



Playshop Trauma and the nervous system: This is where the music plays!"

Part 1: VaguSingers Jakob Ruster

VaguSingers, a body-oriented practice combining voice, singing and elemental music with approaches from SE and Zapchen Somatics, a Tibetan-influenced body-oriented practice by Julie Henderson.

The basic idea of *VaguSingers* is simple: Long before we speak, we communicate and co-regulate through sound, rhythm and movement. Voice and body are our first instruments. And – many mammals use them - like Singers - for regulation, too, like yawning and stretching. In *VaguSingers*, we explore this primal musicality through five key themes:

1. **Experiencing Voice & Music Playfully:** We use humming, yawning, singing, breath, and movement and from there rhythm, vocal games and body percussion, this as a “bottom-up” musicality that supports vitality, connection, and resonance.
2. **Nervous System States & Regulation:** We observe arousal and calmness, linking them to co-regulation, titration, and pendulation.
3. **Proto-Conversations & Early Musicality:** We explore voice as very early nonverbal and musical communication - ‘language before language’, supporting co-regulation between infant and caregiver in a musical way
4. We recognize voice as nonverbal communication in therapy sessions
5. We experience voice as a potential playful doorway to connection and spirituality.

A few important pointers for the practice: Everything is an invitation, make sounds and movements exactly as they feel right for you now. Your sounds are welcome just as they are. There is nothing to do “right”. If you don’t want to make sounds, that’s fine. If something feels uncomfortable or you have a different idea, adapt it or leave it out.

Short warm-up

- Greet the persons next to you – appreciate trying something new and get moving later while sitting close together. Look around for orientation. Notice your breath and body weight. Feel your feet on the floor. Move toes and heels. How do you perceive this? Notice your sit bones on the chair.
- Let your body move if it wants, starting from your feet, small or larger movements, stretch out, with breath and voice if you like. You can sigh, hum, yawn. What do you need right now?
- Shake out your arms / and legs / maybe gently shake your head. You can stroke or pat your body.
- Breathe in with ‘F’. Breathe out with ‘BB’, with or without sound. expansion and contraction. If helpful, use one hand by your mouth to support the Exhale.
- Pluck a high “U” note gently with your arm up like a grape, bring it to your middle range (hand middle) and drop it as a low note (hand down)

One Breath Songs (OBS): Simple random sounds, sighs, humming, noises on just one exhale, no matter how long, and following given cues. The Cues at the conference in Prague: A neutral Humming, your favourite dessert humming, sunrise, a 4-lane motorway, forest floor, a nice encounter at the Conference, the floor supports us. > *Additional Information for OBS see below* >

Visit to Sing-Song-Land and Singsongesian fantasy language. Greetings in fantasy language as a funny (welcome) game in groups: In my imaginary Singsongesian village, the elders greet with “Smekaanja” <all together>, young people say “Otscholala”. I am Curious, what imaginary Singsongesian greetings do you know? Let’s hear a few examples of them.



Dance of Connection, a core VaguSingers game in short form.

Inspired by Peter Levines exercise affirmative statement, today relating to our left arms: *'This is my arm, with its bones and joints, skin, muscles, veins, tendons and fascia. The arm is a part of me, and its parts are connected to one another'*. We set these words to sound and movement. Starting with your fingers, move your left arm through its joints, then fingers and hand, with elbow and shoulder, and all the joints of the arm together. Vocalise the phrase of connection as you move. How is your arm? Does it want to rest, or dance? Express through sound. Then involve another part of your body to sounds and movements....

"One Breath Songs" (OBS) additional Information

I know OBS from "Interplay", see Appendix. In VaguSingers practice, we vary OBS by incorporating emotions, sensory impressions, resources, states of the nervous system (arousal) and SIBAM elements from SE. The keywords or sequence of keywords can serve various purposes, such as having fun together, exploring resources through sound, or experiencing a pendulation between excitement and calm. By using appropriate keywords and sequences, we can address a wide variety of states.

What is important here is the experience of the voice with physical resonance, a playful approach without the need to do anything 'right', and the experience of togetherness within the group. However, OBS can also be implemented in a one-to-one setting. Pauses and integration phases are equally central. A key idea is that the participants in a group provide the keywords themselves. Why not start with a simple humming exercise, for example!

Examples of OBS keywords:

- Neutral, sensory impressions and physical sensations: A neutral "Aah" as if at the doctor's, standing firmly on the ground, I'm in a good spot, favourite dessert, humming neutrally, sceptically and curiously, the smooth/rough texture of a sensory experience
- Images: Relationship: A mother cat caring for her kitten, You receive help ("rest, I'll do the washing up"), or whilst hiking, a friend brings a cool drink at the mountain hut
- Nature and elements: Forest floor, sandy beach, waterfall, rainbow, sound of the sea, sunrise, sunset, campfire, rain, damp forest floor, hot sand, cool wind
- Resources: Which encounter did you find uplifting? What sparked your curiosity? What is a good place for you? Spontaneous joy over food, a gift, a surprise, or a favour received.
- Emotions, like the List of basic Emotions
- Brief pendulation with OBS. E.g. vowel > yawning, growling, ranting, whining > back to vowel or pendulation between expansion and contraction, spaciousness and constriction

*An example of **pendulation within a single sound**: The Voo sound with Peter Levine (ERGOS Experiential Exercise No. 1). The topic was Corona, Fight, Flight, Freeze: Peter Levine demonstrates (approx. min. 6:30) the Wu tone with healthy boundaries "Wu-arghh-uu" accompanied by arm movements. In a single breath, he repeatedly lands on the "U" at the end of the tone, thus "swinging" back and forth within a single tone. Source:*

<https://player.vimeo.com/video/408629671?wmode=opaque> or <https://www.somaticexperiencing.com/experiential>

Do you have any questions? Would you like to receive more new tracks and videos from VaguSingers? If so, just drop me a line at info@singaz.de and feel free to subscribe to the newsletter.

Enjoy, Jakob Ruster



Appendix 1: “One Breath Songs” in Interplay

I know “One Breath Songs” from “Interplay” as a creative musical warm-up exercise for the voice. In “Interplay”, I learnt the sequence as follows, with one cue for each exhalation:

- A sigh
- A single note (any vowel) or alternating vowels
- Note moving up and down in pitch (glissando)
- Vary volume and dynamics
- Consonants only
- All previous elements together (the final OBS) three times
- End again with a sigh
- Possible additions: fake songs in styles such as opera, pop, campfire songs, rock songs

Source: “One Breath Songs” from “Interplay”, see here, amongst other places:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeV_DqKGHIo&t=590s

<https://interplay.org/>

<https://www.facebook.com/InterPlaySEMichigan/videos/this-if-for-people-to-play-along-with-yay-interplay/1248047420874604/>

Appendix 2: Selected Literature and Media

Zapchen:

Books:

- **Julie Henderson: *Embodying Well-Being* / „The Hum Book“**
>> ENGLISH E-Books: <https://ajz-verlag.de/en>
>> ENGLISH/GERMAN Books: <https://www.neuebuchhandlung.de/> (write a mail) or <https://rieger-verlag.eshop.t-online.de/c/die-buecher-von-julie-henderson>
- **Cornelia Hammer, German books** Carl-Auer Verlag: „*Im Körper zuhause sein, Mit Zapchen Somatics zu Leichtigkeit und Wohlbefinden*“ und „*Mit Zapchen durch das Jahr*“:
<https://www.carl-auer.de/autoren/cornelia-hammer>

Online - Links and Media:

- Basics-German: <https://www.carl-auer.de/magazin/zapchen-basics>
- Zapchen Somatics – German introduction – Online Auditorium Cornelia Hammer
<https://www.auditorium-netzwerk.de/ar/zapchen-somatics-eine-einfuehrung-cornelia-hammer-100032065>
- Video- Zapchen - German introduction Jens Frick
<https://youtube.com/@zapchensomaticsinstitutgraz?si=4TCUnuU1v9poD8k4>

Zapchen Deutschland: <https://www.zapchen.de/>

Zapchen International: <https://www.zapchen.com/wp/>

Cornelia Hammer Zapchen Kassel <https://www.zapchen-kassel.com/> <https://www.cornelia-hammer.com/>



Trauma, Music and Voice

Licia Sky: Video „Coming to Your Senses“ (Video Nr. 5: Voice and Vibration is a good introduction to the topic of humming and the voice), TRF (Trauma Research Foundation, Online Series TRF Tuesday

<https://traumaresearchfoundation.org/coming-to-your-senses-with-licia-sky-collection/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m-2-7fG-vv8&t=4s>

Selected Articles on SE and music therapy

- Sound Decisions: A Theoretically Informed Process Model of Somatic Experiencing for the Integration of Clinical Music Therapy Welch, Jennifer Lee, 2022, Publisher University of Kansas
<https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/entities/publication/67bf752b-80d0-4d2f-acc2-6f5bec86e06a>
<https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/9058fc9e-bb73-439c-9fd8-983ae774718c/content>
- Music Therapy, Neurology, and Somatosensory-Informed Trauma Treatment, Kristen Stewart, kristen.stewart@va.gov, VA – Hudson Valley Healthcare System, Montrose, New York, United States, Music Therapy Today WFMT online journal Volume 15, No. 1
https://issuu.com/presidentwfmt/docs/mt_today_2019
- Polyvagal Theory in Trauma-Informed Music Therapy Practice - Erin Fox
Music Therapy Perspectives, Volume 43, Issue 1, Spring 2025, miaf001,
<https://doi.org/10.1093/mtp/miaf001>
<https://academic.oup.com/mtp/article-abstract/43/1/miaf001/8083041?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

Atem-Tonus-Ton

- Courses, trainers, seminars: <https://www.atem-tonus-ton.com/>
- Book German: **Maria Höller-Zangenfeind:** „*Stimme von Fuß bis Kopf. Ein Lehr- und Arbeitsbuch für Atmung und Stimme nach der Methode Atem-Tonus-Ton*“

Babies, Children, Proto-Conversation

Important Book: Communicative Musicality -Exploring the Basis of Human Companionship, Stephen Malloch and Colwyn Trevarthen 2009

Colwyn Trevarthen – A brief overview of links and information:

<https://perspectives.waimh.org/2024/09/13/professor-colwyn-trevarthen-1931-2024/>

Videos on child communication:

- Adorable moment of father and toddler having conversation
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yn8j4XRxSck&list=LL>
- Newborn Baby Mimics Dad's Voice and Makes Him Giggle
<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/FL1LUiqNITo>
- Twin Baby Talk, Meta (on the fridge) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHcXWNyxeTg>
- Creative communication through the singing voice vocal dialogue, Prof. Elisa Läubin, German
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Txe-Sigl3S0&t=346s>