

Songshine

Gaining Vocal Strength through the Power of Music

Songshine is designed for persons with Parkinson's disease, those who have suffered a stroke, other neurological disorders or aging voices. Its purpose is to strengthen the speaking voice through vocal exercises called vocalise (pronounced vōh-kahl-eeze). Because singing and speaking originate from different parts of the brain, switching from the 'speaking' mode (left side of brain) to the 'singing' mode (right side of brain) can retrain or strengthen a person's speech mechanism weakened through loss of use or disease. When the brain no longer sends strong signals for healthy speech, singing allows the student to 'switch channels'. As the student learns to sing correctly through the use of vocalise a retraining process begins in the brain.

Because vocal exercises (vocalise) are a proven tool, having been used over several centuries by professional singers for the development of a healthy voice, *Songshine* classes focus primarily on the use of those exercises to gain or restore strength and control of the voice.

Vocal exercises help to develop pleasing tone quality, increase vocal range, give agility and stamina to the voice, facilitate excellent diction and strengthen the soft palate. Vocal exercises designed to improve breath management can increase previously underused lung capacity and, as a consequence, increase respiratory function. All of these exercises are beneficial to those who are dealing with Parkinson's, stroke, other neurological disorders or aging voices.

In addition to vocal exercises for strengthening the voice, *Songshine* classes include group singing of familiar songs. This provides an enjoyable way to utilize and reinforce techniques practiced during class. At the end of 20-25 class sessions an optional event, a 'celebration concert', is held for participants' family and friends. The concert allows students to individually and collectively demonstrate their progress and share the enjoyment of accomplishment.

Dr. Oliver Sachs, America's leading neurologist in studies dealing with the relationship between music and the brain, states that the effect on people suffering from such diseases as Tourette's syndrome, Parkinson's, autism, stroke and Alzheimer's is significant. "Even with advanced dementia, when powers of memory and language are lost, people will respond to music." ¹

One *Songshine* student, whose voice was barely audible due to Parkinson's, has followed a regular regimen of vocalizing. As a result he has regained his speaking voice, is able to talk on the phone and can converse with others at length.² Some students discover they can 'sing' information to their spouse, caregiver, doctor, etc. and be understood, thus utilizing the undamaged channel of the brain.

Music is powerful. *Songshine* taps into that power for the purpose of strengthening the speaking voice, encouraging individuals to learn and grow in a group setting and promote healing through the creative art of music.

Dr. Ruthanna Metzgar
Doctor of Musical Arts in Voice
Director and Founder of Songshine

¹ "Healing Power of Music Explored" by Karen Matthews, *The Pantagraph*, pg G4, Sunday, June 1, 2008, Bloomington, Illinois. As quoted from *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain* by Dr. Oliver Sachs (no page reference given),

² Mr. Harry Hulson: "Before taking Songshine classes my voice was so soft I could barely hear myself". Songshine student 2006-2009. Harry is now able to talk on the phone, carry on conversations with people for extended times and resume activities that require the use of his voice. Harry has also made an excellent solo CD and has sung in Karaoke settings. He made his solo singing debut with the *Songshine Singers* on Feb. 14, 2008 at the Annenberg Theater in Rancho Mirage California. Prior to developing Parkinson's Mr. Hulson was an Accountant. After Songshine, music became a new passion.