

Chapter 2

Who's this Book for?

Wherever you are on the spectrum of opportunity and challenge that life can throw at us, welcome!

Even if you have been blessed with good fortune, you will know that this can change rapidly and irrevocably – a fact of life brought into stark relief by the Covid-19 pandemic.

This book could be your life-long companion, whether you feel blessed or stressed or both, and whether song or singing are part of your life – or not. It's for helping build strength and resilience, growth in wisdom and compassion, and enabling you to develop a 'toolkit', which can be drawn on at any time.

Below are some examples of ways it could apply in your life. There's also an 'Index of Issues' on page 339.

It's for you if:

- You're up for discovering (more) about what you're capable of, your place in the world, even who you are; and the role of song in unlocking this potential.
- You need to find, and sustain, a resourceful and resilient way of living in this fast-changing, unstable and unpredictable 21st Century world.
- You want to cherish better – yourself, loved ones, the soil, the air, the entire planet.
- You're living with disability or illness (whether your own or a loved one's, whether temporarily, chronically or terminally), and you know how hard it can be to find buoyancy, let alone maintain it ... particularly in the face of exhaustion, dehumanising and even cruel policies and practices, and limited support, if any.

- Your circumstances are burdensome in other ways (as well or instead) – perhaps due to dysfunctional systems or relationships, structural inequality and racism, loss or bereavement, local, national, or global events.
- You want to contribute to the world in a harmonious way, yet find yourself easily despondent or angered by people, by circumstances, by what you're experiencing or witnessing.
- You feel cynical – whether about humanity, life, religion, politics.
- You feel some anxiety about the changes we're living through, and their current and future impact; stressed by busyness or isolation, or both; by relentless hardship, by oppressive, violent or thoughtless behaviour, and/or by self-destructive inclinations – perhaps fostered by social media, advertising, buried pain, or the 'fear of missing out'.
- Whatever's going on, you want to be more open to experiencing joy in life.

"Even in the darkest times, we have the right to expect some illumination."
Hannah Arendt

It's also for you whether:

- You believe you can't sing, or you know you can (with the *Giving Voice (GV) Process*, lack of singing experience or expertise can even be an advantage).
- You don't 'do' music, or you do, or you want to know (more) about what song can offer – whether you sing or not. (If, however, you're simply looking for some songs to sing, you've probably come to the wrong place!).

- You feel ambivalent or sceptical, courageous or cowardly, intrepid or timid, overwhelmed or fearful. There are stories here which touch on these universal aspects of human experience, and on the surprising shifts that engagement with song can effect.



Remember, the book is for use in private

Doing *GV* with even one other person takes a particular kind of skill (our teachers undertake rigorous and continuous training). While there are exceptions, sharing a song without such training is unlikely to facilitate unlocking its power. There could even be undesirable consequences. If you want to know more, please see 'Sharing Songs', or the Transformed-through-song Diagram.

Yet this book won't suit everyone – nothing does

Sometimes people explore the *GV Process* a little bit, then leave it. Sometimes they pick it up again, perhaps when life has become particularly tough; or when they've just understood something about it that eluded them before; or when they realise that the 'self' that dismissed it is not the self they want to nurture.

Equally, it's possible to be unclear about the nature of the process at first – as was the case for me when I was groping my way towards discovering it. However, through experiencing its benefits, initial expectations may get reassessed. People may return to it years afterwards –

"At first I hated the tape [my first recording – designed for private use] and gave it to Oxfam. Now, years later, I understand what it's about. I need to buy another!!" (shared amidst much laughter)

Alison

So, if you're about to set this book aside, do consider which version of 'you' might be in charge, and perhaps explore some people's

experiences about that, (in 'Awareness and the *GV Process*' for example). Do also check out Safety, Suitability & Support.

Challenging times

Untold numbers of people world-wide are grappling with diverse, deeply challenging circumstances, often unspoken, often alone. Many are dealing with injustice, for example, anger and/or heart-ache, with a lack of safety within or outside the home, with oppressive systems and attitudes, including the surreal and hostile nature of our 'welfare' system and the wider political landscape. Increasing numbers face the impact of unemployment, precarious employment, debt, and undermining, unsafe or exploitative workplace practices. Not having the wherewithal to fund basic needs impacts on everything, as does the actuality, or threat of, war. And underpinning all that is humanity's catastrophic impact on the planet (of which the pandemic is but one example), and the systemic changes that are urgently needed.

Finding a way of surviving everything – internally and externally – in a constructive way, that does not overwhelm or diminish us, or demonise others, is a significant challenge in itself.

I feel it's important to remember that we're capable of making remarkable changes when needed: we can find inspiration and support we never knew was possible, strength and compassion we never knew we had, and the capacity to see more clearly, listen more acutely, speak more powerfully and act more responsibly and effectively. Song has incredible potential to help us do all that. So if you'd like to unlock song's potential in any of these respects, this book is your trusty companion.

Useful Links:

Index of Issues [p 339](#)
 Frequently Asked Questions [p 358](#)
 Awareness & the *GV Process* [p 292](#)
 Safety, Suitability & Support [p 326](#)
 Sharing Songs [p 352](#)
 Transformed-through-song
 Diagram [p 330](#)
 Resources [p 367](#)

"We put surviving into our poems and into our songs ... We were pulled down so low we could hardly lift our eyes, so we knew, if we wanted to survive, we had better lift our own spirits ..."
James Baldwin[†]

* Other types of recording are now available – see Resources.

[†] Baldwin talking to Maya Angelou about surviving slavery and its legacy; quoted in Angelou's *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (Random House 2002).