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Concerning the spiritual in voice

ABSTRACT

In October of 2021, I had the honour of being invited into the sacred space of days to hours before death, as I sang for a woman dying of breast cancer. I had never met Regine Verougstreat before, but in the almost two hours of singing for her while she gazed into my eyes and took her last breaths, I had felt a timeless connection and a surrender that is hard to describe. I wrote these words as a stream-of-consciousness response to this experience and many experiences that I have had as a vocalist, from concert halls to marriage ceremonies, sharing sound from a place of the highest intention to align and attune and become a vessel. How can we describe the spirit that becomes our voice? More so, how can we allow for spirit to become us? How do we release the mental grip that hijacks a preconceived idea of what it is to sing? Radical presence. Poetry. Love. These are words that propose an opportunity to choose transcendence.

KEYWORDS

voice
spirit
process
practice
transcendence
release

INTRODUCTION

Freeing the voice from prescribed structure and form, and reclaiming it back as the instrument of our shared human condition. These words come after an incredibly powerful experience singing for a dying woman during the last hours of her life, in an attempt to begin to describe the feeling of singing from and for the soul. The title is inspired by Wassily Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*.

I begin with feeling.
My starting point. My ending point. My anchor. My guide.
I feel therefore I am, therefore I am a person that questions.
I cannot capture or distill or describe or validate by standards that measure and prove.
I feel therefore I am a person of sense.
I cannot explain, but I can explain.
I can exclude the preconceived idea of plain as simple, and shallow excluding depth.
I can exclude the framework of one plane, an imaginary flat surface, which my imagination can explain through imagining what has been proven to have proof.
I can explain the plane in relation to relation, still within a width of marginal error, because still we try to explain.
And when I soften, soften enough that the fluids may leak from my body before my thinking mind can process their exit, when I soften enough to let only what may rise like vapor out of what I can explain, do I find myself at the archway.
In that archway I am aware. I am aware of 'where am I?' I am aware that I cannot explain and feel that inexplicable to be more secure than the concrete under my feet. I feel that inexplicable everywhere in my awareness.
I feel the lawlessness of the inexplicable.
And when I soften, soften enough to allow my familiar plane of naming to remain in the room without interrupting, I begin to quiet the mind. I begin to mine the vapour. I begin to become depth and air. I appreciate the shallow, because I can see beyond vision into the waves that make up the cloud that rose outside and beside me.
I feel that plane in which I must soften, soften enough to lose borders, to lose the expectation of a fade out at some unknown point, but surely a point.
While a fraction of me becomes the observer, most of me is in generation.
Generation surrounds me. Generation becomes me. I am generator. I am generations in one moment, and again the fade-outs at the edge of what I'm able to comprehend, fade out.
If I decide to leave the plane of naming beside me, if I decided that I am able to surrender what I know to name, if I decide to partner with the plane of naming, then I have not lost what I can explain.
I hold hands with that which I can explain and feel pure autonomy. I am dependent, but autonomous and allowing a lift into the vapour that unearths me.
How do I forget? I don't forget. I am able to contain multitudes if I soften, soften enough.
How do I not think? I think. But thought has a new leader and can manifest its true calling as synonymous to changing weather patterns, shape-shifting clouds of baseless perception.
I feel. I lead from my feel. I know from my feel. I feel that I know, therefore I know. I don't know to name in the dense vapor of this plane, I don't need. I don't need in the given of this plane, I give. I receive in the given of this plane. I am given in the given of this plane. I can give what I am given in the given. The given is far from fixed, it's fixated on what cannot be fixed but only corrected, or realigned, from the linear plane of what I can explain.
I hold hands with the naming, but I am autonomous.
I can't forget, because I trust what cannot be forgotten, and allow myself to feel the forgetting as a palpable event that softens me.

I begin with feeling. I am led by feeling. I am guided by feeling to a field where I am singular, but surrounded by billions of blades of growth. Lush and green, I could choose the illusion of their stasis or choose to know and not know and know that they have roots deepening, and crowns reaching. I can choose to name the field around me, I can choose to name in the weakest of names, so weak I can hardly register what the meaning is, therefore quickly softening into feeling. I choose to know the grass is in constant movement from within. I can choose to know the grass is earth, is life, is nourishment, is padding, so that I don't land hard on the dry dirt but find myself held by what can certainly support me yet can never hold or grip me. I find myself supported by what I know to be in constant movement, what I know to be in constant change in its stillness. If I were to voice the field, its voice would call to not listen to the naming, ever. Language is saved for the aftermath. Language is saved for the aftermath, a necessary struggle to find words that are free of naming.

Free.

Free.

Not without cost to the firm hold of naming that needs to prove its essential nature in order for me to feel wise.

And I name to explain what cannot be named only felt, only known through feel, only unknown through feel, I sense.

I sense desire to name so that I can capture the essence of what cannot be explained, only felt.

I find words to help me soften, soften so much that I can forget what cannot be forgotten but is capable of standing beside me and allowing me to be autonomous, to be one.

I find words to help me separate what is inseparable in the mind that needs naming, so she can step aside and stand beside me, so close, yet letting me be autonomous, letting us be one.

I reserve words for the aftermath.

I revere what I cannot take, but can only be given. I revere what cannot be given borders, but is boundless.

I don't step into reverence, I become reverence.

I resonate what I cannot grasp, but only contain. Contain, but only a container in the plane of naming, so my resonator can explain what cannot be grasped.

I revere the pull in that comes from you.

You, human. You, mountain. You, ocean. You, awe. You pull me into my reverence. You pull me in.

And when I face the face of fear of the unknown I see a smile in its eye, and an invitation in its voice. Dance with me. Be my leading partner who is led by me. I will dance the dance of balm, moving like a soothing, healing ointment. I will dance the dance of balm to unclench the grip of my shut eyes so that I can soften, soften so much that I am blind to the limit of sight. Blind to the lack of light in the darkness. All is light refracting in the vapour of higher consciousness. All is known in the unknown when I dance the dance of balm. I can open my pores and let it in. I can open my pores and let myself into my own self so that I may step aside and beside myself without interrupting. I slip out through every pore. I dance the dance of slithering, spiralling oblivion down and up to a heart that has no name but is the core.

I begin with feeling the dropping of guards, and trust that safety is grounded in the roots of my belief. I believe that I will rise into planes of dense, beautifully blinding vapour. I believe that I will drop into the depth of the ocean,

flying. I believe that sound can explain to the beating of my heart what my words cannot. I trust that I can soften and feel my groin vibrating with the tone of my low voice. My navel expands and stretches to the point of no return with the bottomless dropping of my diaphragm. My voice, the new umbilical chord, attaches me to my womb of sound, to the womb of creation so that I don't have to decide to trust, I just do. I just am.

I just sing.

I sing and trust that someone is listening, that someone is feeling, that someone loves me, that someone is in awe as they carry me within them, that someone allows me to consume them, that someone allows me to alter them forever, and all I need to be is Love.

I sing.

I sound.

I am sound.

I am the sounding and the sounder and I am sound.

I am safe.

There is no right or wrong in the space of Pure Love.

I need not worry, for my brain is still a lush garden of senses, rhizomatic myelin sheath. My body in the mycelium of being and becoming. Only sensing. Only feeling. Only sensing. Only feeling. Only love.

From here, and there – there that is beside me, holding my hand, naming without interrupting.

From here and there – there that arrives not knowing and stays.

From here and there I raise my Voice.

From here and there I don't absolutely know, because absolute has an end, and this knowing does not.

From here and there I can carry one into the light with my voice.

From here and there I can improvise an ancient song.

From here I can see my Voice – with my seeing eyes of rods and cones. I can see what you cannot see, because you see what I cannot see.

I see my voice and hear it calling me to call.

I see my voice and feel it wrapping around my entire body and pulling me out.

I see my voice and I step aside.

I birth my voice from tail bone and see it preceding me.

From here I sing my song.

All of me entrusted with the role of transmission.

All of me trusting ignition.

All of me trusting the whisper, the distance of gaps, the moan, the tone.

Absolutely only if I care about you and I.

All of me trusting the weaving I am able to.

All of me trusting the marriage.

All of me trusting we will meet at basecamp and share phenomenal stories.

Absolutely only if you desire to be fed.

And my Voice ...

I recently found myself in a position of incredible honour and humility, accompanying a woman during the last days and hours of her life. I was invited by my friend Kato to come and sing for her beloved friend Regine who was dying of breast cancer. She asked me to help her let go of her body and lean in toward the light.

I was specifically invited not to comfort her, but to assist her.

It's hard to describe quite what that felt like. I was initially afraid I would not be able to breathe comfortably, that my voice would crack and my hands would sweat in the face of death, but the opposite occurred. My breath was deep, my voice carried, and my hands held Regine's with a firm grip.

Regine was transitioning while I sang to her in the flesh and through recordings. She transitioned to the sound of my voice.

I sang at her vigil, as her loved ones gathered around her body at home.

I sang at her sea burial, six miles into the ocean, as her body was given back to the earth.

I was left with asking myself how – but more quickly arrived at the answer, because I knew.

I had been practising letting vibration and energy overwhelm my ego for many years. I had been teaching it and calling it by its many names to arrive at a place where I cannot name it at all, it is impossible to name, it has no name. I let myself receive the affirmation.

I allowed myself to call it and call upon it by the name that begins to let it be understood through being felt – pure love.

As a teacher, I am often guiding my students into a mental state that allows for free improvisation, a freedom of creativity, a non judgment, a place where beauty is defined as anything that captures the attention in a state of wonder. I tell them to ask themselves 'What do I feel like when I'm sounding?' not 'What do I sound like when I'm singing?'

I guide them to a space where commitment and presence are paramount and there is no right or wrong when we are in conscious communication. The body knows how to organize its involuntary muscles to produce what is desired to be produced, we only need to desire deeply, desire to give and share of ourselves radically.

The high notes and deep tones and colorful textures and dynamics ride the wave of the intention we put forward.

This is the technique (if one is dependent on that term to trust themselves).

Self love, love for others, radical sharing, intention to connect, emotionally moving, touching, containing, holding space for and with, allowing for, giving permission for one to feel, for ourselves to feel, for the other to join and pass through to a higher state of consciousness with sound and music and pure love. This is the technique.

We practise being the giver and receiver simultaneously.

We practise strength at the core and softness at the limbs.

We practise elevating the breath and grounding the heels.

We practise raising the soft palate and dropping the jaw.

We practise the mouth cavity becoming the high-arched gothic ceiling of Notre Dame, resonating reverence, reverberating awe for the breath coming through its cellular walls.

Spirit is our instrument, we are our instrument, we are spirit, spirit is the voice. Yet we are so afraid of the unknown of spirit. We are afraid of the decrescendo of sound as it continues into the vastness, knowing that it continues without us, a sound we could never hear but is everything that we are.

How can I be everything that I am not, and everywhere that I am not? How can I know what I don't know and create from material that has not been created? How can I perform what has not been composed and sing with precision the song that has not been written?

When I choose to embrace the paradox within me, my arms wrap around you and I let you in.

I can let you into the flow of what I cannot put words to, but only sounds that utter what I feel. I know what I feel at the core of my primal being, not in my modern brain.

I can let go and allow for what I do not know to lead me confidently and safely. I can sound without hesitancy.

Silence is suspended like the space between my inhale and my exhale where true surrender exists.

I move out of my own way and observe without interrupting.

I must care about you just as much as I care about me and more, so that the voice can make that extra leap out of my groin and into a breath of its own.

I soften, soften so much that I can trust and love myself, finally.

All paths have led to the moment I sing for you.

You take me with you into the great unknown, and I bring You with me, and You take me with you, and I bring You and You and You with me, and You and You and You and You take me with you.

And We.

We practise reciprocal pure love.

I practise with a timer and without.

My technique is pure love.

My exercises are pure love.

My warm up is pure love.

My voice is pure love.

Repeat after me:

I Love My Voice

I Love My Voice

I Love My Voice

And how are you a stranger but I know you so well?

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