

Ep #85: The Self-Sustaining Singer is Open for Enrollment!

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.

There are a couple of things that you should know, especially if you're listening to this in real time, which is in October of 2026.

The next cohort of the Self-Sustaining Singer, my 12-week group program, starts next Thursday, October 15th.

If you're listening to this later, sometime in '27, '28, and you've missed it, don't worry. Go to my website, mvmusik.com and sign up to get on the wait list for the next cohort.

But if you are having the good fortune to hear this episode when it's released, here's what you need to do: send me an email with GROUP in the subject line, or somewhere in the body of the email. I'm reading my email, and I – an AI bot is not reading my email, so you can be as humanly fallible with this as you want. Send me an email saying that you'd like information about the group and I'll send you a link to register.

So we start, as I said, next October 15th, and it is a 12 week program, but you know, the next 12 weeks have a bunch of holidays in them.

So we'll be meeting for six weeks from October 15th, through the Thursday before United States Thanksgiving. We'll take the Thursday of Thanksgiving off and then we'll be back for three weeks in December and we'll take Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve off, and then we'll be back for three weeks in January, from January 7th to the 21st.

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So you're actually getting almost a four-month program for the price of a three-month program. On that level, it's a bargain, but on all kinds of other levels, it's a bargain. And I wanna tell you a little bit about that by way of a story. So if it feels that this is too much of a tangent, just hang in there. I will land the plane. Trust me.

I've been wanting to talk a for a long time on the podcast about why I ask my students, “what is that like for you?” because it's a question that I ask very frequently in the course of lessons, in the course of my lifetime teaching of a particular person.

What was that like for you?

What is that like for you?

How would you describe that?

What does that feel like?

Does an image come to mind? or

Does that kind of sound have a new name? Does it feel like it's not your personality anymore? Does it feel like we should call this somebody else?

I'm asking these kinds of questions really frequently because in my own experience of learning to use my voice better for singing, I spent years not understanding how I was making the sounds that my teacher loved so much.

I would go to my lesson and I'd be, you know, run through some exercises and I'd be singing a song and I would make sounds that they didn't like, and then I'd make sounds that they did like.

And there wasn't an opportunity in the lesson really to reflect on the difference between those two things. It was just like, “that's bad, this is good.” And then I would go home and spend the week trying to do it the “good” way, but having no idea of how I did it the “good” way. And then

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I would go back to my lesson and discover that the way that I thought was the “good” way was in fact not the “good” way.

And did seem that the over the course of several months and even years, the more that I practiced on my own, the more disappointed my teacher was in me when I came to the lesson.

Not necessarily disappointed with how well I knew the music – I learned the music just fine – but like in terms of the vocal technique that the teacher was hoping to impart, it seemed like the more I worked on it on my own, the less I was getting it right.

And I changed teachers and had this repeated with a second teacher, and then changed teachers and then started with my new teacher really asking questions. By then, I had figured out that if I was going to make progress, I needed to build a map for myself of how my voice worked. I needed to build my own instruction manual.

What it took for me to sound the way my teacher wanted to – I had to figure out for myself what that required. What was the order of operations? What did it feel like? What did it sound like? How was it different than other things I had tried?

And that I was going to have to explain this to myself, with my teacher's help, but I was gonna have to explain it to myself because by then I had learned that the only person living in my body is me.

However skilled a voice teacher might be, they are never going to know what it's like to be you. They're never going to know what it's like in all the exquisite detail, what it feels and sounds like for you to make a particular sound.

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So I started asking my teacher questions, and at first, my teacher was really, wasn't very welcoming of the questions, and I think thought that I was asking questions because I was questioning his authority, sometimes.

Sometimes I wondered if he thought that I was trying to avoid an uncomfortable emotion. I wanted to talk about singing rather than actually sing, because actually singing was really scary and vulnerable feeling and I wanted to talk my way through a lesson. And I'm sure there was some of it, I'm sure there was some of that.

But after a while, I either got better at asking my questions, better at formulating my questions, and he maybe started hearing what I was trying to get at. We started understanding one another better and our lessons together became a conversation. I would make a sound and there would be a certain amount of talking about it, what that was like for me.

And I would say, okay, I feel this here. Is that what you're getting at?

And he would say yes or no. And we really developed a beautiful collaborative partnership that has helped me grow my instrument, my singing instrument, I want to say exponentially. I want to say by leaps and bounds. I don't know how you could actually measure that.

You could measure that in the objective range of notes that I'm able to easily sing, in that way for sure. But there's another axis in singing that's emotional depth and emotional vulnerability and warmth and a kind of power that isn't just about how loud you can be, but how absolutely, or maybe not absolutely, but how close to completely present you can be with your singing in the song and move people.

My voice has grown, I can't tell you how much, and it's because I finally figured out how to use it. And I figured out how to use it because I was

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able to engage in concerted reflection, intentional reflection with somebody who was outside my body, hearing my voice with expertise, who could corroborate my experience, guide me in the ways that I needed to be guided.

And so I have taken all of that and applied it to my own teaching. This is why I'm asking my students all the time, "What's that like for you? How does that feel for you? Is there a picture that we can draw? Is there a name that we can give it?"

Because I know that it can't just be "the teacher likes it so it's good, or the teacher doesn't like it, so it's bad." That's not enough information to really grow your voice.

For me, operating in that binary, "teacher likes it, it's good; teacher doesn't like it, it's bad," - when I took that home and tried to practice with it, what I didn't realize at the time was that the conditions of my singing were completely different.

When I was at home, I had to play the pattern on the piano that I wanted to sing along to, if I wanted to sing along to a pattern on the piano. I didn't have the teacher who could play it for me.

When I'm at home trying to learn, I am not just the sound maker, but I'm also trying to analyze the sound as I'm making it. I am giving myself two jobs to do at the same time.

There's a great Russian proverb that says, "You can't catch two rabbits." You have to pick one, right? When we focus on one thing, that's the way to really make progress, so it's very difficult to be the sound maker and the sound evaluator at the same time.

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What I did find though, when I started asking questions and building my internal map, that yes, it's still adding cognitive load, if you will, to play the piano and to sing the pattern, but I have gotten much better at instead of being the sound maker and then the sound evaluator, like trying to be in my body and outside my body at the same time, which is, let me know if you get that to work for you.

I learned what it felt like *in my lesson* to make the good sounds. I learned how to evaluate how I was singing, by how the sound felt as it traveled through my body. And I could remember that, independent of the space that I was singing in, independent of the other people who might be in the room, because that's a perception in my body.

And so I started practicing at home trying to recreate those sensations. Listening, yeah, but not nearly so much. When I first started studying voice, I thought it was all about how I sounded, and now I know it's more about how I feel, not just emotionally, but how the sound feels as it travels through my body.

That's what helps me find the optimum resonance for a given vowel on a given pitch. That's what helps me know whether the sound, whether my body is anchored and open enough to accommodate the sound is by how it feels. Sure, I can tell by how it sounds, whether it's anchored and open, but first, what I have closer access to, more immediate access to is how it feels to me.

What is amazing to me, having already taught one cohort of ***The Self-Sustaining Singer***, what I learned in that, round is how, how much we learn by watching other people learn.

So it's true that from the very beginning, our learning to use our voice is an experience of mimicking the people around us. That's how you first learn to talk by mimicking the grownups who are taking care of you, and

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there's a way in which this part of our human capability is hardwired for community experience. We need outside input to learn how to sing better. We need another example. If we can't hear a different way of sounding, we're not gonna make that sound. We need to hear an example to copy, to strive for.

And so in this group class, what you have access to is not just my wisdom about how the body works, how the voice works, how the psyche works with all of the singing stuff, you also have the opportunity to watch other people learn to use their body, too.

And because I'm asking everybody the same question, "How does that feel for you? What is that like for you?" You get to grow your vocabulary ever faster because somebody else is gonna have different words.

Someone else is going to have a different metaphor, a different analogy, a different character, a different way of describing their experience that provides fuel for your own map-making, for your own world building as it were, for how it is to sing better.

And what I see is that everybody makes faster progress when we do this together.

What's wonderful about doing it on Zoom is that there is a recording to refer back to, because sometimes in the moment of raising your hand and singing something and getting feedback about it, when that's happening, it's really hard. it can be really hard to take in all of the information because you're nervous, you're focusing on your singing, not on the analyzing. It's just really great to have a recording to go back to, to watch as a almost a third-person observer, and hear for yourself, the before and after and how you sounded and recall how that felt for you at the time.

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Yes, it can be really cringey to watch yourself or to re-listen to yourself, but it, the fact that we're doing the class on Zoom means that we have those resources readily available, which we wouldn't if we were doing this in person.

It's always possible to record some part of a class, but for everybody to have the equal quality of audio and video, that's just very hard to replicate in person.

The other great thing about this being on Zoom is that we can use the mute button.

So I spend, I don't know, 15 to 20 minutes of each class time introducing a concept, demonstrating exercises, presenting material that for the good of everybody. And as I do that, the students are on mute and I'm singing. And the students are on mute singing along at home. So all you hear is yourself and me.

We don't have the Zoom cacophony to deal with, which is wonderful. And if you don't know what Zoom cacophony is, thank your lucky stars. I don't wish it on anybody.

But then when it's time for questions and answers or for, you know, spotlight coaching somebody, to sing a little thing for the class and ask for my help or feedback, everybody else can be on mute and sing along with my coaching or sing along with whatever the other person is doing.

So you're not, restricted to silent participation like you would be if the class were being held in person. If we were having a group voice class in person, under no circumstances would you be requested or encouraged to sing along while somebody else was performing.

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You not even humming. No. The standard is everybody gets their moment. of everyone's full attention.

On Zoom, you have an option. You can just listen to the singing and listen to the coaching and not participate. Or if you find something, “oh wait, that's, I need to work on that, too,” you can sing along at home and make use of someone else's time, someone else's learning right there, when it's fresh.

And this just, I said it earlier, that this just accelerates, so far, seems to accelerate everyone else's learning. So if you're thinking that you're, if you're in a season of your life where you want to spend more focused attention on your voice, on your singing voice – how it sounds, and how it feels – I really wanna encourage you to enroll in ***The Self-Sustaining Singer***.

Again, we're starting next Thursday. October 15th. Class is on Zoom from 10 to 11:00 AM Pacific. Recordings are available within 24 hours. And in the these 12 weeks, I walk you through my ABCD-N framework for feeling and sounding amazing.

The basic gist of the class is to teach you how your voice works so that you can approach it compassionately with curiosity instead of fear and blame and judgment. And we spend time working on what your unique body needs in order to warm itself up.

ABCD-N stands for anchoring and opening the body; breathing just enough, in time, with ease; connecting the body to the breath, to the sound; directing the sound intentionally. And N is for noticing what is, the whole time.

When you can learn to do that ABCD: anchor and open the body;

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breathe in time, easily, just enough air; connect the body to the breath to the sound; and direct the sound, intentionally, you will be able to warm yourself up confidently, quickly and sing successfully. And you'll also be able to troubleshoot sounds that may be disappointing you in your singing.

You'll have a framework for evaluating how you're sounding and how you're making the sound, and I see that again and again build so much confidence in my students. Because then it's not, "well, the gods don't like me today, so I just, I just can't sing today because it's, it's just quote unquote, 'not my day.'"

You eliminate that because you recognize how much control you have over your voice and you know how to get to where you wanna go.

You may not become a master of all of these skills in 12 weeks, but you will have enough of them to warm yourself up confidently and to sing better than you ever have, and to be on your way.

So especially if you are singing in a community chorus or you have a garage band, or you regularly go to karaoke, if you've already got singing regularly happening in your life, this is a wonderful addition to making that time as productive and fun and growth-filled as possible.

And if you're, you don't have a place to sing, but you'd like to be singing more, this is a great place to start to learn how the thing works, build your confidence, make some really good sounds, and, learn what helps you feel the best you possibly can when you're singing.

I just think the whole thing is brilliant, if I do say so myself, and I would love for you to join me.

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So if again, if this sounds like something you're ready for, whether you're hearing this in October of 2026 or years into the future, send me an email letters@mvmusik.com. Say you're interested in the group and I'll get you on the waiting list, or I'll send you the link to register right now.

That's what I've got for you this week.

Before I go, I wanna say a little bit more about this building an internal map. I've talked about this elsewhere on the podcast, and I will endeavor to find those episodes and link them in the show notes.

It can feel a little, well, a little new, a little esoteric, a little strange to think about what something feels like inside your body. That skill is called interoception. The ability to feel something inside your body, as opposed to proprioception, which is where we are in space in relation to other things.

So this, skill of building interoception, if you wanna get started on your own, you're more than welcome. And how I would suggest doing that is by humming anything, any little song, any little snippet you want.
[MMM]

And be willing to take two or three or five minutes of humming very simply like that and noticing what you feel. [MMM]. So what I feel first is that my lips are buzzing. A little bit, there's a, I can feel the vibration in my lips, [MMM] and as I make the pitch go up, I can feel how it feels like it travels up in my head and as I make the pitch go down, [MMM] those low notes feel much lower in my body than the high notes did before.

All of these nerve endings most of the time are not attuned, to how it feels when we make sound because that is just not information the brain

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needs in order for the voice to work. Your voice works, has worked just fine with you, having no idea what it felt like. So cultivating interoceptive awareness is asking your brain to pay attention to something that it has thought was completely irrelevant, and maybe even a drag on resources.

So it will likely take several iterations, several attempts at humming before your brain is able to notice anything, or you might get the information right away. Glory, hallelujah.

Nothing's gone wrong either way, but just want you to know that if, if you hum and your first thought is, "I don't feel anything," you're normal.

Do it again. Ask yourself, ask your brain, tell your brain, "I know that this body, these body parts have nerve endings. I know they do because I am a human, and all the human bodies have nerve endings in these places. There are nerve endings inside. I can perceive, I can feel what this feels like, we just need to wake those nerve endings up."

And so you just keep asking. I think by starting with a simple hum. Because the hum is so compact. It's a very small sound, but it's in a very, happening in a very small place so it's easier to feel. I think it's a good, it's a better starting sound for developing interoceptive awareness than, singing an open vowel, like an AH.

After the hum, if you're finding success with that, or you're not and you're getting bored but you wanna try something else, try an OOH. That's an open vowel, but it's also happening in a very small space.

You can also try EE, without smiling. Don't make it a smiley-faced EE, make it a pouting EE. Try to relax the corners of your mouth. EE, that too, is a small sound but in a small area, a concentrated sound in a small

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area, and that might help wake up those inside nerve endings.

As always, if you have any questions or you run into any trouble or you think that what I'm saying is just like off the mark or has helped you a lot, please send me an email: letters@mvmusik.com.

I would love to hear from you, and if you're ready for *The Self-Sustaining Singer*, I would love to have you.

Thank you so much for listening.

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