



# **A Different Voice, A Different Song: Reclaiming Community through the Natural Voice and World Song**

*Caroline Bithell*

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*A Different Voice, A Different Song* traces the history of a grassroots scene that has until now operated largely beneath the radar, but that has been gently gathering force since the 1970s. At the core of this scene today are the natural voice movement, founded on the premise that "everyone can sing", and a growing transnational community of amateur singers participating in multicultural music activity. Author Caroline Bithell reveals the intriguing web of circumstances and motivations that link these two trends, highlighting their potential with respect to current social, political and educational agendas. She investigates how and why songs from the world's oral traditions have provided the linchpin for the natural voice movement, revealing how the musical traditions of other cultures not only provide a colourful repertory but also inform the ideological, methodological and ethical principles on which the movement itself is founded. *A Different Voice, A Different Song* draws on long-term ethnographic research, including participant-observation at choir rehearsals, performances, workshops and camps, as well as interviews with voice teachers, choir and workshop leaders, camp and festival organisers, and general participants.

Bithell shows how amateur singers who are not musically literate can become competent participants in a vibrant musical community and, in the process, find their voice metaphorically as well as literally. She then follows some of these singers as they journey to distant locations to learn new songs in their natural habitat. She theorises these trends in terms of the politics of participation, the transformative potential of performance, building social capital, the global village, and reclaiming the arts of celebration and conviviality. The stories that emerge reveal a nuanced web of intersections between the local and global, one which demands a revision of the dominant discourses of authenticity, cultural appropriation and agency in the post-colonial world, and ultimately points towards a more progressive politics of difference.

*A Different Voice, a Different Song* will be an essential text for practitioners involved in the natural voice movement and other vocal methodologies and choral worlds. As a significant study in the fields of ethnomusicology, music education and community music, the book will also be of interest to scholars studying the democratisation of the voice, the dynamics of participation, world musics in performance, the transformative power of harmony singing, and the potential of music-making for sustaining community and aiding intercultural understanding.

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