

TESTIMONIALS

What was enjoyed most about the course

- ✓ Enjoyed it all but was inspired by Allan's workshops and the gospel sessions
- ✓ Gospel singing, the concert, Miranda's musicianship. I've done three workshops with Allan now. It's all started to go in, starting to click, room for plenty more. The vocal science and gospel singing worked beautifully together.
- ✓ Variety. Challenge provided in musicianship. Information about subject area (Allan/Kathy). Allan's presentations/workshops and links between Allan's and Ken's workshops.
- ✓ Probably Miranda's musicianship group – just the right level of challenge and a huge depth of knowledge.
- ✓ Practical – gospel singing with real feeling. Explanation of the vocal qualities in a non-threatening way – and getting us to do it and change the sound. Putting it all together – musicianship/Alexander/vocal really worked.
- ✓ Everything! Amazing tutors, fantastic to see different specialists and to work on all elements of my vocal practice.
- ✓ I enjoyed all of the course, different bits for different reasons. What stood out for me was our sessions with Ken and gospel singing, such fun – closely followed by Allan where I learned so much new information and practical skills and singing tips.
- ✓ What a wonderful weekend! This course is the best thing I have done in years. A fantastic program that was both challenging at times and completely inspiring. I think the success of it is down to the calibre of tutors that we had. Allan was a complete genius. I studied Singing at the Royal Academy 30 years ago and he completely turned on its head some of the teaching I received there. The great thing for me was that he clarified so much of what I had later discovered for myself as a performer and teacher.
 - David's class was challenging but he's so encouraging even when you get things wrong. Really enjoyed the 4-part harmony singing we did.
 - I found the Alexander Technique especially helpful. It's not something I've ever done before but was a vital part of the day I think and really tied in with what we did with Allan.
 - Ken was fantastic and I especially loved it when he taught us without music. He's such a charismatic teacher and it was a real privilege to hear his choir on Saturday. So, by Saturday night I felt completely satisfied and wondered what more there was to gain from another day..... Sunday seemed to go up another level again! What Allan covered in the morning made me completely confident to really let go and sing with Ken. That was the beauty of the weekend I think. Everything seemed to link together and there wasn't one weak moment.
 - We were so looked after by Sarah, Ben and Henrie. Lovely lunch. Probably ate too many biscuits though! It was a really nice venue. Very easy for me to get to from Hertfordshire. Premier Inn was fine. I liked being within walking distance of the school.
 - Met such lovely people who I felt I had loads in common with. We were all there for the joy of learning.

- I skipped into school on Monday morning. It was just the sort of boost I needed.
- A completely inspirational weekend!
- ✓ The tailoring of the musicianship sessions to the level of the participants. I was very nervous about being not very musical and just a basic choir singer. It was so nice to be in a small group with such a lovely tutor in Liz.
- ✓ Probably Allan's sessions because it appealed to my analytical/scientific way of thinking. The Kodály/musicianship because it was my first proper introduction to that.
- ✓ All the activities were appropriate, interesting and provided a great deal of information, just the right amount and nicely pitched (for me anyway).
 - Session lengths were adequate and tight...Session breaks were perfect and allowed for catching up, asking questions and chatting...
 - Warm-up and technical background – engaging, educational and practical, the change in voice delivery was palpable. I've already tried some of the warm-up techniques in the classroom; the instant clarity of sound – it's like magic!
 - Musicianship – well-pitched and delivered.
 - Alexander Technique – sat nicely (excuse the pun) with improving vocal delivery and sound technique awareness from the other sessions.
 - Gospel – introducing a different way of using the voice gave us the opportunity to practise all three earlier sessions, voice control, body awareness and solfa. It's good to be encouraged to use solfa, with the caveat that if it's not helping you, don't.
 - There was a good basic grounding in the genre and I felt confident of where to go and seek out more information, when I was ready. I will be singing gospel in the classroom with the children now.
 - Links between sessions were strong and overlapped in the connectionist way that makes you understand on a number of layers, better for long term memory. All sessions covered some form of vocal mechanics.
 - Primary was touched on and this was helpful for me as a teacher.

Suggestions for the future

- Have them more often...this would be even better if it was regular.
- Just more of them!
- Singing for mental health (and Alexander technique to reduce tension from stress/anxiety). Singing voice/breathing technique/resonance – application to woodwind/brass playing.
- **There isn't one thing I would want to change about this weekend. I just want to know when the next one is!** I would love to book an individual lesson with Allan next time.

- Even though there was a lot of information, I didn't feel overwhelmed. Still a follow up weekend in a few months would give time to digest it all.

General comments

- Incorporating these elements was the perfect recipe for The Holistic Voice. Thank you!
- I had no idea a technical-sounding weekend would result in profound joy and wonder, physical healing and the odd tear. Thank you for an inspirational weekend. More more more!!!
- A lovely course from The Phoenix Collective. Great opportunity to learn and grow in a positive and supportive environment.
- A truly holistic approach to singing, music and the whole body! I've been sitting on my sit bones all afternoon. Can't wait to take so many inspiring ideas and good practice into my classroom.
- I sing in a drop-in Community Choir and have come to musicianship later in my life. This weekend has taught me new skills, taken me out of my comfort zone and all in such a fun way. Thank you Cyrilla and team!

From e-mails

- ...I put the new ideas into practice this week with astounding results!
- ...I'd like to say what a stunning job you did pulling off such a great feat! An amazing CPD event covering a truly 'holistic' approach to how we think of using the voice.
- ...Thank you once again for a fantastic weekend. I had a wonderful time and learnt so much. It was a fabulous and very well-organised first course for The Phoenix Collective.
- ...Thank you so much for your musicianship classes this weekend. I really enjoyed them. Perfect challenge level, beautifully taught....I had an overwhelmingly positive experience start to finish.
- ...Congratulations once again for organising such a very enjoyable course. I'm so glad it was such an obvious success so huge thanks to the whole team.
- I hope you're able to take time out now and bask in the success of this first Phoenix course.
- What a great group of people too.
- ...Many congratulations on the course – I had a fantastic weekend!
- ...you should be very proud of how the whole weekend ran. It was so good to be a part of, and by the end I felt very included on a personal level, and stimulated on a musical level.

- ...Congratulations on the weekend, I really enjoyed it. I particularly enjoyed Allan and the class I had with him.
- ...I thoroughly enjoyed every minute - it was everything I expected and more! I do hope...you will plan another similar weekend. I appreciated the certificate – a nice record!
- ...I'm so grateful, THANK YOU! I'm still buzzing from the weekend...
- ...What a fabulous day today. Very well done!
- ...I thoroughly enjoyed everything...Last night's concert was very very special too...could not fail to be moved by the London Adventist Chorale's musical talent, total commitment and belief in what they are singing and just sheer joy. There were a number of their songs where I was tearing up and there was such an interesting variety of music.
- Well done for all your hard work and I look forward to the next one! ...keep flying high...
- ...It was a super course - I really enjoyed it, the venue was good...food/refreshments very good.
- All the four sections were excellent and complimented each other. Critical feedback tricky as it was all good!
- I look forward to more Phoenix flights...Allan and Ken...both so brilliant and unique.

READ ON...!

A Musical Journey - a blog by Ron Kelley

This last weekend I have been on a music course – first one I've been on for a while that involved singing. This wasn't the usual 'turn up and rehearse and perform xyz' type of weekend. Instead it was a weekend around learning to use Kodály technique. Kodály was a 20th Hungarian composer with a passion for improving how music was taught. He developed his own methodology and pedagogic technique. This involved a mixture of using solfa (solfège) for note names, hand gestures, rhythm syllables etc.

Although I did music at school back in the 70s, which taught me to read music and got me to a very basic level on cello (which I then didn't touch again until I was in my 50s), I didn't sing other than for hymns. This was because I had the very common experience of being told I couldn't sing and was never selected for the school choir.

My interest in choral music developed over the years because of my association with the Metropolitan Cathedral. Eventually in my 30s, frustrated by not making music, I came across a chance advert in the local paper for a singing teacher. I started singing lessons. My teacher, Owen Wynne, was a counter tenor and an ex opera singer. I had an assessment lesson and he decided I was a 'light baritone', which is an upper bass voice.

That started the next quarter of a century of music-making as a bass singer. I've done everything from singing in a community choir, my teacher's chamber choir, choral societies, other chamber choirs, singing workshops, weekends, summer schools, major festival concerts, several TV programmes (a one act opera and a 'reality' programme about Tallis' Spem in Alium), and a performance at the BBC Proms.

After fifteen or so years with two local choirs, I decided for various reasons to have a break from singing, so I have done little singing for three years or so.

The organiser of the Kodály weekend 'persuaded' me that I should participate. So, I signed up for the course, but also for a one-on-one private lesson with one of the tutors – Allan Hubert-Wright. Allan is a specialist in the science of singing and how the human voice works. He is based in France where he trains opera singers and people in music theatre etc.

My singing voice has always been slightly unusual. I have a lot of power at the top end – around middle C and above to F#. My voice is reasonably resonant in the octave below that but loses power rapidly below that. By the time I get to bottom F# / F at the bottom of the bass clef, there is no power at all and notes are either 'on' or 'off'.

Allan made an initial assessment as I vocalised over a series of notes across my range. He went 'aha... I have an idea...'. He pointed out that there were things stopping air flow in various places. We went through various exercises to work on that. I was somewhat disturbed by how high we seemed to be going with some of them.

After a while he says: baritones don't sing Ds, Es, and Fs like that. They certainly don't sing Ab, A, Bb, C, and C#... you're a tenor easily able to sing top C...

Umm. That's somewhat radical... It explains some things but not others. When I sing the big D major Handel choruses, I've always been able to knock out the top Ds and F sharps and punch holes in walls with them. I have had to sing 2nd tenor a few times on early music singing days but have tired quite quickly. So I asked Allan if I was a tenor, why was that? His answer was quite simple: I've been singing as if a baritone, with lowered larynx, lowered tongue and forward lips that give the 'darker' baritone sound. That doesn't work for tenor.

His suggestion is I need to work on developing tenor technique... so it looks like back to singing lessons for me...

Here's a podcast of Allan: <https://youtu.be/truxNnmeozE>

The Holistic Voice - A Review by Anne Bradley

How many of us dream of an ideal singing lesson or choir rehearsal; where all the activities feed into each other beautifully, and there is enough time for each. Where we really get to spend time working on posture and relaxation, develop the tools needed for sightreading and harmony, plus vocal technique relevant to whatever song we are working on, and then combine them all to produce a wonderful sound.

This is precisely what was experienced during The Holistic Voice. This incredible weekend was the inaugural course presented by The Phoenix Collective; a group of musicians who are passionate about music education, delivered holistically, and based on the teachings of the legendary Zoltán Kodály.

This course incorporated Kodály Musicianship, Alexander Technique, Vocal Technique and Gospel Singing, with top tutors in each area. Each of these was worth doing on its own, but the benefit of putting them all together was exponential.

Singing – Classical vs Gospel

Allan Hubert-Wright is an extraordinary vocal coach, with many years of experience as a professional singer and actor in both Opera and Musical Theatre. Qualified in both music and phonetics, he has done extensive research on the physiology of the voice, and is expert in rehabilitating vocal issues. Skilled at working with singers of all abilities, his happy manner and hilarious presentation style make you comfortable trying out new things.

More of a workshop than a presentation, it even felt at times like a giant masterclass. We explored the different voice qualities needed for both Classical and Gospel sounds. We played with different positions of the tongue, lips and larynx, and saw how it changed the overall sound of the group.

More than a third of participants said they sang in choirs or sang professionally; many of these also being singing teachers or conductors. Some were beginner singers, with varying degrees of musical knowledge. It's quite amazing how a workshop like this can work with such a mixed audience. Allan even had people trying things out on their own, in a completely non-threatening environment with no criticism of any one style of singing.

And even in that mixed group, everyone was learning. Many people were encountering onsets and larynx positions for the first time. I was learning about phonetics, and using harmonics to brighten and darken the sound.

Kodály musicianship

Whenever I strike up a discussion about Kodály, people ask if that is solfa and handsigns. Yes, it is, but it is also so much more. I am surprised that more singing teachers don't use it, because it gives us a voice-based approach to teaching theory, aural and sightreading simultaneously. Again, on this course, there was something for everyone, and musicianship was offered at four levels. (Not levels of ability; steps on a journey).

In the class for those with no previous solfa training, they learned to sing the notes of the pentatonic scale, and to read basic rhythms. (I remember my first Kodály course, when we were all together for choir, marvelling at half the room's ability to sing a melody back in solfa, but I was doing it in no time.)

I was taught by David Vinden, who recently presented at the AOTOS Conference. He made us warm up by singing all the modes in solfa, with handsigns, from the same starting note. Then dictation with a difference. He would sing a short melody, with us joining in in canon, so that as we sang the first bar, he was singing the second, and so on. Once we could sing the whole melody, we sang it in solfa, then played it individually on the piano, and only then were we allowed to write it down. Then we had to sing it and play it on the piano in canon.

After we had all done that, we transformed the melody into each of the modes. With a simple change of key signature, a new note becomes do, and all the other notes follow. A terrific way to build sightreading skills, and encounter the different intervals.

This of course was the more advanced class, but even just doing an 'instant canon' with singing students, using an easy melody, is a terrific way to build their aural skills. (You can begin with a song containing two notes.) The dreaded ABRSM melodic repetition will be a walk in the park.

Alexander Technique

After lunch on both days we had Alexander Technique with Kathy Hulme, where we got to play with skulls and skeletons. Kathy has many years of experience as a musician and Kodály teacher, and has more recently trained in Alexander Technique, particularly focusing on voice users. She has a lovely manner which enabled us all to relax, and it was wonderful to be working mainly on the voice.

We walked, forwards, backwards and a combination of both. She showed us how to sit in a chair and free up our breathing muscles.

I was amazed at how much I was nodding my head while talking, as well as grinding my teeth. After a bit more work freeing up my head and neck, I felt a glorious stretch down my shoulders, arms and back, and someone commented that she saw all the tension fall from my face.

I found myself walking around, pain-free, stress-free, completely relaxed and still. And as this was AT for singers, we did some lovely improvisation, and produced quite a glorious sound.

Gospel Singing Workshop

I was lucky enough to encounter The London Adventist Chorale two years ago, on a Kodály course, and I described their concert as being in a room which was filled to the brim with pure joy. Ken Burton, their awe-inspiring MD, is not only a fantastic musician and teacher;

he performs and directs Gospel music with total conviction, and really makes you think about the words you are singing.

This wasn't simply a workshop, it was more like a choir rehearsal, with Ken really putting us through our paces. We had been prepared by Allan to be able to use our voices flexibly to produce the sound Ken wanted, and had practised our sightreading and aural skills in our musicianship classes. The AT sessions had relaxed us, (although I was a little too relaxed, and didn't want to move around as much as Ken wanted), and our voices were free of all tension. It felt as if the whole course had been building to this.

We learned the songs in a variety of ways – by rote, by sightreading, and even by Ken playing the melody on the piano and asking us to sing back in solfa. Adding in a little bit of improvisation, and working on what Allan had taught us on our vocal placement, we made a fine Gospel sound.

I enjoyed the technical side because I am not a classical singer, trained in more of a blues and jazz voice, so the overall sound was very comfortable. But the joy of singing this music with such a great teacher as Ken was overwhelming.

The Results

As always, the benefit of a course is seen in how it helps with your job, and barely a week later, I had much to report. When I find myself tense, or grinding my teeth, I put myself in the lovely sitting position and breathe. I sang at a funeral last week, and helped by both Allan and Ken, I found myself producing the right sound and really putting emotion into the song.

At school, a student I hadn't seen for a while had been struggling with her break. We tried one of Allan's fun exercises, with instant results. A musicianship student was trying to sing and play a simple song in canon, (an excellent way to develop harmony skills). Again, inspired by David's class, I was able to say just the right thing to her, and she got it right for the first time.

Much of the course feedback has concentrated on two things:

- The joy of learning, especially how such technical content, when taught in a supportive environment, could bring such joy.
- The combination of all the different elements, especially the singing technique and practical workshop.

The course really was a triumph for the Phoenix Collective, and there is now much pressure on them for another one on similar lines!