

## Singing makes you feel better



**Julie Thomas**

*Director of the Imperial Choir*



*'Music produces a kind of pleasure that nature cannot do without.'* (Confucius)

The Imperial Ladies Choir were denied the pleasure of music-making for most of last year. When we did meet up it was only independently in small numbers to sing in funerals, although we did manage to sing as a choir at our annual remembrance service at the Parish Church, albeit without the accompaniment of the band. There were no Christmas concerts, helping the tourists at the local hotels to celebrate the 'Season to be Jolly' nor the opportunity for residents at Dar il-Madonna tal-Mellieħa to join us in our carol concert; as a result, none of the usual commitments that keep the choir and the band going with the reward of sharing music with an audience. So, when the opportunity to begin rehearsing again was offered, how could I motivate the choir without a goal on the horizon? How could I remind them how much laughter and camaraderie we used to feel on Thursday rehearsals? After all, we had endured a long period of fear, uncertainty and mostly, a lack of social contact.

### *So how can singing help?*

This article is not just for my lovely singing ladies but food for thought for anyone. Singing as part of a choir has been shown to improve mood, increase concentration and cognition levels, counteract anxiety and stress and, probably the most important of all, aid mental health through the socialisation element.

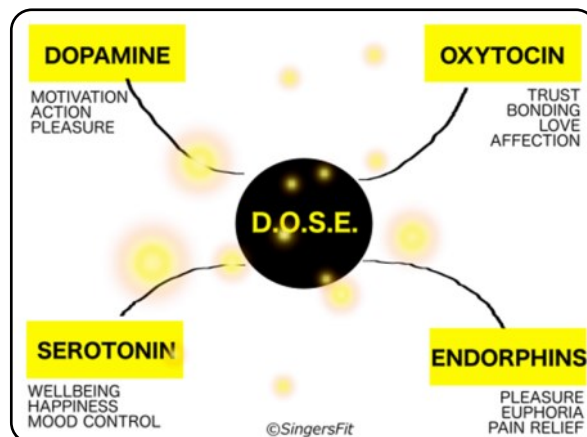
Sarah Wilson, a clinical neuropsychologist and head of the School of Psychological Sciences at the University of Melbourne, studied the brains of volunteers of varying vocal ability who were asked to sing whilst having an MRI scan. She said,

*"There is a singing network in the brain which is quite broadly distributed. When we speak, the hemisphere of the brain dealing with language lights up. When we sing, however, both sides of the brain spark into life."*

She goes on to state, "We also see involvement of the emotion networks of the brain. Regions that control the movements we need to produce sounds and articulation also light up. There is evidence that, in general, singing in a group enhances our empathy and social connection. We see this at football clubs, people singing in congregations at church. It's a community-building activity because we're united in our voice."

There are many scientific answers as to how singing can be beneficial, most of which state that when you sing in a group, whether it is a large choir or a smaller group, the act of collective singing causes your body to release endorphins, a hormone which can help promote positive feelings. These endorphins contribute to an overall feeling of happiness, a feeling of euphoria and therefore can be associated with a reduction in stress. Whatever the situation, whether it is stress, physical ailments, illness, or psychological deprivation, music has the qualities to affect our body and mind.

Apart from the increasing amount of scientific evidence that singing releases endorphins, it also releases serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin – the 'happy' chemicals that boost your mood and make you feel good about yourself. Scientists believe that's one of the reasons why people report being on a high



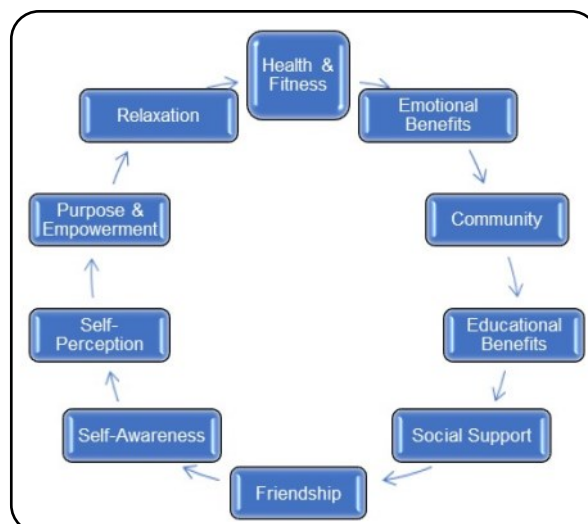
during choir sessions and continue to feel positive, uplifted and motivated afterwards. In addition to this, scientists have identified a tiny organ in the ear called the sacculus, which responds to the frequencies created by singing. The response creates an immediate sense of pleasure, regardless of what the singing sounds like. When you put all of that together, a DOSE of singing can simply take your mind off the day's troubles to boost your mood.

*Even more science!*

A 2017 study measured the amount of cortisol, the stress hormone, in a group of volunteers' saliva before and after they sang. Researchers in that study found that the amount of cortisol was lower after singing, an indication that people felt more relaxed after they had sung a tune. They also found singing reduces stress levels whether the participants were singing in a group or by themselves.

I have found that being part of a choir can be both exhilarating and transformative. It takes something incredibly intimate, a sound that begins inside you, shares it with a roomful of people and it comes back as something even more thrilling. Science is still hard at work trying to explain why it has such a calming yet energizing effect on people. What researchers are beginning to discover is that singing is like an infusion of the perfect tranquilizer, the kind that both soothes your nerves and elevates your spirits – without any harmful side-effects!

I'm sorry if now you have been hit by too much science; this is all you need to remember:



Singing, especially as a group or choir is cheaper than therapy, healthier than drinking, and certainly more fun than working out. It is the one activity in life where feeling better is pretty much guaranteed. Even if you walk into rehearsal feeling exhausted and depressed, by the end of the night you will walk out high as a kite on endorphins and goodwill. I have noticed this with the Ladies Choir – how the mood changes over the time spent at rehearsal. They are quiet and fairly reserved at the start, but all the club knows when they are leaving: the smiles, the jokes, the laughter, and the camaraderie. Long may we continue to have classic therapy Thursdays, ladies. Thank you for your commitment and I wish you and your families and all the friends of the Imperial Band Club a very happy Festa.



**Interested in joining the Imperial Choir?**

*New Members Welcome!*

Contact us on [info@imperialbandclub.com](mailto:info@imperialbandclub.com)

# LEZZJONIJIET TAL-MUŻIKA MILL-GĦAQDA MUŻIKALI IMPERIAL

waqt l-imxija tal-Covid-19,  
bl-użu tat-teknoloġija u l-internet



## 'TEKNOLOĠIJA FIT-TAGĦLIM TAL-MUŻIKA'

### STUDENTI

studenti mogħtija  
l-opportunità li jitgħallmu l-  
mużika mis-sigurtà u  
l-kumdità ta' darhom



### KLASSIJET VIRTWALI



lezzjonijiet ta' prattika u  
teorija *online*

### TABLETS

mixtrija apposta għall-użu  
tal-istudenti bħala  
parti mill-proġett



### FOLLOW-UP



eżerċizzji u xogħol għad-  
dar fuq bażi individwali

### IBDA TGĦALLEM IL-MUŻIKA!

Inkiteb u ingħaqad magħna!  
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# MUSIC LESSONS BY THE IMPERIAL BAND CLUB

during the COVID-19 outbreak,  
using technology and the internet



## 'TECHNOLOGY IN MUSIC EDUCATION'

### STUDENTS

students are given the  
opportunity to learn music from  
within the safety of their home



### VIRTUAL CLASSROOMS



online practical and theory  
lessons on a weekly basis

### TABLETS

specially bought for use by music  
students as part of the project



### FOLLOW-UP



weekly tasks and homework  
in order to promote  
individual learning

### START LEARNING MUSIC!

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Proġett għid imniedi mill-Għaqda Mużikali Imperial b'kollaborazzjoni mal-Aġenzija  
Zghazagh ul-Għaqda Kazini tal-Banda bħala parti mill-iskema  
'It-Tagħlim tal-Mużika għaz-Zghazagh fil-Kazini 2020'



A new project by the Imperial Band Club in collaboration with Agenzija Zghazagh and  
Għaqda Kazini tal-Banda as part of the scheme 'Musical Tuition for Young People in  
Band Clubs 2020'

