

## NATURAL VOICE TRAINING with THE *FELDENKRAIS METHOD*®

by RICHARD CORBEIL

Human vocal production is a phenomenon that requires the development of complex integration skills in ourselves, with elaborate features that have contributed to our evolution and distinct status of human beings. Our voice, which gave birth to language, expresses the different qualities of relationship between ourselves and our physical and cultural environment. It also serves as a tool to assert our status and rights within our social order. To fulfill those needs, we must develop a clear image of the physical movements necessary to produce the intended sounds, to organize these movements in space and coordinate their timing.

When we pursue our ability to better understand these sensory-motor processes and study how to use them more effectively, voice production becomes an art. Perhaps it is because of this tradition as an art form that most vocal trainings focus on mastering the technical demands of a specific style, as defined by the cultural opinion and ideas of a given time.

As a voice teacher, I became quite dissatisfied with the constraints of this goal oriented process. I started looking for alternative approaches to voice training that would be free of any preconceived ideas of style, relevant to both speaking and singing and pliable to any vocal tradition.

Where most voice trainings typically rely on artificial exercises and vocal gymnastics that have little to do with the natural development of our voice, The *Feldenkrais Method*® inspired me to put together numerous sensory-motor lessons that playfully imitate and amplify the organic processes by which we formed our voice, stimulating vocal evolution to its full maturation.

I usually start with the student lying down and through the through the gentle movement guidance of *Functional Integration*® begin to free the breathing processes from the unnecessary tension often experienced when standing and talking. The breath then takes a particular quality, unique and different for each person, with the kind of speed and pressure that is just right for the reorganization of the vocal apparatus. Take for example the original babbling that differentiates the lips (“p” or “b”) or throat (“k” or “g”). Notice that it implies a total stop and restart of the exhalation.

Very few people realize that they can achieve this simply by the closing and opening of the lips or throat, without using the jaw or regulating the airflow by overworking all the muscles of the torso. The human larynx is very sensitive to any effort involved, and will most likely respond by closing, limiting sound, resonance and vocal agility. Making sure that the breath adapts smoothly to the closing and opening of the lips or throat while the jaw remains free will improve the quality of the breathing and the functioning of the voice. Those changes can then be transposed to sitting and standing and extended to speaking and singing. There's an infinite number of sound-creating movements to explore in an endless number of ways to free one's entire voice.

This approach assures vocal flexibility and choice rather than the rigid application of rules and vocal techniques. Each sound, phoneme or melodic line can be purified, filtered from the tension, overwork, or pre established idea of what is "right" or "wrong", leaving only a unique, living body making sounds in the simplest, healthiest and most efficient way it finds.

This voice training, based on The *Feldenkrais Method*®, which I call **Natural Voice Training**, provides a healthy foundation for extensive speaking and singing. It opens abundant resources for vocal rehabilitation, while paradoxically, the accent is on the person, not the voice.