The Voice in a Broad Context

A Review and Commentary on *Anatomy of Voice: How to Enhance and Project Your Best Voice* by Blandine Calais-Germain and François Germain

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With this brief article, I'd like to speak from my decades of experience as a professional singer and a voice trainer working with professional singers. My narrow topic is a review and commentary on the book *Anatomy of Voice: How to Enhance and Project Your Best Voice* by Blandine Calais-Germain and François Germain (Healing Arts Press 2013), and my broader topic is what can be gleaned from a book about voice versus what generally can only be learned through one-on-one work with a voice expert. This we can call the difference between knowing-what versus knowing-how.

On the back cover, it is suggested that this book is for singers, teachers, actors, lawyers, politicians, or workshop leaders, offering that "this book reveals how understanding your vocal anatomy enables you to express your best voice." I am sure that this is true to a degree, and I would agree that it should be inspiring for the serious voice student, voice educator, or professionals who use their voice in their work, with its numerous drawings of individuals using their voice in various postures and real situations.

It is quite comprehensive in its scope, a gold mine for an experienced singer but more especially for voice educators. The book is well organized with a tremendous overview of the physiology of voice production and beautiful anatomy pictures. It is organized in a very intelligent way, starting with the vocal apparatus, and then looks at the skeleton. It introduces what are known as the 'generators' of voice, the larynx, the vocal tract, and finally specific language used in the vocal education professions. From the very beginning, it is an education in itself about the body and structure and voice production.

Now to my first caveat. A singer myself, and someone who has worked over three decades with professional singers, I am always left scratching my head when I hear it announced that there is no actual vocal apparatus. This book states that the voice is an event that cannot be broken down and that it is the entire body and more that makes up our voice. Although I have no contradiction with this statement, that we use our entire body when speaking and singing, I must insist that there is a vocal apparatus and a human expression

system. Yes, our organism is a complex, adaptive system and follows the laws of nonlinear reality (just as Dr. Rolf taught us with the hypothesis of the phase shift or state change that occurs when energy is added to fascia and gel transforms to sol, and so on).

Our human organism follows the principles of nonlinear reality which means that there is an *unpredictability* within the interaction of systems. So, even though my tongue has other functions, it is still part of my vocal apparatus, and has evolved to allow complex and highly nuanced communication that has allowed us to ultimately build society and culture. Our highly complex system of the ear (vestibular and cochlear system) has multiple functions, yet we would never say that it is not a discrete system for hearing and, one step higher, listening (as well as kinesthesia and balance, cortical recharge, vocalization control, and so on).

My other caveat is less a critique than the comment – again from my professional experience as a singer, therapist for singers, and voice trainer – that any book such as this one is limited in how far it can take a serious student of voice. This is because a book is unable to demonstrate the difference in the speech function in the front of the mouth that must be kept independent from the vibratory event that happens in the pharynx (vocal tract), between larynx and spinal column (and that is the primary way that we 'feel' our own voice, ten times faster than air conduction of sound). If you put these two functions together because of acquired family habits or based on a regionalism, accident or injury, unresolved systemic trauma, or just plain misinformed training of which there is a lot, you can miss the exponential event that happens when these two apparently separate functions transform into one event (that is greater than the sum of the two systems). This type of learning occurs with an experienced voice teacher or trainer who can help you get there.

There are other elements of vocal work that generally can only be learned in a one-to-one relationship. The natural voice is often inhibited in the process of socialization when we are children, so for most singers who are serious about uncovering and utilizing their natural voice, therapeutic or somatic training work is generally needed, whether with an experienced vocal trainer or teacher, Tomatis® practitioner (I am certified), incredible Rolfer, or any intervention that can renormalize the body/psyche and help reverse holding patterns of tension (that is actually acquired fear) that are absorbed unconsciously.

Considering another type of inhibition, it is interesting that Calais-Germaine is both a dancer and physical therapist. I have found in working with professional dancers that there can *sometimes* be a split between their movement function and their voice (Gene Kelly had a serious glottal fry). The voice function often must be integrated with someone capable of doing this, who can help the singer to use his/her respiratory/pharyngeal/bucal space function in a more effective, relaxed, and precise manner.

Learning that singing demands the least amount of breath is not easy in the early stages of vocal training, since we are often used to overexerting when we begin to sing, especially in front of others. This use of force (a panic/anxiety state that I can measure using the EEG) in the vocal process reduces the full range of the voice exponentially and limits its range and full spectrum of possibilities and unique beauty. This level of understanding cannot be transmitted in a book, given what we now know about learning and mirror neurons. Kinesthetic learning is primarily about learning person to person. In other words, it wasn't what Dr. Rolf, or our instructor, said about Rolfing® Structural Integration so much as it was *how they were* and what they *did* while doing Rolfing SI that really counted in our learning development as Rolfers.

This book will remain in my voice education library and is useful to me because I already learned the effective and necessary fine motor skills and somatic reflexes for singing via teacher-to-student transmission, and the anatomy alone is helpful in clarifying what motor/muscle skills are needed by those I am passing on my experience as a singer to. For Rolfers (and others) who lack voice training but are interested in furthering their knowledge of the anatomy and neurophysiology of the human vocal system, I highly recommend this book as a first step.

David Delaney was certified in 1985 as a Rolfer, having the sole purpose of working with singers, most of that time in New York City working with Broadway actors. He is also trained in many other approaches that support singers to find that voice that Nature intended for them (contemplative exercise physiology, Tomatis® audio-vocal training, *NeurOptimal® neurofeedback for performance anxiety reduction, tai chi chuan, meditation, bio-neuro-psychology, Chua Ka® bodywork, craniosacral work, etc). He was student, apprentice, and collaborator to Metropolitan Opera singer and Broadway voice teacher Margaret Laughlin Riddleberger, who taught actors the physiological tradition of the singing voice approach that was passed on in the Bel Canto tradition from Italy. For two decades, David worked with all her students both in New York City and Silver Spring, Maryland to help them achieve intrinsic body freedom, elasticity, and unification that is the basis of singing with the least amount of breath, the least amount of tension in the throat, achieving maximum resonance, what he calls an 'intrinsic' or 'nonlinear voice'. David holds a master's degree in counseling psychology and has focused on the area of somato-emotional trauma resolution since 1985. His upcoming book* Intrinsic Singing Voice: The Being of Singing *will integrate all he has discovered in forty-five years as a singer and somatic voice trainer related to singing voice physiology and neuropsychology in a fun and fascinating read.*