

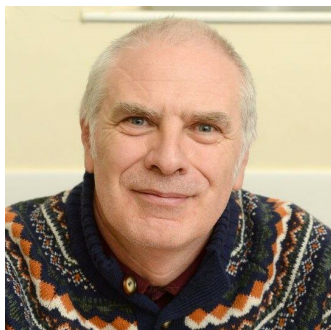


REASONS TO SING!

Exploring the soul of our favourite songs

Wellbeing Course Notes





Welcome to Reasons to Sing!

Songs have played a powerful role in people's lives throughout human history. In addition to their wonderful ability to simply entertain, songs help us express the wide range of emotions that are intrinsic to what it means to be human - ranging from love to anger, joy to despair. They bind communities together and are used in worship and other ceremonies in different traditions across the world. They also create a focus for our protests and our resistance, and provide a backdrop for our work. Songs help us create memories and leave within us deep emotional legacies that can last a lifetime.

The value of music and singing has perhaps never been more apparent than while live performance was so sorely missed during the the Coronavirus pandemic. For many people, the isolation of being in lockdown highlighted the power of music and our desperate need for it - not only for our pleasure, but for our mental and spiritual health and wellbeing. Music and song have the ability to take us to 'another place'. Like other creative arts, they move us into a liminal space – a space between spaces – a place where we might perhaps lose ourselves for a while and momentarily escape our worldly cares.

This short wellbeing and spirituality course has been developed by Steel City Choristers and Parson Cross Initiative projects (PXI) to invite people to explore the stories and emotions behind their favourite songs, and to reflect on the role and power of music in our lives.

Steel City Choristers is a choir of adults and children that is sharing the joys of choral music with communities across Sheffield, including with us at PXI Projects. The transcendent quality of music is perhaps found nowhere more so than in a blend of human voices in a choir. So I'm delighted that they have recorded twelve songs for this course. I'm also grateful to the members of the PXI community who have been happy to speak openly about some quite personal connections they have to their favourite songs.

Steel City Choristers and PXI Projects are grateful to Awards for All and the Worrall Male Voice Choir Grants Foundation for the funding that has made this project possible. Audio recordings of the choir were skillfully produced by Luke Dunn, a young sound engineer; and Dan Jackson of Subversive Productions has given generously of his time and professionalism to produce the superb videos accompanying this course. I hope you enjoy the course.

Nick Waterfield

Pioneer Minister with the Methodist Church in Sheffield

Introducing the Reasons to Sing! Wellbeing Course

This wellbeing course will help you to explore six 'Reasons to sing' and the way that singing shapes and affects how you feel. It can be used in the classroom, with community groups and churches and for personal reflection.



A short introductory video can be used in advance to interest people in joining the course, and again at the beginning of the first session to set the scene. To introduce each theme, there is a video featuring two songs sung by Steel City Choristers. One song was chosen by a member of the PXI Projects community, the other by the choir.

Each session we will invite you to listen to the stories behind people's choice of song, before exploring your own feelings about the theme through reflective conversation in a safe and accepting atmosphere. Open-ended writing, drawing or craft materials could provide the opportunity to reflect in an artistic and contemplative way.

This course aims to create a space in which people can reflect on the role of songs in their own lives and the emotions that are bound up with them. We hope that people will find wellbeing through connecting with each other, with themselves and with the transcendent. Silence, wondering and creative reflection may play as important a role as dialogue as people tune into and express how they feel.

Videos for each session are available at: <https://steelcitychoristers.org.uk/reasons>



Comfort



Create a safe space	Welcome everyone and help them feel at ease and at peace with themselves and the group. You might ask each person to check in with the others by saying very briefly what has been at the heart of their week, or how they are showing up today. Encourage the group to be ready to listen and to accept each person's contributions without judgement.
Introduce	<p>Songs that bring us comfort take us to a safe emotional space.</p> <p>We may draw comfort from a song's meaningful words which speak a much needed message into our lives. We may associate a song with a particular situation and listening to it brings back reassuring or happy memories. Or it may simply be the familiarity of song that we listen to repeatedly that brings us comfort.</p>
Watch	Carly from PXI Projects talks about <i>He's Got the Whole World in His Hands</i> Eddie and James from Steel City Choristers introduce <i>Psalm 136</i>
Discuss	<p>Let's be curious about how we felt while listening to the stories and songs:</p> <p>What did you like? What did you not like? What did they remind you of?</p> <p>Which songs bring you comfort and why?</p>
Reflect	Take time on your own to reflect further about how songs help you find comfort - you might like to write, draw, build, paint, move, go for a walk or sit quietly.
Celebrate	Come together with food or drink to relax and chat, creating a threshold back into what's happening next in your day.



Gratitude



Create a safe space	Welcome everyone and help them feel at ease and at peace with themselves and the group. You might ask each person to check in with the others by saying very briefly what has been at the heart of their week, or how they are showing up today. Encourage the group to be ready to listen and to accept each person's contributions without judgement.
Introduce	Intentionally remembering to be grateful can increase our joy and satisfaction with life. Gratitude helps us honour people and our environment, and can change our attitude towards them. Songs that give us space to reflect and be grateful remind us that life is full of wonder, and to not take things for granted.
Watch	Michelle from PXI Projects talks about <i>What a Wonderful World</i> Yinka from Steel City Choristers introduces <i>For the Beauty of the Earth</i>
Discuss	Let's be curious about how we felt while listening to the stories and songs: What did you like? What did you not like? What did they remind you of? Which songs stir up gratitude in you? Why? How and when do you feel most grateful for the natural world?
Reflect	Take time on your own to reflect further about how songs help you feel grateful - you might like to write, draw, build, paint, move, go for a walk or sit quietly.
Celebrate	Come together with food or drink to relax and chat, creating a threshold back into what's happening next in your day.



Loss



Create a safe space	Welcome everyone and help them feel at ease and at peace with themselves and the group. You might ask each person to check in with the others by saying very briefly what has been at the heart of their week, or how they are showing up today. Encourage the group to be ready to listen and to accept each person's contributions without judgement.
Introduce	<p>We have all experienced loss of one kind or another in our lives. When something that we value is missing from our lives we are left with a gap. Loss can also make us feel anxious, fearful and insecure.</p> <p>Singing or listening to songs can help us accept and process complex emotions. By observing and expressing how we feel, we can develop new perspectives on our loss.</p>
Watch	<p>Terry from PXI Projects talks about <i>The Day Thou Gavest Lord has Ended</i></p> <p>Laura from Steel City Choristers introduces Fauré's <i>Requiem</i></p>
Discuss	<p>Let's be curious about how we felt while listening to the stories and songs:</p> <p>What did you like? What did you not like? What did they remind you of? Which songs help you process loss? Why?</p>
Reflect	Take time on your own to reflect further about how songs help you express and process loss - you might like to write, draw, build, paint, move, go for a walk or sit quietly.
Celebrate	Come together with food or drink to relax and chat, creating a threshold back into what's happening next in your day.



Love



Create a safe space	Welcome everyone and help them feel at ease and at peace with themselves and the group. You might ask each person to check in with the others by saying very briefly what has been at the heart of their week, or how they are showing up today. Encourage the group to be ready to listen and to accept each person's contributions without judgement.
Introduce	<p>CS Lewis talks about four kinds of love - romantic, charitable, parental and unconditional love. A lot of popular music focuses on romantic love, while sacred music often talks of love in a way that leans into something bigger and deeper, transcending our normal human existence: "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him." (1 John 4:16)</p> <p>It might be the words, the music or the associations we have with a song that help us express or feel love.</p>
Watch	<p>Cherryl from PXI Projects talks about <i>Angels from the Realms of Glory</i></p> <p>Niamh and Jess from Steel City Choristers introduce <i>If Ye Love Me</i> by Tallis</p>
Discuss	<p>Let's be curious about how we felt while listening to the stories and songs:</p> <p>What did you like? What did you not like? What did they remind you of?</p> <p>Which songs help you to express or feel love?</p>
Reflect	Take time on your own to reflect further about how songs help you express and feel love - you might like to write, draw, build, paint, move, go for a walk or sit quietly.
Celebrate	Come together with food or drink to relax and chat, creating a threshold back into what's happening next in your day.



Unity



Create a safe space	Welcome everyone and help them feel at ease and at peace with themselves and the group. You might ask each person to check in with the others by saying very briefly what has been at the heart of their week, or how they are showing up today. Encourage the group to be ready to listen and to accept each person's contributions without judgement.
Introduce	Songs can be used to celebrate, and purposefully create, community and to reinforce a sense of unity and solidarity. They can help us express our identity, by demonstrating our belonging to other people with whom we share something important such as an interest, a belief or a nationality. Songs of unity can be of most significance at times when we want or need to feel we belong.
Watch	Jean from PXI Projects talks about <i>Hi Ho Silver Lining</i> Jeremy from Steel City Choristers introduces <i>Jerusalem</i>
Discuss	Let's be curious about how we felt while listening to the stories and songs: What did you like? What did you not like? What did they remind you of? Which songs help you to express or experience unity, community or solidarity with others?
Reflect	Take time on your own to reflect further about how songs help you feel a sense of unity and connection - you might like to write, draw, build, paint, move, go for a walk or sit quietly.
Celebrate	Come together with food or drink to relax and chat, creating a threshold back into what's happening next in your day.



Structure



Create a safe space	Welcome everyone and help them feel at ease and at peace with themselves and the group. You might ask each person to check in with the others by saying very briefly what has been at the heart of their week, or how they are showing up today. Encourage the group to be ready to listen and to accept each person's contributions without judgement.
Introduce	<p>Songs can help create structure and mark important moments in our lives. These may be daily moments of calm, weekly events such as church-going, annual events such as birthdays, or one-off life events or rites of passage.</p> <p>Singing or listening to a familiar song brings into the present moment all of the associations and memories of that song being sung at other times and in other places. In this way, songs can frame routines and rhythms of our lives.</p>
Watch	<p>Dom from PXI Projects talks about <i>Mr Blue Sky</i></p> <p>Joshua from Steel City Choristers introduces Byrd's <i>Mass for Four Voices</i></p>
Discuss	<p>Let's be curious about how we felt while listening to the stories and songs:</p> <p>What did you like? What did you not like? What did they remind you of?</p> <p>Which songs help bring structure to your life? Is there a song that you always like to sing or listen to in a particular situation?</p>
Reflect	Take time on your own to reflect further about how songs help create structure in your life - you might like to write, draw, build, paint, move, go for a walk or sit quietly.
Celebrate	Come together with food or drink relax and chat, creating a threshold back into what's happening next in your day.



Conclusion to Reasons to Sing!



This final session is an opportunity for your group to celebrate and draw together all your reflections and discussions. Over your sessions you will have looked at only a few of the many reasons to sing. There are others which you may be keen to discuss. People may have a song that they love which doesn't fall neatly into one of the six themes we have covered.

This session is an opportunity to share food and drink, and perhaps to listen to or perform a favourite song! There is a short final video to watch, and you may also want to talk about the evidence for why singing is good for you, as set out on the next page.

Do share your songs and stories and tag Steel City Choristers on Facebook!
#steelchoristers

We'd love to hear about your experience - please fill in our feedback form at
www.steelcitychoristers.org.uk/reasons

If you would like to know more about running a Reasons to Sing! project in your community, please contact kate@steelcitychoristers.org.uk. The elements of the project are:

1. Matching six favourite songs from a community with pieces from a choir's choral repertoire
2. Running community singing workshops and then rehearsing with the choir
3. Presenting the chosen songs in a final joint concert.

Thank you and Happy Singing!



The Evidence



Singing is good for you! Here are 10 reasons why:

1. Singing is for everyone
2. Singing makes you feel better
3. Singing builds a sense of community
4. Singing lets you express yourself
5. Singing boosts your confidence
6. Singing helps you beat stress and relax
7. Singing helps improve memory
8. Singing can help with pain relief
9. Singing enhances lung function
10. Singing features in wellbeing studies

For more detail see:

operanorth.co.uk/news/10-reasons-singing-is-good-for-you

And: singup.org/blog/article/1390-the-benefits-of-singing

