Adaptive characteristics of group singing: perceptions from members of a choir for homeless men

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*Abstract*
There is considerable evidence to suggest that music has adaptive characteristics. Individuals use recorded music to transform the emotional landscape to coincide with transitory needs and desires. Also, music has frequently been reported to provoke uncommon emotional and physical reactions often referred to as peak experiences. In many cultures, that have limited industrial and technological development, active participation in musical activities is pervasive and all individuals are considered musical. In contrast, the musical elitism that has evolved in the Western world intimates that musical ability is specific to a talented minority. The elitist notion of musicality restricts the majority to procurers of rather than producers of music. However, experimental and theoretical sources indicate that music is an innate and universal ability and, therefore, active participation in music may have adaptive characteristics at many levels of proficiency. Positive life transformations that occurred for members of a choir for homeless men, since joining the choir, provided an opportunity to determine if group singing was a factor in promoting adaptive behaviour. A phenomenological approach utilizing a semi-structured interview was employed to explore the choristers' group singing experience. Analysis of the interviews indicated that group singing appears positively to influence emotional, social and cognitive processes. The choristers' perceptions of the adaptive characteristics of group singing fell within four principal categories: clinical-type benefits, benefits derived from audience-choir reciprocity, benefits associated with group process and benefits related to mental engagement. Active participation in singing may act to alleviate depression, increase self-esteem, improve social interaction skills and induce cognitive stimulation. The themes adhere to the tenets of flow theory which advocate the importance of mental stimulation and social interaction in increased life satisfaction. The emergent themes provide a preliminary basis for the development of a theory of the adaptive characteristics of group singing and also provide a framework for further investigation in this area.
INTRODUCTION

Anthropological evidence has demonstrated that all pre-literate peoples engaged in musical activities (cf. Alberti, 1974; Blacking, 1973; Merriam 1964; Messenger, 1958). More recently research within the psychology of music indicates that music is an innate and universal ability (Gordon, 1987, Lerdahl and Jackendoff, 1983; Sloboda, 1985; Thompson, Cuddy and Plaus, 1997). The ubiquitous use of music throughout the world and the innate and universal aspects of human musicality suggest that music may have adaptive characteristics.

ADAPTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF MUSIC

There is a corpus of research which supports the adaptive role of music in child development. Cross-culturally lullabies and play songs are used to soothe and stimulate children (Ayres, 1973; Trehub and Schellenburg, 1995; Trehub and Trainor, 1998; Suliteanu, 1979). Mothers and other care givers have a natural tendency to communicate with infants by injecting the voice with a sing-song quality referred to as motherese (Papoušek, 1996; Storr, 1992). Papoušek (1996) suggests that infants' physical and auditory responses to early melodic and rhythmic encounters may assist in cultivating nonverbal understanding between the child and individuals in the child's environment, and, similarly, Storr (1992) states that: “The crooning and cooing tones and rhythms which most mothers use when addressing babies are initially more significant in cementing the relationship between them than the words which accompany these vocalizations” (1992, p.9).

Indeed, theoretical and experimental evidence from diverse paradigms suggest that music may play a role in influencing adaptive functioning throughout the life span. From a theoretical anthropological perspective Kaemmer (1993) indicates that humans have an intrinsic drive that generates goal seeking behaviour and pursues meaningful interpretation of events for the self and meaningful interaction with the world outside the self. He suggests that musicality plays a significant adaptive role in the cognitive, physical, emotional and social processes that direct behaviour. Sears (1968), commenting on the effects of music therapy, theorizes that because of the temporal ordering of musical structure “music demands reality-ordered behaviour” at many levels including: (1) musical and verbal responses to aural stimuli, (2) the response of the body to the rhythmic aspects of music, and (3) attending and complying to the instructions of the musical director or conductor (p. 36). Similarly, Capra, speaking from a dynamic systems position, proposes that “health is a multidimensional phenomenon involving interdependent physical, psychological and social aspects” (1982, p.322). Capra proposes that since rhythmic patterns are inherent in all these systems, rhythm, and accordingly music, plays an important role in promoting wellness. From research within the clinical paradigm, Panvini (1998) postulates that singing involves the integration of psychological, psychophysiological and sociocultural components. He suggests that problems with singing may be the
result of psychological pathologies and evaluation of singing behaviours can be useful as a clinical diagnostic aid. A combination of vocal training and body awareness can be used as an effective tool to encourage introspective analysis, to treat depressive disorders, and to foster self-expression (Panvini, 1998).

Music and Emotion

The importance of music in our everyday lives is evidenced in the extent of our daily encounters with the medium. For example, Davis (1985) reports that, in the years from grade 7 to grade 12, American teens listen to music of their own choice for an average of 10 500 hours. Sloboda and O’Neill (2001) contend that day to day musical encounters are in the realm of the mundane in the sense that they accompany almost every aspect of our commonplace living routine. At the opposite end of the ordinary/special spectrum, music is one of the mediums that frequently has been attributed with accompanying or inducing highly intense or emotionally passionate experiences which lift individuals out of the world of the ordinary and transport them into the world of the special or ethereal (Adams, 1996; Gabrielsson, 2001; Maslow, 1968; Storr, 1992).

Even in the most ordinary situations listening to music is manipulated as a tool to adjust the personal environment to meet the emotional needs of the individual: “Listeners are by no means simply ‘affected’ by music but are, rather, active in constructing their ‘passivity’ to music — their ability to be moved” (DeNora, 2001, p. 169). Sloboda, O’Neill and Ivaldi (2001), as cited in Sloboda and O’Neill (2001) found that everyday encounters with music generally were adaptive in nature, that is they resulted “in participants becoming more positive, more alert, and more focussed in the present” (p. 418). In one example Sloboda and O’Neill (2001) describe how an individual uses a specific musical selection to deal with recurring depressive-type episodes:

> When I’m down I listen to this [a specific track] and go down as far as I can, then I cry, I cry deep from inside. I wallow in self-pity and purge all the gloom from my body. Then I dry my eyes, and wash my face, do my hair, put on fresh makeup, and rejoin the world (p. 421).

In this situation music is a self-administered therapeutic tool used to produce a cathartic experience that ultimately alters an unpleasant state of being.

DeNora (2000) discusses earlier research (DeNora, 1999) in which 52 women in the United States and the United Kingdom were interviewed to determine the uses of music in managing everyday life. With this group of subjects it was found that listening to music was often actively employed as a means to transform or control the personal landscape. In many instances individuals were found to manipulate their physical and emotional environments through the use of self-selected music. Such uses of music included: blocking out intrusive sounds or thoughts, changing mood, constructing an appropriate climate for a romantic
encounter, venting frustrations, and a mechanism for identity verification or identity creation. In these situations music listening became "an active ingredient in the organization of self" (p. 61).

In addition to everyday uses and responses to music, individuals quite frequently report transcendent encounters with music. Gabrielson (2001) sought to document descriptions of these transcendent-type encounters which he labelled the strong experience of music (SEM). In the SEM study participants were either interviewed about, or asked to describe in writing their most intense musical experience/s. Data from approximately 300 respondents resulted in almost 400 SEM descriptions. About 80% of the accounts represented listening episodes. Positive reactions were predominant although there were some intensely negative anecdotes as well. Gabrielson reports that "happiness, joy, elation, and bliss" were the feelings described most frequently (p. 437), and in many cases even more forcefully descriptive words and phrases such as "a kind of intoxication, rapture, or euphoria boarding on ecstasy" were employed (p. 437). These SEM disclosures indicate the highly emotional reactions that many individuals experience during musical encounters.

Cognitive Diffusion in Listening Episodes
Although it is clear that many experiences of listening to music have positive connotations, it is also true that listening episodes are frequently accompanied by mental remoteness. Sloboda, O'Neill and Ivaldi (2001) utilized the experience sampling method (ESM) to determine how people generally experience music in the context of everyday life. Individuals in the study carried electronic pagers which were programmed to send 1 signal to each participant during each 2 hour interval between 0800 and 2200. When signalled the participants were instructed to write down their most recent music listening experience. If there were no encounters with music listening in a 2 hour interval the participants were asked to write down information about the activity they were involved in when they received the signal. The results of this study indicated that whereas music listening was experienced during 44% of the 2 hour time intervals, music was the primary activity in only 2% of the intervals. This data suggests that even though there is a pervasive presence of music, the impact of the listening experience may be diluted or altered due to cognitive diffusion; also the lack of critical judgement during such episodes may result in auditory exploitation.

In this vein DeNora (2000) reports how a karaoke host uses different types of music to manipulate the mood of the patrons at a karaoke bar: "Whatever music we play they tend to respond as different individuals" [i.e. through the adoption of different personae] (p. 17). In the following example the patrons are not judicious consumers of music but are collectively acted on to construct a common reaction:
adaptive characteristics of group singing

Betty A. Bailey and Jane W. Davison

they put on a lot of love songs and then it gets a bit boring so then I slip a couple of rock "n" roll songs in or line dancing [...] then it starts to come back up again and at the end of the night if there's too many drunks shouting around and that then I say "right", I'm going to put some ballads on now to quiet it down again (p. 18).

in this instance and in others (e.g. music in shops) the mood of the individual may be manipulated to produce behaviours that correspond to commercial rather than individual interests (cf. Arendt and kim, 1993; Milliman, 1986).

flow theory and active versus passive participation

although considerable research attention has been devoted to the effects and uses of listening to music, and the diversity and complexity of the listening experience (cf. Bull, 2000; DeNora, 2000; Hargreaves and North, 1999; Sloboda and O'Neill, 2001), there remains a void in the literature concerning the effects of making music, especially at the amateur level. one theory outside academic musical paradigms that may provide insights into the importance of active as compared to passive involvement is flow theory developed by Csikszentmihalyi (1997). flow theory evolved from years of research investigating how individuals set about living their day to day lives and the level of satisfaction derived from the "content of experience" (p. 8). based on data accumulated from thousands of participants, flow theory indicates that life satisfaction is enhanced through experiences that provide active involvement and mental absorption, whereas passive activities result in mental entropy and dissatisfaction with the quality of life. according to Csikszentmihalyi meaningful life demands focussed attention and when attention is directed on a sufficiently complex task we experience total mental absorption or "flow"; "because of the total demand on psychic energy, a person in flow is completely focussed. there is no space in consciousness for distracting thoughts, irrelevant feelings. self-consciousness disappears, yet one feels stronger than usual" (p. 31).

experiencing flow is not simply the pursuit of happiness but the pursuit of experiencing life through the maximum utilization of mental energy. for instance, we may feel happy watching television, going to the movies or during a myriad of other entertaining activities, but on reflection these passive activities often leave an unsettling sense of life wasted. in contrast, when time is spent in productive and creative endeavours happiness may be delayed, but on completion of the task a variety of positive feelings may be experienced in addition to happiness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

another consideration addressed in flow theory is the importance of social interaction in promoting emotional health. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) proposes that social isolation encourages distracting and distorted thoughts and contributes to the development of emotional disorders. his research indicates that people experience more negative feelings when they are alone, and that negative feelings dissipate in the company of others. people suffering from chronic depression and eating...
disorders have been found to have similar mood characteristics as healthy individuals except when they are alone. In general people report that “they feel less happy, less cheerful, less strong, and more bored, more passive, more lonely when alone” (p. 90). Also, suicide rates have been found to be higher in occupations that are physically or emotionally isolating.

Whereas loneliness facilitates psychic entropy, social encounters (even at the most routine level, such as greeting a neighbour) require orderly and directed attention that is similar to, though not as intense as, experiencing flow. When people are alone and, at the same time, are not occupied in an activity that demands a considerable portion of their mental attention, thoughts turn inward and can become haphazard and distorted. These inward thoughts often centre on deficiencies and worries, such as feeling unpopular, unpaid bills and problems with children or partners. Preoccupations such as these lead to negative self-assessment and dissatisfaction with life in general (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

FLOW THEORY AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN GROUP SINGING
Flow theory indicates that active participation and mental engagement promote learning through the constant mental assessment that occurs during the activity. Dedicating energy to the cognitive process enables the individual to realize increased levels of ability (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). In group singing there is continual feedback concerning note, rhythm and pitch accuracy, proper pronunciation of words and the blend of the various sections. Each rendition of a song conveys new information which may be applied in subsequent repetitions resulting in a sense of progress, achievement, and an increase in self-esteem. In addition to the cognitive component, group singing also provides participants with opportunities for social engagement. As suggested in flow theory, social engagement provides opportunities to direct attention away from the self. Perhaps it is because of this duality of function (both cognitive and social stimulation) that participation in musical activities has been an integral component of many primitive cultures. Therefore the effects of active participation in a musical activity, such as group singing, may provide opportunities to experience the positive effects of mental stimulation and social engagement as described in flow theory.

AMATEUR SINGING
Enthusiasm for group singing by nonprofessionals is evidenced in the existence of large numbers of amateur choirs. The ability and training of the members of these choirs vary considerably, with numerous of the participants having had very little or no formal music instruction. But regardless of the level of training, singing is so important in the lives of many of these individuals that they remain choir members into their very late senior years, even when the quality of the singing voice has deteriorated considerably and the effort required to attend practices and performances is quite demanding for the aged person. The devotion to singing and the joy received
from singing by amateur choristers suggest that the activity provides a form of gratification that engenders extraordinary dedication. The significance of the choral experience for some singers is clearly demonstrated in the insightful testimonies of three octogenarians who each have been faithful participants in the same church choir for approximately 60 years (Adams, 2000).

Even though many individuals participate in amateur choirs, numerous others remain silent where any form of public singing is concerned. This avoidance behaviour is possibly a by-product of the elitist view of musicality that has developed in Western culture. Whereas in some primitive cultures all members of the culture are considered musical and actively participate in musical performances (Blacking, 1973; Messenger, 1958), in Western culture there is a widely held view that musical ability is specific to a talented minority endowed with a genetic predisposition to excel in music (Sloboda, Davidson and Howe, 1994). The popular presumption that only a small portion of the population is truly musical confines the majority to passive (other-generated) rather than active (self-generated) involvement in music (Blacking, 1973; Pascale, 2000).

SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES
Anecdotal evidence suggests that music directors and educators have sometimes been insensitive to the natural inclination of individuals, regardless of level of musical ability, to be involved in the process of making music. In an attempt to understand the singing problems of a group of her 7 year old pupils, Knight (1995) interviewed the parents of the afflicted children. Of the 8 parents interviewed, 7 reported that before the age of 10 they had been informed through choral directors that they did not have enough talent to sing. All had accepted the certainty of the determination, yet all of them wished they could participate in singing. As adults they avoided singing to or with their children as they believed that their children might be musically tarnished by the non-musicality of their parents. It appears that in this example, which is similar to the anecdotes of many non-singers, the elitist notion of musicality, and the resulting expectation to produce impeccable performances resulted in a lack of concern for the personal benefits of inclusion in the process of music making (Paterson, 2000).

The above evidence illustrates the importance of the leader/group fit in creating a positive environment in which to experience one's musicality. The general social psychological literature indicates that a successful group experience is often achieved through a prudent balance between individual and group needs. It is important for individuals to have the opportunity to express ideas, yet it is also important to have a group leader who can effectively wield authority when a homogeneous resolution is not available (Brown, 1986).

Similar to the general social psychological literature, research investigating the social dynamics of small instrumental ensembles suggests that while it is important for the group leader to be democratic and decisive, it is also essential for individual
group members to perceive that both their ability and opinions are respected by the leader and the other players. Successful groups also were found to be rule orientated. The establishment of well defined rules for dealing with differences of opinion conserved time and minimized conflict (Murningham and Conlon, 1991). Strouse (1987) found that the personality of the conductor and his/her sympathetic relationship with the ensemble were necessary components in ensuring an inspirational performance. In the choral field, Mudrick (1998) investigated the success generating attributes of four exceptional high school choir programs in south central Pennsylvania. The success of these choirs was found to be related to student, program and director criteria: (1) Students' motivation was related to competency and sufficient rehearsal time, as well as social interaction with other choir members. (2) The choral programs were challenging and diverse, thereby sustaining interest and incentive. (3) The directors were dynamic in their approach and forthright in their assessment of the students. However, the most important attributes of the choral director from the perspective of the students were humour and sincere concern for the choir members.

The above research pertains to musicians, whether amateur or professional, who have achieved considerable performance skill. In recent research (Bailey and Davidson, 2002), 84 amateur choral singers were asked to complete a pilot survey related to the effects of listening to music and the effects of group singing. Of the respondents 40 had never had instrumental lessons and 62 had never had vocal lessons. The mean years of instrumental training for the sample was 2.49 years and the mean years of voice training was 0.81 years. In one survey question the participants were asked to rate on a 5-point scale the importance of the personality of the choral director compared to his/her directing technique. The results indicated that 53.1% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the personality of the choir director was more important than his/her directing technique, 9.9% were uncertain, and 37.0% disagreed or strongly disagreed. These results coincide with those of Mudrick (1998) and suggest that the leaders personality appears to be a very important feature of the quality of the musical experience for the participants.

**Active participation in group singing**

The question remains if participating in group singing may promote adaptive behaviour and enhance life-satisfaction. Recently, Clift and Hancox (2001) conducted two studies with members of a university college choral society to determine members' perceptions of benefits related to active participation in singing. In the first study 84 participants completed a questionnaire that attempted to extract information about personal and health benefits derived from singing. A content analysis of the choristers' responses indicated that they believed singing had positive effects on their social, emotional, physical and spiritual lives. The second study employed a structured survey, developed from the information gathered in the first study, to collect data on the benefits of singing. The results from 91 choir
and opinions are respected by the group. Such groups also were found to be rule bound for dealing with differences of opinion (Cross and Conlon, 1991).

The conductor and her/his sympathetic interaction with each component in ensuring an environment for student development (Kudrick (1998) investigated the nature of the relationships between groups and school CHOIR programs in south eastern United States. It was found to be related to student, instructor, and competency orientation with other choir members. It was also found that sustained interest in the choir approach and forthright in the choir was the most important attributes of leadership. Students were humour and sincere and are considered as an amateur or professional, who in a recent research (Bailey and Harrison, 2000) asked to complete a pilot survey to determine the effects of group singing. Of the 50 students and 62 had never had vocal training. The average age for the sample was 2.49 years and 5.8 years. In one survey question the importance of the personality in the conducting technique. The results indicated that the personality of the conducting technique, 9.9% were agreed. These results coincide with the belief that personality appears to be a very important aspect for the participants.

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The availability of a choir comprised completely of individuals who were experiencing or had experienced homelessness provided an unusual and expedient opportunity to investigate the possible adaptive characteristics of group singing with a sample of participants who were removed from elitist environs. The Homeless Choir was established in Montreal, Canada, December 1996 through the efforts of a young man who volunteered at a busy soup kitchen. He began to surmise that his volunteer work, which centred around feeding the patrons of the soup kitchen, failed to provide the homeless with an incentive to change their bleak circumstances. He thought it would be more rewarding to help the homeless find a way to help themselves.

The idea to start a choir with the homeless germinated from his experience as a chorister and the joy he felt while singing. He hoped that the destitute men at the soup kitchen might also benefit from choral singing. However, this individual was not a music specialist and had no previous experience as a choir director. He clearly indicated in a pamphlet that he distributed to hundreds of homeless people that talent or previous musical experience were not necessary criteria for membership in the choir. After an initial slow start with only 3 members, the size of the Choir eventually stabilized at approximately 20 members. At the time of this study there were 17 active members (1 member was in hospital recuperating from

As one part of a study on the effects of singing on immune system response Beck, Cesario, Yousefi and Enamoto (2000) developed a 28 item, 5-point Likert-scale referred to as the Singers Emotional Experience Scale (SEES) to determine emotional responses to singing. The subjects were 41 members of a professional chorale. The majority of the participants agreed or agreed very much with items related to many positive aspects of singing including: singing in very important to me; singing gives me a kind of high; singing has made me healthier; and singing has contributed to my personal well being (p. 98). The majority of the participants disagreed or disagreed very much with one-third of the negative scale items including: singing generally lowers my mood; and I don't usually feel strong emotion when singing (p. 98). The results of the SEES indicates that the participants perceived singing as a very emotionally positive activity.

Although the Clift and Hancox (2001) and Beck et al. (2000) studies provide important information in an area of research that has largely been ignored, both investigations involved singers in privileged environments where membership may be compatible with the elitist perspective and, therefore, the results may not be representative of the ability and attitudes of the general population.

This study

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heart surgery and 1 member was asked to leave because of unacceptable behaviours related to substance abuse).

Various of the Choir members were plagued by emotional disorders, alcohol and drug abuse, chronic unemployment, unsuccessful relationships, and unfortunate life circumstances. Most of these men had spent many nights sleeping on the streets, often in the rain and snow, living like animals. They were societal outcasts with little hope of leading productive and fulfilling lives. Since joining the Choir many of these previously destitute individuals have experienced remarkable transformations in their lives.

The Homeless Choir’s musical journey began with a repertoire of 4 Christmas carols which they sang for passers by in a subway station. Since that time they have performed at more than 850 concerts in local, national and international venues. They have appeared on television broadcasts and in large auditoriums in the company of celebrities. The Choir has made a number of CDs which they sell at performances. They sing for children in the schools where they also act as anti-drug ambassadors. In November 1998 the choir travelled to Paris where they encouraged street people of that city to start a similar initiative. Following the Paris expedition they took a bus trip to New York City where they performed at the Lincoln Centre and the United Nations Visitor’s Lobby. The Choir received acclaim in the French newspaper Le Figaro and in the Canadian magazine Elm Street (McKay, 2000). Even though they have a very hectic schedule they continue to sing in the subway stations where they first performed for the public.

The Choir now sings a more extensive and eclectic repertoire which includes: French Canadian folk songs, popular music, hymns and a few more challenging works such as Beethoven’s Ode to Joy. But the popularity of the Choir is not related to the excellence of their performances, as by Western standards they are not accomplished singers. Rather, it seems that it is their ability to reveal both the frailty and resilience of the human condition that has made them popular.

The Choir’s initiatives have reached beyond their musical offerings. In the Fall of 2000, the Homeless Choir started a political party called the Parti de Rien (Party of Nothing) and raised enough money to qualify a member of the choir to run as a candidate in the November, 2000 federal election in Canada. This political gesture gave the homeless a representative in the first federal election in Canada in which the homeless have been permitted to vote (Brownstein, 2000).

At the time of the interviews all of the choir members were living in permanent housing. Some have found part time work and some have been able to form successful relationships. Even though the experience of homelessness was a requirement for membership in the choir, participants are encouraged to remain with the choir after they have become established in more stable living circumstances. In this way, those who have been able to make changes in their lives can be examples for others who continue to struggle to find direction. Also, many of the choir members grapple with the drug addictions that have plagued their lives.
for many years; continued involvement in the choir provides them with an incentive to avoid alcohol and illegal drugs. If choir members are suspected of “using” at the time of a rehearsal or performance they are not permitted to participate at that time. However, they are not permanently banned from the choir; they are welcomed to the next practice or performance with the condition that they are not “using”.

Because of the accomplishments and persisting success of the choir over a three-year period, it was considered that the members of the choir might be able to communicate insightful information relating to the effects of the group singing experience. The following research sought to determine if utilization of the singing voice, through active participation in group singing, may render some psychological or physiological advantage. It was hypothesized that the analysis of the perceptions of the choristers might provide emergent themes that could begin to form a foundation for further studies in this area by: (1) permitting comparisons between different groups of choristers and/or (2) generating a framework for the development of quantifiable investigative instruments in group singing research.

**Method**

**Basis for adopting a phenomenological approach**

The paucity of research which addresses the effects of amateur group singing warrants that any investigation into this activity must begin with the experience of those involved in singing at the amateur level as the experiences of professional singers are not representative of the singing practices of the general population. Of course, the Homeless Choir investigated in this study is not a representative sample of the general population in terms of life style and socioeconomic status, but their musical training and ability may be more comparable to that of the populace than that of professional or highly trained musicians.

It was considered that a phenomenological approach, as discussed in Smith (1999), would be the most appropriate format for this investigation. Similar to the focus of Smith’s research with pregnant women, the purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of the participants as perceived by them. Also, because of the sensitive and marginalized nature of the homeless condition, it was considered important to engage the choristers in such a way that they would regard themselves as an integral part of the process rather than merely objects of investigation. The qualitative format utilized by Smith seemed likely to achieve this objective.

The initial contact with the choir was achieved through correspondence with their director. To ensure that the dignity of the choir members would not be compromised, the director requested that the researchers consider certain sensitive issues that tend to be more salient with people living in marginalized circumstances. For example, the director did not want the choristers to be pressed to discuss issues surrounding family circumstances, drug addiction and mental illness if that line of
questioning made them uncomfortable. To gain final approval for the endeavour, the choir director required an outline of the interview to take to an administrative committee of the sponsoring mission. Once the project was approved, the director approached the membership of the choir and asked for volunteers to participate in an interview for a study in singing; seven of the choristers agreed to be interviewed.

A fairly comprehensive semi-structured interview was employed as the research instrument to determine the choristers' perceptions regarding participation in the Choir. The flexibility of the semi-structured interview allowed the members of the choir to have some control in the direction of the interviews. For example, if the content of a question was too embarrassing or too emotionally charged for the comfort level of the participant, it was possible to change the course of the conversation without jeopardizing the flow of questions as may have been the case in a more structured format. However, the interview was divided into five sections (see Appendix) and it was the investigators' intent to attempt to explore the topics contained in each section with each participant unless there was evidence of discomfort for the participant: Section 1 probed the early life of the members of the choir. In this section questions were directed toward family life, school life, and the extent of musical involvement in the early years; Section 2 investigated education, employment, and events that led to the descent into homelessness; Section 3 examined the decision to join the choir and the choristers' first impressions of the choir; Section 4 focused on the choristers' perceptions of the experience of singing; and Section 5 explored the progression of the success of the choir and the resulting personal changes. To avoid interviewer bias, care was taken to frame questions in a neutral fashion. For example: "How do you feel when you are singing?" seemed less likely to beg the question than "Do you feel good when you are singing?".

Each interview took about one hour and fifteen minutes. The interviews were tape recorded with the permission of the participants. Subsequently each interview was transcribed verbatim. The phenomenological accounts resulted in approximately 100 pages of material that informed the investigators about the life events of the participants, their level of emotional and social functioning, and their perceptions relating to membership in the choir and the effects of singing. The transcripts were read and scrutinized many times by the participating authors to discover emergent themes that might help to explain the apparent changes in the lives of these men and the role, if any, of the use of the singing voice in affecting that change.

- Participants. The participants were 7 of the 17 active members of the all male Homeless Choir. Because the Choir is sponsored by a Catholic mission for men, membership in the choir is restricted to males. The ages of the participants ranged from 45 to 62 years (m = 52.14 years). All of the participants had experienced episodes of homelessness that extended over periods of a few months to 11 years. Of the 7 participants: 6 had no formal music training, 6 had participated in group singing in elementary school and/or in church, and 1 had been a member of a
military band and had received some music lessons in xylophone and voice during his employment with the armed forces.

The interviewer spent several hours with the Choir members prior to conducting the interviews to establish a comfortable level of rapport. During this meeting it was possible to observe not only those who had agreed to be interviewed but also those who had declined. One chorister had a laryngectomy and as a result used an electrolarynx to speak and sing. He seemed a bit embarrassed when talking with strangers although he appeared to be quite comfortable singing with the choir. Aside from this one conspicuous physical impediment, there was evidence of several other factors which may have contributed to non-participation including: (1) severity of mental illness, (2) extreme shyness, and (3) distrust of the process.

Two comfortable rooms in the mission house which sponsors the Choir provided a familiar environment for the interview sessions. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form requesting permission to use the information contained in the interview for purposes of publication in the academic forum. The contents of the consent form, which explained the nature of the study and the participant's right to discontinue at any time, were read to each participant before the interview began. The choir members were assured that their names and other identifying information would remain confidential.

It is important to note that the participants were native French speakers and, therefore, any speech idiosyncrasies that appear in the document are related to being interviewed in English, their second language. However all those interviewed had excellent English comprehension skills.

- Documentation techniques. Throughout the paper, when referring to direct quotations and personal information from the transcripts, the names of the participating choristers have been replaced by pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Also, the names of places and friends or associates of the Choir members have been replaced by fictitious names in the interests of privacy. When these later changes occurred the substitutes were [bracketed]. Pauses that occurred in the transcripts while the participants were deliberating on their replies were indicated by two dots (...). Word repetitions that occurred while the participants were searching for the correct English word resulted in rather cumbersome sentences. For the convenience of the reader these repetitions were omitted and replaced with three dots (....), when these omissions occurred at the end of a sentence four dots were used (.....). On some occasions sentences or parts of sentences that were superfluous or redundant were omitted to ensure a parsimonious presentation of the material supplied by the participants; these omissions, indicated by [ ], did not alter the interpretation of the material. Occasionally it was necessary to clarify the meaning of a sentence, in these incidents the clarification appears (in italics inside parentheses). The quotations were not altered in any other way.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DIRECTOR

Before discussing the perceptions of the choristers regarding group singing, it may be instructive to discuss the influence of the director and his leadership style in relation to the success of the choir. Similar to the literature on successful ensembles, the Homeless Choir operates within a rule based structure. Although the rules for this Choir may be quite different from the rules of a more professional ensemble, in both circumstances the rules function to maintain concord among the members.

Bernard: *(Having rules)* yes that helps, that helps, and we have to keep the professional image, and it is known we have such problems, because any human being .. any .. we are all different, everybody think different, has their own way to do things.

Henri: Oh yeh there are rules [ ] that we dress properly and uh not to swear, not to injure people, things like that you know. [ ] Yeh, no drinking.

Louis: We got to respect ourselves and respect all people, that is the only rule.

Simon: The first reason for the existence of the Choir is to help the homeless to get off the street and to come and sing. It takes a lot of courage, and this is very important too. They know very well that in order to join the Choir, they have to stop drinking or doing drugs, so it's a bit scary for them. *(And later)* The rules are quite strict, no drinking, no drugs, and if we don't obey we are forced to leave.

In addition to the rules which provide a stable environment, there are other, more person related aspects of the director which appear to contribute to the successful continuation of this unique group. The Choir members have tremendous respect and affection for their director as is illustrated in the following comments:

Henri: He has a lot of patience, he is spiritual.

Louis: I would say he is a spiritual genius, to have an idea like that to uh to, to take music and songs to help people get out of their problems.

Louis: I appreciate him and respect him very much even ... if I don’t think like him, I respect him.

Patrice: *The director* is fundamental, fundamental *(to the success of the choir)* [ ] First he is my friend, no question, second I have a fantastic respect for this man.

Raoul: *Our director* has spent numerous hours talking to those guys *(Choir members)* in order to reassure them and give them self-confidence.

Simon: *Our director* has a very big heart and he loves everyone in the Choir. And we love him too, I love him very much. I don’t question what [he] decides. If he decides that we’re going somewhere and even if I don’t feel like it, I go anyway because [he] is a good man. Just for [him], I will go. So, *our director* is the soul of the Choir, and that's very important.

Here we see evidence of the leadership attribute that appeared to be most important in the literature *(Mudrick, 1998; Strouse, 1987)*, that is the genuine concern that the director has for the members of the choir. But regardless of the
mutual affection and respect between the choristers and their director there is also evidence of considerable discord:

Bernard: Should I say something? [Our director] sometimes is hard and I think he has his favourite people [ ]. But I think sometime, [he] is funny .. he do not accept our opinion. [And later] [Our director], he choose his own music. We don't have much choice you know. He arrive with this, we sing this.

Henri: I used to be more aggressive with [the director], he was not refined as a musician, but for him it is not only musical it is spiritual too, and I didn't know that, and really I didn't figure it like that ... me, I was just thinking about music.

Henri: We all got together and [ ] we quit him [ ]. He wanted to administrate us (the money earned from performances), so I didn't like that [ ] so we had a vote, so I got all the guys and kind of made it like an election[,] so he didn't like that because there were thirteen votes for us and six for his side, so he quit. He went away, he didn't like the idea of not being appreciated. [ ] Well the Sister (one of the administrators of the mission) got him back [ ] she gave him the musical part and she took charge of the finances.

Henri: Yeh, but it's the truth, like we do express our feelings but nothing change, it doesn't change any of his feelings, we are as kids, we have suggestions but he doesn't take any suggestions, he is a little bit a dictator.

Patrice: The Choir is much more than [the director] himself, I often say the Choir is much more than each member of the Choir [ ] the Choir is much more than that. [And later] I am not always with what he does, what he says.

Raoul: What's extraordinary about that guy is that he is very sensitive. He's a child that is unable to meet a girl. He is homeless as much as any of us because he too has a missing part and he too needs each of us so that we can form a solid core and this is what's very strong in the Choir.

The above comments illustrate that the director's leadership style does not completely adhere to the characteristics of effective leadership noted above (Brown, 1996; Murningham and Conlon, 1991). For example, this director is perceived to have a dictatorial rather than a democratic approach; the opinions of the choristers concerning repertoire do not appear to be given serious consideration; there is an impression that the men are treated like children rather than capable adults; it is felt that the director favours certain members; and the choristers perceive a weakness or flaw in the director that eventually may affect their respect for him. However, the Homeless Choir has many atypical characteristics, and the behaviours the participants developed on the streets may be inappropriate in more normal social settings. Therefore it may be essential for the director to demand control of most aspects of the choral project until the Choir members can prove themselves in the social environment of the larger society.

The role of the director's leadership style to the overall success of the choir remains ambiguous, but the choristers believe that singing has acted as a behavioural change agent. The choristers' perceptions of the benefits derived from group singing
were found to fall within four main categories: (1) benefits that appeared to be similar to outcomes derived from clinical therapy; (2) beneficial effects that were attributed to reciprocity between the choir and the audience; (3) benefits related to group participation; and (4) benefits derived from directing mental energy on a specific task. The evidence for the basis of the development of these themes follows.

CLINICAL-TYPE THERAPEUTIC RESPONSES TO GROUP SINGING

The reports of the Choir members who volunteered to be interviewed indicated that the experience of singing in the Choir had therapeutic benefits that appear to be similar to the desired outcomes of clinical therapy. For example, Henri had many burdens in his early life; he was afflicted with emotional problems and alcohol addiction. He had early aspirations to be a singer but his family’s poverty and his own unsettled nature and lack of direction prevented him from pursuing this goal. Henri describes his troubled feelings in several statements:

I went a little bit crazy at times in my life.
After I joined the air force, I travel a lot, I travel all the time ... you know I was trying maybe to forget, who knows, I was not at ease you know.
I didn’t know anything then, didn’t know to talk to somebody, I was too young.
I was never taught or advised or anything, nobody ever told me right or wrong, so most of the time ... when I started working I did all the wrong things.

But even in those early and troubled years singing provided a source of comfort:

When I was kind of sad I sing all the time, I forgot everything .. when I know trouble I start singing and forget about my troubles, that’s how it worked.

Later in life, during a period of extreme anguish due to the death of his two-year-old child his thoughts returned to a career in singing:

Well, once I lost my baby [ ] I said to her (his wife) maybe I got to quit smoking, I'm going to do something with my singing ... but I never ... realized it would ... feel good like that, singing.

For Henri, the unbearable sadness that accompanied the loss of his child may have aroused a desire to return to the one thing in life that had provided comfort during previous times of sadness. The notion to return to singing may have been an unconscious attempt to find an emotional release mechanism that could reestablish the internal balance that was disrupted by grief. Several comments made by Henri refer to the stabilizing aspects of singing:

When we perform, just in the subway sometimes, I don’t feel like going, but after I go I feel so good you know, it refreshes you.
I would practice eight hours a day I like it so much, so when there’s no practice I don’t feel good ... I’m not the only one, we need it now, it’s nuts you know, we need it.
It is a therapy I think myself.
Raoul’s life was also filled with many traumas. He has suffered with emotional problems since he was a teenager and he continues to exhibit the characteristics of extreme paranoia. He has had two failed marriages and has lost the right to have contact with his daughter. But Raoul believes that singing with the Choir has given him emotional and physical relief:

For me it’s very therapeutic as before coming here I was in very bad shape emotionally.
(I have found) a way out of my traumas. Because if you always live in the past it’s not good.
Some of us are so uncomfortable, we talk about this one and that one and we never talk
about the real thing, you know.
These days, I suffer from arthritis in the knees, but the minute the music starts I don’t feel
my arthritis anymore.
The emotional part of it will last eight to twenty hours, you know, and that’s worth a lot
of money.
For me it is a drug.

In statements that are analogous to those of Henri and Raoul, Patrice also
discussed the healing attributes of the singing experience. For almost 25 years Patrice
has been haunted with feelings of regret. He believed that he had disappointed his
Mother by not pursuing the career path she had wanted him to follow:

Patrice: My Mother I think she, she always wanted to be a physician herself. She couldn’t do it because of the war, [ ] She didn’t have that, that uh necessity of being a physician, see what I mean. [ ] she never said that, she never expressed that, but I felt it. [ ] You feel somewhere you have to do some more, you know, something like that. I, I don’t hold nothing against her but I think [ ] that she included something in myself [ ] a kind of a behaviour that if you wanted to have, to get some attention, get some love, get some thanks whatever, you know, you have to do, you have to be smart, you have to be fun, you have to be good, you have to be well expressing, what ever.. [ ] I tell you that I chose being in the Choir, [ ] this was the first time in my life that I chose something uh, uh directly for me, for my own purposes, for my own life.

Patrice maintains that singing in the choir has provided him with a cathartic
experience that has released him from the guilt he carried with him for so many
years:

The song Mon Mere Chanta Toujours, My Mother Was Always Singing, when I learned (that song) I needed three days, I was crying, that’s all, because it was something that was not
fixed with my Mother, and I said oh wow, phew, OK now I can live,... I can know when I
sing it, I live it, the expression doesn’t hurt me anymore, ... I fixed that, you express, you
cry... you are expressing it, and that’s what people feel, they feel this emotion, this therapy
that happened on me. When I sing, whenever I learn music, whenever I’m in ... the
rehearsal, [ ] and if I sing in a concert or just with friends, I do something I like and [ ] I’m
proud of myself I’m .. contented, I’m happy with what I did.
This incident appears to be similar to the purging episode described above (Sloboda and O’Neill, 2001), except in Patrice’s case it does not seem to be an habitual behaviour used to deal with periodic depressive episodes, but rather a single occurrence that allowed Patrice to move forward.

Another chorister, Louis, discussed the hardships of a dysfunctional family life. His father was physically abusive to his mother and, consequently, Louis was removed from his home and put into an orphanage at the age of 4 and, eventually, into foster care at the age of 12. Louis reported that throughout his life he struggled with shyness, low self-esteem, emotional problems and alcoholism. Like Henri, Louis had desired to be an entertainer but his extreme shyness and emotional imbalance prevented him from singing in public:

I always love to sing but at that time I was too shy ... to sing, I ... had practically no confidence in myself, I had none at all, and so I start to drink because of that problem. I was not able to talk to people uh naturally without having a drink ....
I was partially ash out of the map uh emotionally ....

It took many years for Louis to develop the courage to sing for an audience, but through his participation in the Choir he has found a release from his depression:

Physically, mentally it’s different as day and night (comparing singing to not singing), if I don’t sing during the day I feel I’m depressed, but if I sing there’s something magic in me, I do what I love to do and that is magic.
I’ll die if I don’t sing, I would go depressed if I don’t sing.
Usually we sing at night, I’m so high because of having singing [] I’m on a trip, it’s a drug for me, it’s a real drug, a natural drug.

Louis refers to both the physical and mental changes that occur while he is singing. The terminology he uses to portray his feelings during these times — magic, trip, natural drug — are indicative of the heightened or transcendent experiences referred to as flow by Csikszentmihalyi (1997), as special experiences with music (SEM) by Gabrielson (2001), and as peak experiences by Maslow (1968).

Raoul believes that, not only himself, but all the Choir members have benefited emotionally from the restorative powers of singing:

But you see, there are 19 of us here who are like that (emotionally disturbed) and we’re not in the asylum. Do you understand? We’ve made it. Now, you take a guy out of the Choir and the next day he’ll be terribly depressed.
These are homeless sick people who are doing quite well.

Simon also explains his perceptions of the power of music to affect change for himself and others:

Since I started with the Choir, it’s like a second life for me. [] Music changed my life and it’s starting to change my thoughts, my way of thinking I guess, and the way I act. I am less aggressive and more sociable, kinder; I know I have a long way to go but I realize that
Adaptive characteristics of group singing

BETTY A. BAILEY AND JANE W. DAVIDSON

The episode described above (Sloboda, 1959) does not seem to be an habitual occurrence, but rather a single episode of a dysfunctional family life. Consequently, Louis was rejected at the age of 4 and, eventually, throughout his life he struggled with addiction and alcoholism. Like Henri, he experienced extreme shyness and emotional pain, 

...to sing, I ... had practically no interest to drink because of that problem. I was having a drink ....

...to sing for an audience, but it was a release from his depression:

(comparing singing to not singing), if I sing there's something magic in me, ... singing.

... singing [ ] I'm on a trip, it's a drug that occur while he is singing.

... during these times — magic, trip, ... transcendent experiences referred to as experiences with music (SEM) bySlow (1968).

Choir members have benefited from singing (emotionally disturbed) and we're not alone, you take a guy out of the Choir and he's well.

Music of music to affect change for the best.

... to me, [ ] it changed my life and to me, singing I guess, and the way I act. I am a long way to go but I realize that when I started in the Choir, I was very RRRRRRR, I was bad. Now, I'm not as bad as I was so this means that the music has changed my character. It has made me a more gentle person. And now, I love to sing. I realize that music should have been part of my life a long time ago; maybe my life would have been better and I would have been a happier person. But, it's never too late. So far, music has greatly helped me, socially, emotionally and it also has opened many doors.

There are several in the Choir ... who have succeeded in their lives because of the music. [ ] so people are changing their lives around because of the Choir; it is giving people hope and happiness.

The testimonials of Henri, Raoul, Patrice, Louis and Simon suggest that these choristers believe that singing has restorative therapeutic properties that appear to promote emotional and physical health. There are indications that singing has helped these men experience joy, contentment, increased self-esteem, pride and relief from physical complaints. Some have been able to explore and heal emotional wounds that have tormented them for many years.

Czikszentmihalyi (1997) reports that both physical and mental health are improved through filling time with meaningful activities that require mental stimulation or social interaction. Evidence reveals that people complain of more physical and emotional illnesses on weekends than during the work week (Ferenczi, 1950, as cited in Czikszentmihalyi, 1997). Also people are less focussed on symptoms of illnesses when they are in the company of others than when they are alone. Czikszentmihalyi suggests that this condition may be more prevalent for people like those who are members of the Homeless Choir:

... being alone affects most those individuals who have the fewest resources: those who have been unable to get an education, who are poor, single, or divorced. Pathological states are often invisible as long as the person is with others; they take effect mostly when we are alone (p. 42).

Devoting attention to singing rather than self-obsession may have created an organic atmosphere that contributes to improvement in both mental and physical health for the members of the choir. To this point the inquiry has focussed on the effects of singing on the individuals and the group as isolated entities, but much of the Choir's singing occurs in the public forum which includes an element of audience-choir reciprocity. The interviews revealed that the relationship with the audience influences the psychological and social impact of the group singing experience.

ADAPTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF RECIPROCITY BETWEEN THE CHOIR AND THE PUBLIC

For many individuals encounters with partners, children, friends and co-workers provide ample opportunities for the exchange of shared emotion. However, this is not the case for the homeless who generally are estranged from normal social
networks (cf. Rossi, 1989; Wright, 1989). The following comments indicate the sense of disconnection and despair felt as the result of the homeless condition:

Louis: Uh I never felt I, I had no friends, I had a lot of friends, but uh I was not able to, to uh share my emotion with them, there was a part of me that was very... isolated.
Patrice: It's (homelessness) an awful life [ ] well it's a life when I think you are not connected to yourself, when you're not connected to your emotions, when you just live for... existing, but you don't really live... you don't feel... (you are) disconnected from your feelings... you have no friends to uh, I mean real friends, that understand you, that you can talk with. You just meet people that are like you, that are in the same mission. [ ] most of those people in missions are disconnected from their own emotions, that is the only way to survive.
Raoul: What happens is that — it's not that we get along well together, we're all individualists. The people here have difficulty socializing amongst themselves on the outside.
A homeless person is a person who is alone.
Raoul: When a homeless person is with another person communication is seldom good.
Raoul: I'm a bit of a loner. I have difficulty joining groups and I find that others (in the choir) have that same difficulty as well. I try to be sociable and patient. You know the choir is not just about singing, it covers a lot of aspects of life.
Raoul: A lot of them (homeless people) have behaviour problems. For my part it is something that I work on a lot. I've worked a lot with people, helping them and at the same time helping myself, trying to be in harmony with myself. I guess it's like music.

The above comments expose the loneliness and isolation that some of these men have experienced because of their inability to connect to others in meaningful relationships. However, some choir members believe that through singing they are able to establish an emotional connection with their audience:

Bernard: The Choir gives me lots of joy, because I give, ... I give to the others, I try to sing to tell them you have a chance, ... there is hope for you and when I give joy to the people I feel happy, I feel good because I gave to them.
Henri: When you sing in front of the public you tend to express something, you know, you make them feel something, you want to give something that you have, you know like... it is kind of a relationship with the people.
Jean: [ ] all the love [ ] we receive from there we will bring it with us for another place, and we are sharing that love with someone else, that's the most important thing.
Patrice: I always believed in the choir and I always believed that it's a kind of a mission [ ] that we have... some kind of a social mission [ ] people listen to us. [ ] The songs that we... sing and the, the words, the message that we... are carrying... in the song... has a large effect.
Patrice: I love to sing, it gives me a lot and... when we sing, when we give a concert we do give, but the public also responds. He gives us clapping, he gives us smiles, [ ] he give us back a lot of things and this energy stimulates [ ] that's what's important. [ ] I feel WOW what a great thing happened tonight, I don't know exactly what happened but something happened, you're right, I'm happier and we express something that people, some people like.
following comments indicate the
time of the homeless condition:

of friend, but uh I was not able to, to
me that was very...isolated.

It when I think you are not connected
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Isolation that some of these men
connect to others in meaningful
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we...I give to the others, I try to sing
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Raoul: I was traumatized a lot in the past with a bad marriage and ... my daughter (he had
lost custody and visitation rights). So, when I sing, I try to sing for the children because I
miss my daughter, so I pretend that she's in the crowd and I'm singing to her.

Raoul: Because when I sing, it's a very powerful thing and a profound feeling. I have the
sense that I'm touching the people with my voice.

The above quotations illustrate the Choir members' perceptions that singing provides
opportunities for reciprocity. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) alleges that social relationships help
to focus cognitive energy and promote opportunities to experience flow,
whereas both passive entertainment and loneliness can lead to psychic entropy:
"When we are alone with nothing to do there is no reason to concentrate, and what
happens then is that the mind begins to unravel, and soon finds something to worry about" (p. 42). The inability of these men to form successful relationships may have
been the result of stressful life events and the trauma of homelessness. By directing
mental energy externally, group singing may provide these individuals with periods
of relief from the pressures of living in challenging circumstances.

Reciprocity between the Choir and the audience also appears to give the choir
members a sense that they are engaging in a meaningful exchange with the larger
community. The space created between the performer and the audience in the
performance context may provide a safe distance from which the Homeless Choir
members can begin the process of reconnecting to mainstream society. Aside from
the sense of contribution and social inclusion that occurs during performances,
there is also evidence that personal relationships within the Choir are improving.

ADAPTIVE EFFECTS OF GROUP SINGING THROUGH SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

When the Choir first started these men had difficulty being together without
engaging in verbal and physical abuse:

Henri: It was very hard when we start, we had violent people.

Henri: It was the people, the guys there, the singers I was with [...]. I didn't trust (the other
choir members). It was very hard when we start. We had violent people. [...] Because I am
very sensitive, I didn't want to show my sensitivity.

Jean: (At the first rehearsal) I checked one (then) the other, ([...]) one guy with his 10 ounces
of booze in his jacket, the other one was smoking as a chain, the other one was yelling all
the time and ... phew (I thought) this is not for me.

Jean: At the beginning it wasn't the same, yelling and fighting for finding a place in, in the
gang, now it's ... it's different as black and white.

Louis: (In the beginning) no respect at all! Sometimes they were yelling one at each other.

Patrice: When I came in the Choir, oh my god, you wouldn't believe how much energy we
needed just to be calm, just to talk, just to listen one to another, just to have some respect
... then I had to fight to be heard.

Now the Choir members appear to be developing social skills and self-control
which enable them to function successfully as a group. They are able to interact
appropriately during practices, performances and group meetings. The following statements reflect the social evolution that is taking place within the Choir:

Bernard: But our Choir is special, you know. The people ... they are my friends and I respect them.

Hemis: [ ] we got to be a good group now, we get along together very good now.

Jean: Oh *(the Choir)* changed life in a positive way, because it helped me to deal with someone else.

Jean: [ ] so I have to rebuild my own thoughts, you have to work altogether now.

Louis: I have at the beginning ... I had more problems with the guys 'cause I have to change ... the way I was receiving them, but I made a lot of progress uh on myself OK, trying to change what is possible to change and more listen *(listening more)* to the needs of the others.

Raoul: We have learnt to accept each other as human beings and that is something that I am working very much.

The individuals in the Choir have had to deal with many traumas in their lives and as a result of their emotional problems and homelessness they have been disconnected from normal supportive environments. Flow theory suggests that "in apathy, worry and boredom the self is usually at centre stage" and the personal reflections that are generated during these times are negative and serve to exacerbate concerns about the self. The remedy for this situation is to "invest psychic energy in goals and relationships that bring harmony to the self indirectly" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, pp. 136-7). It appears that group singing may be an ideal way to realize the remedy suggested by Csikszentmihalyi. A choir provides both goals and relationships, and practising and performing music requires concentration on a task rather than the self. Csikszentmihalyi states that "after having experienced flow in a complex interaction, the feedback is concrete and objective, and we feel better about ourselves without having had to try" (p. 137). The concept of flow appears to be actualized in this description by Raoul:

I'm a very quiet person before a show. But the minute I hear the first note, my eyes want to pop out of my head and I'm gone, I'm singing and right to the last note. It's great because you know exactly what the next note is and everyone sings in harmony. When it's finished, my heart beats very fast, it takes me an hour to calm down.

Choral singing may be an effective agent for achieving the beneficial characteristics of flow and, perhaps, that is why members of the Homeless Choir attribute many therapeutic outcomes to participating in group singing. As Jean succinctly declares: "When I start singing I forget all, it's a therapy".

Group participation and group goals require external focus. As a consequence attention is directed away from the self and appears to promote positive feelings and connection to others. Group singing also requires directing energy to internal cognitive processes through concentration on the structural components of the music and the harmonic coordination of the choristers' voices. Comments relating
group meetings. The following place within the Choir:
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singers' voices. Comments relating
to the cognitive aspect of group singing were examined to determine the choristers' perceptions of the importance of mental engagement to the overall quality of the experience.

ADAPTIVE EFFECTS OF GROUP SINGING THROUGH MENTAL ENGAGEMENT

Through participating in the Choir, knowledge of various components of chorale singing are being accrued by the Choir members. The following excerpts indicate that the choristers are learning about pitch, harmony, tempo, rhythm and voice control, and as a result the caliber of the Choir is improving:

Henri: It is very strange, but uh every one of them ... even though that they're not singing good has something special, they could be a very good .. performer and a lot of things like a joke or movements and dance ... uh everyone has something special [ ].

Louis: [] but the quality of the Choir is higher (than in the beginning) and for myself I have learned a lot of things in the art of singing.

Patrice: I often say [ ] it's as a free singing course I'm taking now, it's a free music course that I'm having, that I'm with the Choir [ ] and I'm learning a lot of things also in doing music, in doing something I like. [ ] I feel that you create something [] we create some harmonies [] develop a good ear [ ] we learn what harmony is and we try things; some things are absolutely no good, OK, we won't do it again. And those creativity [ ] this is really good for, for your self-esteem, [ ] creativity is something I'm experiencing now that I couldn't do probably in digging a hole somewhere ..., like working ... in a factory somewhere, whatever.

Patrice: You can do a lot of things [ ] could be your solo, maybe you're jamming about, you come back at the right time on the right note and [ ] music is a lot of ... discipline ... if you want to do good music you have ... a lot of discipline.

Patrice: Not just listening to music, which is very good, but doing music, oh what a difference, what a great difference it is, thanks god. And then I feel I participate in something, my whole body participates in something, I feel that you create something.

Raoul: He (his friend in the Choir) taught me the notes, I learned the piano, the flute and the bass. Each day he taught me something different. They (guest director) show me how to sing and how to control my voice, sing high, sing low, etc; there is so much to learn in the music field, it is so vast.

Raoul: And you have to be able to keep the tempo, sing at the same time as everyone else.

Simon: We have at least fifty songs. And right now we're learning some new ones, we're slowly changing the repertoire. By next spring or the first part of next summer, our entire repertoire will have been changed. We're learning new songs each week. (Later he comments)

When you like to sing, it's very easy to learn a song by heart. It can take at the most two weeks. We have sheets with the music and the words and we practice at home.

The Choir appears to provide a focus for mental energy. The motivation and discipline required to attend rehearsals, learn the repertoire and perform for the public result in increased skill. Increased skill permits movement to new levels of
understanding and promotes further knowledge acquisition and skill development. Optimal complexity is sustained as the complexity ceiling is pushed higher and higher and, consequently, interest in the Choir is also maintained.

Again we see similarities between the ideas expressed by the Choir members and the precepts of flow theory. It appears that while the choristers are learning and performing music they are able to distance themselves from their problems. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) developed the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) to determine individuals' moods during various activities. Each participant in these studies carried a pager at all times which was programmed to send signals at random intervals. When signaled, the participant was instructed to write down their location, activity and thoughts at that moment, and to rate on a numerical scale their perceived level of concentration, happiness, motivation and self-esteem. High scores on all of these dimensions were characteristic of the flow experience. The results of these studies indicated that flow experiences occurred more often during work than during free time.

Several of the above comments also suggest that the choir experience allows the Choir members to express their creativity and individuality resulting in a sense of accomplishment and increased self-worth. It is possible that a lack of creativity and cognitive challenge in the lives of these men may have contributed to their passage to the streets. Working to maintain an impoverished lifestyle has few creative rewards. Many of the positions that are available for individuals with limited education are labour oriented. Often these jobs are repetitive and boring providing few occasions for mental stimulation. In contrast, survival on the streets requires incredible ingenuity. For example, after Simon had lost his job and material possessions he had the opportunity to live in comfortable surroundings in the home of his son. He tried this lifestyle for a short period of time, but the boredom and lack of purpose made life on the streets look quite appealing:

So, I lived with my son on the [shore] for a while. He has a nice house close to the water and a good job. But after three months in the rocking chair on the porch, I was bored and tired so I packed my suitcase and told my son to drop me off at the corner of [First and Second Streets]. He got worried and asked all kinds of questions, how would I manage, etc. I reassured him. Deep inside, I preferred being on the streets rather than have nothing to do.

The streets afforded Simon the opportunity to be actively engaged in the evolution of his life, a participant rather than a bystander. At the very least the streets could provide Simon with the excitement of the unknown and an opportunity to test his survival skills. The hardships of homelessness were outweighed by the inertia of boredom. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) states that "both intrinsic motivation (wanting to do it) and extrinsic motivation (having to do it) are preferable to the state where one acts by default without having any kind of goal to focus attention" (p. 23). Simon was not willing to submit to living by default. Fortunately
The Choir has given him a more normal and healthy environment in which to utilize his cognitive capabilities and creativity. When speaking about his experience with the Choir his perceptions echo those of flow theory: “Yes, you need to be motivated and disciplined. After that it becomes interesting. The Choir is a marvelous thing.”

In commenting on how the Choir has changed his life, Jean also emphasizes the importance of engagement in living as opposed to mental inertia in the following metaphor: “Instead of looking the train goes on the track, jump in the train!” Although Jean’s English is a bit unpolished in this instance, it is clear that he believes that the Choir has enabled him to be an active participant in life; he is in the train experiencing the excitement of the trip rather than remaining an idle spectator.

It has been suggested that primitive peoples may have participated in musical activities to provide a sense of control over the forces of nature (Alberti, 1974). It also is possible that the musical activities of primitive peoples may have had as much to do with alleviating boredom and/or inducing flow through the direction of mental energy as with appeasing the spirits. Horton (1973) noted that the Ekine masquerade plays of the Kalabari of Nigeria, which include drumming and dancing by masked and costumed members of the tribe, are a religious tribute to the water spirits. However, the focus of these spectacles is generally aesthetic rather than religious suggesting that the performance itself is as or more important to the people than the religious connotation, which simply may be an excuse to perform the ceremony. Through performance of the ritual the Kalabari, similar to Simon and Jean, may be attempting to avoid the disconcerting state of mental entropy.

The social and mental stimulation that accompanies participation in group singing appears to have provided some of the Choir members with opportunities to experience flow or at least a close approximation of the flow experience. Through their own reflections they have discovered that singing requires concentration, motivation and dedication and generates feelings of happiness, pride, usefulness, and increased self-esteem.

CONCLUSIONS

The content of the interviews suggests that, for those members of the Homeless Choir interviewed for this study, participation in group singing has yielded positive emotional, social and cognitive outcomes. Several themes consistently emerged during the interviews: (1) Active participation in group singing appears to alleviate depression and promotes emotional and physical well being; (2) Reciprocity between the Choir and the audience appears to provide the choristers with a sense of personal validation, as well as a milieu in which to bridge the gap that has separated them from normal social networks; (3) The Choir has provided the choristers with a familial atmosphere in which to develop more appropriate interpersonal behaviours, which in turn allows for the accomplishment of group
goals; and (4) The concentration required to learn and perform the repertoire acts as a stimulus for mental engagement. During these times attention is directed away from disturbing internal reflections and may help to establish more emotionally balanced thought processes.

The choristers’ insights suggest that active participation in singing has a variety of adaptive qualities. Many of the choristers have been able to decrease their dependency on alcohol and drugs; they now are able to work toward shared objectives; they are improving their musical knowledge and performance skills; and they are happier, more relaxed and looking forward to the future. These are remarkable accomplishments for men who, before joining the Choir, were preoccupied with finding a meal, a bed and/or a fix.

The findings are also consistent with the precepts of flow theory which imply that active involvement in music may, in some instances, be superior to more passive encounters. Music listening may be utilized for many self-governing purposes, may generate positive emotional feelings and may induce transcendent type episodes, but because many listening experiences require minimal concentration and commitment, and occur in circumstances that diffuse attention, they frequently may elude the adaptive features of active participation. It must be considered that the members of the Homeless Choir had many opportunities to listen to music, but for them the listening experience did not affect positive change in their lives. It appears that the mental concentration required in choral singing and the social affiliation that is part of the group experience acted as change agents. The director states:

The choir is just a way, an excuse to keep contact with society. The contact was lost and music is the perfect way to build a bridge to society [ ] the best way, the most easy way.

It is also notable that the perceptions of the members of the Homeless Choir are similar to the findings reported from research with a university chorale (Clift and Hancox, 2001) and a professional chorus (Beck et al., 2000). The analogous outcomes suggest that the benefits derived from group singing do not appear to be dependent on musical proficiency or training and, therefore, group singing may be a useful therapeutic instrument at many levels of musical ability.

At a more global level it may be suggested that the four primary themes which emerged from the interviews converge to improve the quality of life of the participants. With regard to this inference the themes have been consolidated to form a working model of a theory of the adaptive characteristics of group singing (Figure 1). Undoubtedly research with diverse groups of singers will result in refinement of the model, but in the interim it may provide a useful preliminary framework to guide research in an area of music that generally has been neglected.

It is encouraging to find that the choristers’ perceptions coincide with theoretical and experimental findings from many areas within psychology. This consistency supports the phenomenological approach as a reliable method to extract emergent
and perform the repertoire acts in a way that sometimes attention is directed away from the performer to establish more emotionally engaging participation in singing has a variety of benefits that have been able to decrease their levels of distress, able to work toward shared knowledge and performance skills; and open them to the future. These are benefits that one may experience after joining the choir, were

In line with flow theory which implies that as a state of consciousness, be superior to more structured activities, may induce transcendent type experiences and require minimal concentration and diffuse attention, they frequently result in optimal performance. It must be considered that groups with these opportunities to listen to music, but can also be an organizing factor in the social aspects of group singing and the social group as change agents. The director

Although the strength of the evidence provides some merit to the hypothesis of group singing as adaptive behaviour, there are several issues that need to be tested in future research. The small number of participants and their unusual circumstances may restrict the validity of the findings. Further research with larger groups of singers from diverse vocal environments may help to substantiate some of the results from this preliminary study. The unusual dedication of the director may have resulted in outcomes that are choir-specific and, therefore, it will be necessary to examine choirs with directors with diverse choral approaches in order to unravel the importance of the director in the overall success of a choir. Research in this area must also attempt to extract the importance of the purely musical component of the choral experience from the social and communal aspects of membership in a choir to determine if choral singing is different from other forms of enjoyable group activities.

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themes that can form a foundation for further qualitative and quantitative research in this area.

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247
REFERENCES


Appendix

EFFECTS OF GROUP SINGING INTERVIEW

SECTION 1: EARLY LIFE

FAMILY LIFE
Could you describe your family background to me? (with the intent to cover relationships with parents, siblings, problems in the family, socioeconomic status)

SCHOOL LIFE (academic ability, relationship to teachers and other students, extracurricular activities)
What about your school life? How was it at school? What kind of student were you?
Did you have many friends at school?
Did you get along with your teachers?
Did you ever get into trouble in school?

EARLY MUSIC EXPERIENCES
Did you participate in musical activities? (home, church, school, community)
What level of enjoyment was received from these activities?

SECTION 2: EDUCATION/EMPLOYMENT/LIFE DIRECTION

EDUCATION
How far did you progress in school, university, vocational training?
What were your main academic/school interests?

EMPLOYMENT
What jobs have you had?
How long were you employed?
What happened that led to your unemployment? (occupations and success or failure in those occupations)

THE DESCENT INTO HOMELESSNESS
How long have/had you been homeless?
How has this experience been for you? Tell me about some good and bad times.
How does being homeless make you feel about yourself? (self-esteem)
In your experience, how do other people treat homeless people?
How did/does that make you feel?
Has homelessness affected your personal relationships?
How did you feel the first time you went to a soup kitchen/shelter?

SECTION 3: THE CHOIR

DECISION TO JOIN
How did you hear about the choir?
What prompted you to join?
How long have you been a member?
FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE CHOIR
What did you think about the choir during your first practice?
What did you think of the director?
Did you relate well to the other choir members?
Have your relationships with the director and other choir members changed since you first joined?

SECTION 4: THE EXPERIENCE OF SINGING
How do you feel when you are singing?
Does the music affect or change how you feel?
Do you have any musical preferences?
Why do you think certain types of music appeal to you more than others?
Are there any differences in how you feel before practice and after practice?
If yes, what do you think has caused that change?
Is there any difference/s between singing in practice and singing in front of an audience?
What about listening to music, is there a difference between listening and singing?

SECTION 5: PROGRESSION OF SUCCESS OF THE CHOIR AND RESULTING PERSONAL CHANGES
When you joined the choir did you know that you would be performing for the public?
How did you feel when you first performed publicly?
Has that changed?
Did you ever think that the choir would be so successful?
Why do you think the choir has been so successful?
How do you feel about the choir now compared to when you first joined?
I hear you have been traveling, what has that experience been like?
You have also produced several CDs, how do you feel about that?
You are beginning to experience celebrity status, how does that make you feel?
Has the choir affected your personal relationships?
Has the choir affected your attitude towards life?
What does the choir mean to your life now?
Is there any other activity that could have accomplished what the choir has accomplished?
What are your hopes for the future? (the choir and life in general)
• Características adaptativas de un grupo coral: percepciones de miembros de un coro de hombres sin hogar

Hay considerables evidencias que sugieren que la música posee características adaptativas. Los individuos emplean música grabada para transformar su paisaje emocional coincidiendo con necesidades y deseos transitorios. También, la música ha sido empleada frecuentemente para provocar reacciones físicas y emocionales no comunes, con frecuencia referidas a experiencias extremas. En muchas culturas, de limitado desarrollo industrial y tecnológico, la participación activa en las actividades musicales es completa y todos los individuos son considerados musicales. En contraste con esto, el elitismo musical que se ha extendido por el mundo occidental supone que la habilidad musical es específica de una minoría con talento. Esta consideración elitista de la música convierte a la mayoría de la sociedad en consumidores de música en lugar de productores de ella. Sin embargo, las fuentes teóricas y experimentales indican que la música es una habilidad innata y universal y, además, la participación en actividades musicales puede tener características adaptativas de provecho a muchos niveles. Las transformaciones vitales positivas que han sufrido miembros de un coro para hombres sin hogar, desde la misma formación del coro, han proporcionado la oportunidad de determinar si un grupo coral era un factor de promoción del comportamiento adaptativo. Se empleó una aproximación fenomenológica, mediante una entrevista semi-estructurada, que explorara la experiencia de los coristas. Los análisis de las entrevistas indicaron que el coro suponía una experiencia fuertemente positiva desde los puntos de vista emocional, social y de los procesos cognitivos. La percepción de los coristas de las características de adaptación del coro se englobaron en cuatro categorías: beneficios de tipo clínico, beneficios derivados de la reciprocidad audiencia-coro, beneficios asociados con el proceso grupal y beneficios relacionados con un compromiso mental. La participación activa en el coro puede actuar alivio la depresión, incrementando la autoestima, ampliando la interacción social e induciendo la estimulación cognitiva. Cuestiones vinculadas a los principios de esta teoría invocan la importancia de la estimulación mental y la interacción social en el incremento de la satisfacción vital. Las cuestiones emergentes proporcionan los fundamentos previos para el desarrollo de una teoría de las características adaptativas de un coro y también proporcionan el marco adecuado para posteriores investigaciones en esta área.

• Caratteristiche di adattabilità del canto d'insieme: percezioni dei componenti di un coro di senzatetto

Ci sono considerevoli prove a sostegno delle caratteristiche di adattabilità della musica. Gli individui usano la musica registrata per trasformare il paesaggio emotionale fino a farlo coincidere con i loro bisogni e desideri temporanei. Inoltre, si afferma di frequente che la musica provocherebbe singolari reazioni emotive e fisiche, spesso indicate come esperienze culminanti. In molte culture industrialmente
e tecnologicamente sottosviluppate, è diffusa un'attiva partecipazione alle iniziative musicali, e tutti gli individui sono considerati musicali. Per contro, l'elitarismo musicale sviluppatosi nel mondo occidentale suggerisce che l'abilità musicale sia propria di una minoranza dotata di talento. La nozione elitaria di musicalità relega la maggioranza al ruolo di procacciatori piuttosto che di produttori di musica. Comunque sia, fonti sperimentali e teoriche indicano la musica come un'abilità innata ed universale, e perciò la partecipazione attiva alla musica potrebbe presentare caratteristiche di adattabilità a vari livelli di competenza. Le trasformazioni positive avvenute nella vita di alcuni membri di un coro di senzatetto da quando sono entrati a farne parte, hanno offerto l'opportunità di determinare se il cantare in gruppo fosse un fattore di promozione del comportamento adattativo. Un approccio fenomenologico basato su interviste semi-strutturate è stato impiegato per studiare l'esperienza di canto di gruppo dei coristi. L'analisi delle interviste ha indicato come il cantare in gruppo sembri influenzare positivamente i processi emotivi, sociali e cognitivi. Le percezioni da parte dei coristi delle caratteristiche adattative del canto di gruppo rientrano in quattro categorie principali: benefici di tipo clinico, benefici derivati dalla reciprocità fra pubblico e coro, benefici associati a processi di gruppo e benefici collegati all'impegno mentale. La partecipazione attiva al canto può alleviare la depressione, accrescere l'autostima, migliorare la capacità d'interazione sociale e produrre una stimolazione cognitiva. Questi temi aderiscono ai principi della teoria del flusso, che sostiene l'importanza della stimolazione mentale e dell'interazione sociale per un'accresciuta soddisfazione esistenziale. I temi così emersi forniscono una base preliminare per lo sviluppo di una teoria delle caratteristiche adattative del canto di gruppo, oltre a costituire un quadro di partenza per la successiva ricerca in quest'area.

- Les caractéristiques adaptatives du chant d'ensemble: comment les membres d'un chœur d'hommes de sans logis les perçoivent-ils?

Tout semble indiquer que la musique a des caractéristiques adaptatives. Nombreux sont ceux qui voient dans la musique enregistrée un moyen de faire coïncider le paysage émotionnel avec des besoins et des désirs transitoires. Ou qui font état de réactions émotionnelles et physiques peu communes à l'écoute de la musique, volontiers qualifiées d’expériences ineffables. Quantité de cultures au développement industriel et technologique restreint témoignent d'une omniprésence de la participation active aux manifestations musicales: tout individu y est considéré comme musicien. En revanche, l'élitisme musical qui s'est développé dans le monde occidental tend à faire accroire que les aptitudes musicales sont le fait d'une minorité douée. Cette notion elitiste de la musicalité confine la majorité des individus dans un rôle d'intermédiaire plutôt que dans celui de producteur de musique. Pourtant, au vu des sources expérimentales et théoriques, la musique est une aptitude innée et universelle; aussi la participation active à la musique peut-elle avoir des caractéristiques adaptatives à tous les niveaux de compétence. Les transformations positives qui sont intervenues dans la
la partecipazione alle iniziative musicali. Per contro, l' elitarismo musicale assicura che l'abilità musicale sia relegata ai più alti livelli di competenza. Le esperienze del coro di gruppo hanno offerto l'opportunità di dimostrare come il fattore di promozione del modello musicale basato su interviste e esperienze di canto di gruppo non sia solo emotivo e cognitivo, ma anche sociale e culturale. Le percezioni della sensualità del canto di gruppo rientrano in un contesto di benefici derivati dalla reciprocità e dal senso di appartenenza al gruppo e benefici collegati alla crescita. L'esperienza del coro può alleviare la depressione, promuovere la crescita sociale e produrre una serie di benefici emotivi e cognitivi. In conclusione, le caratteristiche adattative del canto di gruppo offrono un modello per la successiva ricerca in questo campo.

- Adaptive Charakteristiken des Singens in der Gruppe: Wahrnehmungen von Mitgliedern eines Chores für obsdachlose Männer