

Online quarterly Magazine about singing – Year 1, VOL. 4 – Spring 2022

VOLUME IV

SIING

MAGAZINE



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Interview with one of the best
drum circle facilitator and musician

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CIRCULAR MUSIC



Stefano Baroni,
Musician and Circular
Music Facilitator

A large group of people, including children and adults, are sitting in a circle on colorful plastic chairs. They are engaged in a musical activity, with some playing drums and others singing. The scene is set outdoors in front of a building with a brick wall and a window. The overall atmosphere is one of community and shared music-making.

**“Sing what you play,
Play what you sing”**

Mary Knysh, a life in the circle

Musicians are not just performers. There is a category of musicians who are also music advocates and learning facilitators, helping people to reconnect with their inner musicality and using music to develop human potential, to create skills and strategies for life, human connections, personal and group awareness.

They work in different fields, from community building to socially disadvantaged people, from education to team building, from health and wellness programs to corporate trainings.

Some of them use drums and facilitate drum circles, some are singers and facilitate singing circles, some other use any kind of instruments. Rarely there are musicians using all these tools together. This is an interview to one of them who changed my vision of improvising, of being a facilitator and doing music together in circle.

July 2018, Barcelona, 1300 km from my home town in Italy to meet one of the best drum circle facilitator and music advocate in the world, **Mary Knysh**. She was leading a workshop called “*Drum Circle Extended*”, not only drums but also voice, bodymusic and any kind of musical instrument. I didn’t know yet but that experience was going to be one of the most exciting turning points in my life, the missing link among all the musical experiences I did in my life. From that moment, Mary has been a mentor and great friend and I’m really happy to have the possibility to interview her.

Hi Mary, thank you for accepting my invitation. You’re a wonderful musician, facilitator, you travel the world bringing music and joy to lot of people, please introduce yourself, tell us something about your story: how did you start your journey in this music world; which were the transition points that brought you to be who are you today?

I am so happy to have the opportunity to share my story. I believe that human beings are born into song and music. I can remember as a young child, swinging on my swingset in the backyard of my home in Corning, New York, and making up songs about the trees, the yard, my friends, and my family. Many years later I learned that the Australian Aborigines have a belief that the world was sung into being. I thought to myself, yes, that has been my experience too, life is a song and music brings light into the darkness and joy into our hearts.

Since my earliest memories, I have been creating music, both in song and on many different instruments. The recorder was my very first instrument and I am fairly certain I drove my brothers and sister crazy as I was learning to play it. My dad played the mandolin and



I have such wonderful memories of him playing around the campfire at night and singing along with him. I remember being very anxious as a child and that anxiety disappeared when I was engaged in music-making. Music has always brought me great joy. I believe this is why I am so passionate about sharing easy, fun, and engaging pathways for people of all ages to discover the musical genius that lives within them.

During my early teaching career, I studied Orff Schulwerk and was very excited with his philosophy and pedagogy that features improvisation as a foundation for learning music. And then, while attending an Orff conference in Colorado, I met Paul Winter. From my connection with Paul Winter, I discovered the cellist David Darling and

the Music for People organization. I spent three days in a recording studio up in Connecticut with David and my percussionist friend and bandmate, Jonathan Edwards recording a completely improvised album. I discovered a joy in the transformative power of authentic musical expression that blew me away. I was that same bliss that I experienced as a young child making up songs in the backyard. I felt I had “come home” to a community and a way of discovering the music of my soul. I have been with the Music for People organization ever since.

During the early years of training to become a MfP facilitator, I met Arthur Hull at a community drum circle at Berklee College of Music in Boston, MA. I was so enamored with Arthur’s facilitation style and his approach that I took several workshops with him and spent a good deal of time studying world percussion and instrumental styles.

Over the years I have embraced many inspiring philosophies and approaches that have been the foundation of my creative work. My life has been a fascinating musical journey and in my work these days one can experience the influences of David Darling and Music for People, Arthur Hull and his Village Music Circles organization, Carl Orff and Orff Schulwerk, and NIA and the 5 Rhythms movement practices.

What’s the role of voice in your life, what does it represent for you?

It is sadly disheartening to discover how many people are terrified of singing. Somewhere along the way in their lives they were told that they were unmusical and they believed this and stopped sharing their song. This breaks my heart. One of the first things we say to people at Music for People is “there are no wrong notes” meaning all notes can live together in the universe just like

all kinds of people do. Some live close together, creating some tension at times, and others live far apart, but regardless of what the notes are, they can be expressed and explored in the easiest manner through “One Quality Sound”. When I lead the One Quality Sound activity I invite people to sweep their arms up in front of their bodies as they breathe in and on the out-breath they sound a single note and hold it for the duration of the out-breath. It is important to have people release their sound at the exact same moment so they do not





adjust to the notes around them. It is absolutely stunning to experience what happens in a group when everyone does this at once! The single sounds of each person in the group join to create a glorious symphony of sound that resonates through the body! Each breath is different and each community composition is fresh and new. The next step in this activity is to invite four people to do the One Quality Sound activity at a time and the community gets to experience simple and stunning chords that are composed in the moment, without planning or thought, they are emergent. It is often through this simple, yet profound, activity of vocal sounding that people have breakthroughs and realize that their voice matters and is unique and beautiful in it's own way.

Our voice is the most natural music maker and it is a genius! Our brains and our bodies are hard-wired for music-making and our voice is the beginning of all sound. Over the years I have witnessed people rediscovering their voices in the easiest and most natural ways possible. The magical moments of musical discovery for people almost always have to do with the human voice. Our voice is our gift to the world and our song is completely unique to who we are. I encourage people to share their song as it makes our world a better place for everyone!

When we met in Barcelona I totally felt in love with you for your way of facilitating and for your presence in the circle; it wasn't just drum circle, just circlesing or bodymusic but something really new for me, an experience in which these three ingredients were together for the first time in my life in the same recipe, "Drum Circle Extended".

What's the role of voice in your "extended" drum circles?

The most remarkable moments in the extended drum circle experience are when the facilitator invites people to sing as they are playing their instruments (either by singing what they are playing or by creating their own song) and then stop cuts to the vocal song. All of the sudden, the community is transported to the magical experience of vocal vibration, and the energy in the community completely shifts. It feels like heaven appears in sound at our doorstep. These magical musical moments live on long after the sound has disappeared. Music is healing and I feel that our voice is the natural healer within each one of us. I studied with Don Campbell many years ago and he shared his ideas about the transformative power of vocal toning. He said something I will always remember. He said disease was the "disease" or discomfort of one's own inner vibrational world with a vibrational world outside that is often resonating at a

different frequency. Campbell's philosophy was that vocal toning could restore the balance between what resonates within us and outside of us and could help us to create coherency between the two worlds. I believe that drumming creates a rhythmic and heart-centered coherency and when we add the human voice to the drum circle it adds the possibility of soul coherency. Our voice is our most powerful tool for healing ourselves and others through sound.

“Sing what you play, play what you sing” is one of the golden rules in “Music for People”; what’s the role of the voice in this way of making music, improvising and facilitating?

As a multi-instrumentalist and vocalist, I was delighted to embrace David Darling's *“Sing What You Play and Play What You Sing”*. I share this concept as the ultimate loop of creativity, we can become inspired by and bring sounds and vibrations that live around us into our voice, where they become internalized in our bodies. The outer world of sound possibilities fill us with new textures, timbres, and sound ideas which greatly expand our musical vocabulary. Then when we move the vocal song that we created to any instrument (drum, strings, woodwinds, etc), it takes on an extraordinary new life! In over 30 years of music improvisation in performances, workshops and trainings, I never cease to be amazed and inspired by this simple process.

Thank you my friend, we see you in the next circle



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