

VOCAL Adventures

Lauren Newton

*Free Improvisation
in Sound, Space, Spirit and Song*

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FOREWORD

In this fascinating book Lauren Newton pulls back the curtain, offering a rich, personal, and deeply informed look inside the secret world of the free improviser. In one sense it is a guide with inspiring lessons and exercises for improvising singers: here, beautifully articulated, we see the relations between intention, spontaneity, and group interaction; the psychological intricacies of embodied expressivity; how the voice can “ride” on the flow of breath; the marvels of how we find the sources of creative inspiration throughout life; what it is to sing with multiphonics, overtones, and vibrato; how to perform non-semantic yet meaningful vocal sounds or “wordless words”; and how, inverting the entrenched model, the voice itself can “play” the singer. But more – very much more – than a guidebook for improvising singers, it is an expansive mosaic of descriptions and observations and absorbing reflections on the complex experience of interactive improvisers including instrumentalists as well as vocalists. Showing with enlightening detail what she means by the self’s merger into the vibrating energy field of an improvising ensemble, we also gain insight into: the quicksilver fluidity of the selfhood of the creative performer; the suddenness, unpredictability, and power of inspiration; the emergence of form within free improvisation; the difference between being in front of and being contained within an ensemble; the subtle interactions between deliberation and emotional immediacy; what for an improviser “the exploration of sound” can actually mean (for example, investigating “the underlying secrets of a vowel”); how to learn, as she says, to trust yourself in traversing the fine line between uncertainty and euphoria; and the special way in which fragments and echoes of music one has heard can weave themselves into one’s tapestry of sounds.

This book, one of deep personal engagement, is the harvest of a musical lifetime – first as student, then as up-and-coming performer establishing a creative identity, then as famous international improviser and recording artist, and finally as professor of musical improvisation. With unwavering belief in the expressive power of the human voice (indeed, as she observes, the voice is after all the original human instrument), and with massive experience and achievement in the musical world she herein describes,

Lauren Newton captures not only the what, the how, and the why of free improvisation, but indeed nothing less than the creative soul of a distinctive artform that is inescapably of the here and now.

Garry L. Hagberg¹

CONTENTS

Foreword	5
Traces – Whispers	11
Chapter 1 Sounds of Surprise	29
Chapter 2 A Flash of Sound, A Sudden Space	41
Chapter 3 Inner Music	49
Chapter 4 Singing from the Inside Out	55
Chapter 5 The Immediacy of Music	67
Chapter 6 Tentative Truths	75
Chapter 7 Take a Breath	89
Chapter 8 Ensemble Work – Synergies	109
Chapter 9 Nurturing Musical Expression – Reflection(s), Guidelines	123
Chapter 10 The Mirror of Awareness, Communication	147

Chapter 11	
Words, No Words – The Musical and Phonetic Aspect of Words and Language	167
Chapter 12	
Vocal Textures.	175
Chapter 13	
Solo Work – Do What You Do.	191
Chapter 14	
Epilogue – Free Improvisation in Sound, Space, Spirit and Song. . . .	203
Notes	207
Acknowledgments.	211
Biography.	213