

Deaf Girl Singing “Someone Like You” – Vocal Somaesthetic Perspective to Singing and Vocal Norms

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Deaf Girl Singing...

Video: “Deaf Girl singing Someone like you”

- <https://youtu.be/Gb0SX9bYyTc>
- Published: 17.3.2012
- Video uploaded by: PuppetMaster415
- Singer on the video: NativeYellowOwl92
- Song: Adele’s hit “Someone Like You” (2011).

Statistics 14.2.2017

- 611 092 views
- 13 148 likes
- 901 dislikes
- 3761 comments

“I'm going to be honest and say that you aren't a great singer but I can tell that you tried your hardest and you are so brave to put this on the internet not even knowing what it sounds like and I greatly admire that. You are such an inspiration. If you love singing that keep doing it. ❤️”

“If she is really deaf, then she is very good, you cannot compare a deaf person singing with a non-deaf person singing, its not a fair comparison, just like paralympics do not compete in the normal Olympics. [...]”

“this is fucking shit. give up”

“Is this a joke? This is offensive to real deaf people you racist!!!”

(YouTube comments)

“There's something captured here in your performance that is so beautiful that most people won't understand it. Outside of the tangible concepts of music like melody, harmony, and rhythm, there lies the things that are often forgotten, for they take a keen ear and an open heart to be realized. The color, texture, soul, emotion, the reason that the music was ever brought into existence: this is what makes it beautiful. You have opened my eyes to this intangible concept in it's purest form and I thank you.” [...]

(YouTube comment)

“To many of you who discriminated me as a person who could not sing or my speech or my disabilities. Yes, it is very harsh when people discriminate someone's abilities. Yes, I am deaf but does not mean that I thought that was a "Good Singer" then. I was expressing the words and facing the reality that people would judge. [...] Please choose your words wisely. People who have tough life or struggle with their any kind of disabilities are not always open and express their feelings because we all feel in denial. During that time I was going through hard time and getting out of my comfort zone. I was doing it for myself. [...] I am very proud of myself that I put it out for the world to see that I am nowhere near perfect. If I had a stutter speech I would have sing anyways. To the people who generously support me with positive statements, I want to say thank you so much. You gave the light in my heart. So many goose bumps from head to toe. I am so touched. Please don't Judge others. Encourage them to make their lives better. <3” (Singer’s comment)

Main arguments

1. In our culture, we have certain vocal norms that help us to communicate and understand each other. However, these norms also restrain our vocal expression and listening.
2. Vocal norms are often based on the acoustic qualities of vocal sounds (voice as heard). They are maintained by normative listening.
3. Voice, vocalizing, and listening are not only acoustic and auditory phenomena. There are also multimodal and bodily dimensions at play when we vocalize or listen.
4. Singing has aesthetic and experiential value in itself - as a bodily experience - regardless of whether the vocal sounds fulfill the traditional aesthetic criteria of singing or not.

1. Vocal norms

- We have countless unspoken norms in our culture about who can use their voices, in what kind of situations, and in what ways. Cultural and social aspects affect the ways we use our voices in our everyday lives.
- *Tyrannies of understanding* dominate the human voice in our culture by restraining the voice to the fields of language and music. (Thomaidis & Macpherson 2015)
- *Push and pull effect*: the raw emotional vocalizations and the restraining effect of culture on them. (Scherer 1994)
- Culture shapes our bodily appearance, behavior, and the ways we experience our bodies. Embodied actions, in turn, keep the culture animated and alive. (Shusterman 2012)

Normative voices

- Normative voices fulfill the aesthetic and communicative demands of certain vocal culture, subculture or musical style (e.g., pop-ballad, heavy rock, rap).
- Normative voices are the ones we are used to hearing in our everyday life.
- Voice research and vocal pedagogies construct and enhance certain vocal norms by cultivating the manners of vocalizing and by establishing the vocal ideals.
- Medicalization of voice
- Normative singing in popular music:
 - Singing in tune (but in some genres, not too purely)
 - Articulating the words in certain ways (e.g., different accents)
 - Using variety of different voice qualities (e.g., hoarseness, breathiness, creakiness)
 - Interplay between originality or individuality and the genre rules

Normative listening

- Normative listening is something that strives to evaluate and categorize first, and only after that possibly seeks to understand another human being on a deeper level.
- With normative listening, we try to evaluate the singer or speaker.
- Adequate listening in popular music studies (Frith 2004, 383)
- Modes of staring at people with disabilities: pity (deficits), amazement (exotism), horror (freakishness), awe, looking up to (superhuman difference). (Howe et al. 2016, 7, see also Garland-Thomson 2009)
- Examples of the modes of listening found in the YouTube comments:
 - pity: “she would be really good if she wasn't deaf I can hear it. I feel bad”
 - amazement: “How did you learn how to sing to tune?? :O This is absolutely amazing. And no people, even though she doesn't sing like Adele doesn't mean it isn't amazing how she can carry a tune and know how it goes. That is remarkable....”
 - horror: “MY LUNGS ITS LITERALLY SO HORRIBLE”
 - awe: “She's an inspiration. I admire her she [is] great[.]”

2. Voice as heard

- Vocal norms are often based on the acoustic qualities of vocal sounds (voice as heard).
- Representational, performative, and experiential somaesthetics (Shusterman 2008)
- The somaesthetics of representation is dominant in our culture.
- Culture of appearances (Liimakka 2013)
- The culture of appearances is shown in our vocal behavior as well:
 - vocal ideals
 - vocal role models
 - voice as heard
 - bodily experience is often disregarded

3. Bodily dimensions of vocalizing and listening

- New perspectives on the rich sensorium of music and voice in the cultural musicology (e.g., Austern 2002, Eidsheim 2015, Neumark 2010)
- “Phenomenologically I do not merely hear with my ears, I hear with my whole body.” (Ihde 1976)
- Listening with the whole body, empathetic listening (Tarvainen 2012)
- Developed singers trust their voices as felt inside their bodies even more than their voices as heard. (Sundberg 1987)
- Harkening = Preconceptual listening without preoccupations, normalizations, or manipulative relationship to things. (Levin 1989)
- When we give up the need to understand another person on the conceptual level, we can find a deeper understanding.
- How “the experience of inhabiting an extraordinary body can inflect the perception and cognition of music.” Autistic hearing, blind hearing, mobility-inflected and deaf hearing. (Straus 2011)

4. Vocal somaesthetics

- *Somaesthetics* is a pragmatic-phenomenological approach developed by Richard Shusterman (e.g., 1999, 2008, 2012).
- *Vocal somaesthetics* is an approach that focuses on the bodily and experiential dimensions of producing vocal sounds and listening to them. (Tarvainen 2016)
- Inner-body perceptions produced by the proprioceptive and interoceptive senses
- The aesthetic, vocal and bodily relation of a human being to other human beings
- Cultivating and enhancing the *vocal experience*
- Democratizing the vocal conventions by questioning the prevailing vocal norms and by studying the vocal practices that have remained marginal in our culture.
- Developing practices for everyone to enjoy their voices regardless of the individual vocal skills or musicality in the traditional sense.

What is singing?

- What it means to listen? What is listening? What could be considered as listening? What kind of listening is listening without hearing? (cf Straus 2011)
- Listening is always “disabled” to some extent - one can never listen universally.
- What it means to sing? What is singing? What could be considered as singing? Is there singing without melody? Is there singing without sound?
- In what ways singing is manifested in this body? What kind of singing this unique body produces?



Thank you!

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