psychophysiology of Trauma and Trauma Treatment* (New York: Norton, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Mary Wolfe, "Correlates of Adaptive and Maladaptive Musical Performance Anxiety," *Medical Problems of Performing Artists* 4 (1989), 4; 49-56.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VOICE TEACHERS**

The following recommendations are gleaned from conversations with students, the case study participants, and voice teachers: First, do no harm. Second, proceed with confidence.

### ***First, Do No Harm.***

For CSA survivors, the dictum should read “do no more harm.” The vulnerability inherent to this population increases the risk of harm. To avoid potentially harmful situations teachers are advised to:

1. Bear witness
2. Be highly cautious with touch
3. Recognize the difference between a voice lesson and psychotherapy
4. Stay self-aware
5. Respect boundary issues
6. Honor confidentiality

### ***Second, Proceed with Confidence in the Healing Power of Singing.***

Avoiding harm as the only precept could be paralyzing for a teacher. Believing in the benefits of lessons, the teacher-student relationship, music, and singing can reassure a teacher that the process of learning to sing has value for healing. Highly important to a CSA survivor is the establishment of a safe and healthy environment. The acts of singing, studying with a supportive voice teacher, making music, and building a voice, all contribute to self-esteem and to healing. The teacher is in a privileged position to nurture, witness, and enjoy the growth of the voice and the singer.

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## **RESOURCES FOR HELP: SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA**

### ***Psychological Counseling and/or Crisis Intervention***

- Alameda County Behavioral Health (800) 491-9099
- Associated Counseling Services of San Leandro (510) 357-0550
- Berkeley Therapy Institute (510) 841-8484
- East Bay Counseling Choices Referral Service (510) 525-6678
- Victims of Crime Resource Center (800) 842-8467
- Suicide Prevention and Crisis (24 hr) (800) 309-2131
- Berkeley Women’s Health (510) 843-6194
- A Safe Place (24 hr) (510) 536-7233
- Therapy Network (510) 287-9225 [www.therapynetwork.net](http://www.therapynetwork.net)
- Psychotherapy Institute (510) 548-2250 [www.tpi-berkeley.org](http://www.tpi-berkeley.org)

***Web Pages Recommended in Briere and Scott (2006):***

- International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies [www.istss.org/resources/index.htm](http://www.istss.org/resources/index.htm)
- Office for Victims of Crime (U.S. Dept. of Justice) [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/help/welcome.html](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/help/welcome.html)
- David Baldwin's Trauma Pages [www.trauma-pages.com/pg4.htm](http://www.trauma-pages.com/pg4.htm)

***Singer-Friendly Voice Help:***

Krzysztof Izdebski, PhD.  
Founder/Chairman, Pacific Voice and Speech Foundation  
Author, *Emotions and the Human Voice* (Plural, 2007)  
(650) 723-5281 (Stanford University)  
(415) 476-2792 (UCSF)  
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**SUGGESTED READING**

Allen, John G. *Coping with Trauma: Hope Through Understanding*, 2d ed. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 2005.

Briere, John and Catherine Scott. *Principles of Trauma Therapy: A Guide to Symptoms, Evaluation, and Treatment*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 2006.

Bunch, Meribeth. *Dynamics of the Singing Voice*, 3d ed. New York: Springer-Verlag, 1995.

Chapman, Janice L. *Singing and Teaching Singing: A Holistic Approach to Classical Voice*. San Diego: Plural, 2006.

Doscher, Barbara. *The Functional Unity of the Singing Voice*, 2d ed. Latham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 1994.

Goodwin, Jean and Reina Attias, eds. *Splintered Reflections: The Body in Trauma*. New York: Basic Books, 1999.

Herman, Judith L. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books, 1992.

Johnson, Grace Weber. *The Effects of Childhood Sexual Abuse on the Adult Singing Voice*. DMA diss., Shenandoah Conservatory, 2004. (To access, see below.)

PILOTS [www.ncptsd.org](http://www.ncptsd.org) (Database of peer-edited scientific articles regarding trauma.)

Rosen, Deborah C. and Robert T. Sataloff. *Psychology of Voice Disorders*. San Diego: Singular, 1997.

Rothchild, Babette. *The Body Remembers: The Psychophysiology of Trauma and Trauma Treatment*. New York: Norton, 2002.

Ristad, Eloise. *A Soprano on Her Head: Right-side-up Reflections on Life and Other Performances*. Moab, Utah: Real People Press, 1982.

Wormhoudt, Pearl. *With a Song in My Psyche: On the Psychology of Singing and Teaching Singing*. USA: Xlibris, 2001.

***To Obtain a Copy of the Research:***

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