

Ep #62: Singing for Health

Can't
wait
to hear
you
with
Michèle Voillequé

Full Episode Transcript

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Your voice is unique to you. It grows as you grow. It changes as you change. If you're curious about the relationship between your voice and your body, your heart and your mind, welcome. My name is Michèle Voillequé and I can't wait to hear you.

Have you noticed how much space and time is dedicated to telling us how to live longer, happier, healthier lives?

I just saw another article about that a day or two ago, and I felt like I had just seen an article like, three days before. It just keeps coming. And I guess our world is full of that content because that's, that's a question we all want an answer to, right?

How can I live well? How can I live a long and happy life?

I recently took an elderly relative to the doctor and they were, my relative, was complaining about not being able to remember things as well and suffering with a lot of brain fog and just feeling like “I'm losing my mind” in air quotes.

And, this relative is in their mid eighties, right? Really common complaints for someone of that age. And the doctor very patiently explained what they needed to do to feel better.

And I say very patiently because I know the doctor has told my relative this more than once. But it just doesn't seem to take.

And I think that maybe that's why there are all of these articles that keep coming around and around and around because we hear the information, but we're not able to fully act on it or absorb it or like even take it in.

Or maybe we just all need to be reminded. Maybe it's just easier to live badly, maybe. I don't know.

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But here's what this doctor said, and I think it holds water.

To live a longer, healthier life, we need to do four things.

We need to eat good nutritious food.

We need to do weight bearing exercise, and you can add weights if you want. So going for a walk, carrying your groceries. You don't have to go to the gym and lift weights. You can just make your own life a little bit heavier.

We need to socialize with our friends and our loved ones. We need good conversation

And we need to read and solve problems, engage our minds in some kind of critical thinking task.

And if we do those four things, we're gonna feel better. We're gonna feel more engaged and we might still forget things we wish we wouldn't forget.

But if we can stay active, keep the blood moving, keep oxygen coming into the body and feed it well, and feed our hearts with love and conversation, and feed our minds with good thoughts and good stories, good problems, we're gonna be all right.

That's the way to go. It's not that we're not gonna die, we're all gonna die, but that will help us live more fully until we do.

And I've been thinking a lot about that this week in part because I just passed my 17th anniversary of volunteering at the San Francisco VA Medical Center in their, Community Living Center wing, which is the skilled nursing wing of the hospital.

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So I've been working with vets who are at the ends of their lives for 17 years, bringing them music, singing with them, listening to their songs, sharing my songs.

It's been such an amazing, rewarding journey, and I see how our singing really adds to their quality of life, and how music just instantly can affect one's mood and outlook on the world.

Another thing that happened this week was that I dusted off my Messiah score. I'm going to be helping to lead a sing-along Messiah on December 21st – pretty late for a Messiah Sing-along, actually – and I need to review my notes. I don't know if you know Händel's Messiah. It's got a lot of notes in it.

And that the Messiah Sing-along is coming is a signal that the seasons are changing. Here in Northern California, the sun's going down earlier and earlier, and we're all surprised, although it happens every year like this. But it really does feel like we're heading into the festive singing time, whether it's Christmas carols or Hanukkah songs or Händel's Messiah.

The twinkle lights are out right now for Halloween, but the holiday decorations are coming.

And I just wanted to suggest that one of the ways that you can help your own loved ones engage their minds and feel connected and get good exercise for their lungs is to invite them over for singing.

It doesn't have to be holiday music. It could be any kind of music you want. It doesn't even have to be, like, good with a capital G, singing. Just a gathering time maybe to sing an entire album that you all like, whatever that album might be.

Or to watch the Sound of Music and sing all the songs, or some other musical movie. Or invite folks over and go Christmas caroling. Go ring

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people's doorbells and sing them songs, or just stay at home and sing them.

Or use a karaoke machine. Or play your guitar or the piano. Or if you have friends who are more accomplished at making music, invite them over for like a show-and-tell evening. Singer songwriters sharing their work.

Bringing people together to sing.

Because it, it meets like those four things that we're supposed to be doing. Well, you don't have to feed them, you don't have to make it a big production. But setting aside eating good, nutritious food – engaging your mind, and socializing and exercising your body, singing takes knocks out three out of four.

And it is such a good way to relax and feel connected and feel safe in your own body and in the company of others. Even if you're not an amazing singer, whatever that might mean, when you breathe deeply and allow sound out of your body, that is a profoundly relaxing thing for your nervous system.

That can be a profoundly relaxing thing for your nervous system.

You have to let go of being afraid of doing it wrong, and just letting it be, whatever it's gonna be. But it's so good for you.

I've seen this in the elderly at the VA. I see this in my studio every week with my students who are ranging in age from eight to 75, 76.

So if I could give you a task, it would be to consider hosting a singing gathering and seeing how it goes, with just, the only intention is to be together and have fun.

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One of the things that is hard about singing is starting, is getting over that fear that it's going to be wrong or it's going to sound bad, or that it's gonna make somebody unhappy, that the world will end, that there will be some negative impact from the sound that we're making.

And how I deal with that myself is by humming, by finding a nice, easy way to use my breath and make sound with my body that isn't too loud, and that helps me feel safe and grounded.

In the show notes, you'll find a link to a short YouTube playlist that I put together, called "for humming." These are songs that are, I find really fun and easy to hum along to.

And the thing you wanna keep in mind is that the hum is gonna sound better if you take deeper breaths. When we're scared, we tend to breathe very shallowly just into the upper part of our lungs.

But if, when you go to hum, you can remind yourself, and over time train yourself to take a deeper breath, a breath that expands the center of your body and keep some space in your mouth.

Even though you're humming, your lips are closed, but your teeth don't need to touch. Your mouth can feel very full even though there's nothing in it.

So you have a, a full belly and a full mouth, and you can let some sound out.

And I find for me, just some random hums can help me calm down, feel more at home, grounded in my body, and, in a better place to start to make music.

So the playlist is there to inspire you, to support you, to give you an idea, and if you find yourself singing words, that would be great too.

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I really hope this is helpful. I hope you'll let me know if you decide to host a gathering, even if it's just inviting one friend over to sing with, to do something musical with, to hum through the playlist with.

I would love to know. I really think it's one way we can all help each other live longer, happier lives, or at the very least, stay sane in these very challenging times.

Thank you so much for listening.

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