

*Born to Sing*  
*A Singer's Journey Toward Mind-Body Unity*  
*Book with accompanying DVD*  
 Ron Murdock  
 Berkeley, California: Mornum Time Press, 2015

by Ruth Rootberg

In his memoir, *Born to Sing*, Ron Murdock describes his path to becoming a singer and an Alexander Technique teacher. The book pays tribute to his singing teachers and presents his approach to singing and the Alexander Technique. The accompanying DVD has recordings of Murdock and others singing, excerpts from an interview, a discussion of the “whispered ah,” and a detailed demonstration of using his hands on a voice student to stimulate “dynamic breathing.”

Murdock offers his recollections in a candid and gentle manner, whether telling us about life in a small town in Canada, studying and making a career in Europe, or raising his Downs-Syndrome son. Growing up in Canada, he loved to sing and was fortunate to receive good early training and then to study with Frederick Husler and Yvonne Rodd-Marling in Switzerland. He first studied the Alexander Technique with Elizabeth (Betty) Langford, and that was followed by teacher training with Walter Carrington in London. Murdock found the Alexander Technique immensely valuable and has dedicated his teaching to integrating the Technique with his vocal pedagogy.

Murdock’s concept of singing, drawn from his work with Husler and Rodd-Marling, links the emotions and the need to communicate with vocal technique. He quotes Rodd-Marling, saying the voice is “set in motion by a fundamentally emotive desire to express beauty.” Whereas many teachers suggest that taking Alexander Technique lessons benefits the singer because it improves coordination, Murdock also offers the reverse:

*The thought of wanting to express something with the most beautiful sound you can make connects you to your heart and to your emotions.... All of this can change the co-ordination and bring about a different and easier use of the self. The mind becomes quieter.... All of this in turn helps improve the quality of life and therefore the quality of the sound being made. (44–45)*

There is a chapter on habit and a chapter interpreting Chris Steven’s work on the psychophysical support system, but most of the book is about singing: He addresses anatomy (with beautiful illustrations by Korina Kaisershot), breathing,

stabilizing the breath in producing a tone, practice, fear of singing, and helping amateurs or beginners learn to sing in tune. Murdock emphasizes the need for unified and coordinated action of muscles.

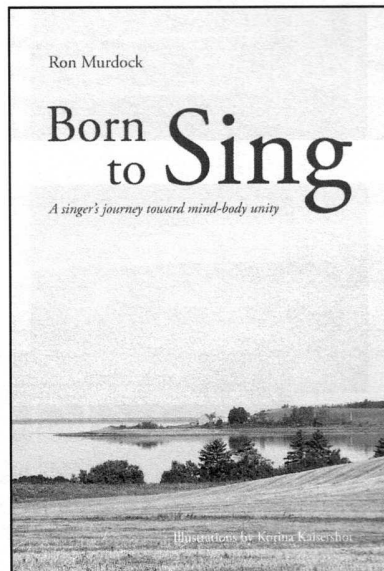
I had hoped the book would give vocal exercises so I could learn how Murdock works, but he explains that vocal exercises must be specific to each singer. He does provide, however, a few procedures and some suggestions to stimulate dynamic coordination of breathing muscles, including the “whispered ah” and a pelvic floor exploration from Eric Franklin’s *Pelvic Power* (2003).

There are other practical suggestions as well. For example, we are advised to think of the out-breath beginning at the lips in order to draw the air out of the body without unnecessary muscular effort and to work rhythmically, again to improve breathing. Another exploration suggests letting out as much air as possible and then singing a short phrase. The purpose of this exploration is to coordinate everything—the vocal cords, elastic scaffolding of the larynx, the transversus thoracis, and the “breathing organ”—and to stabilize the air (*appoggiare* in Italian classical singing) in vocal production.

Murdock’s approach to singing emphasizes stripping away interferences. “An Alexander teacher and a good singing teacher remove interferences to reveal what is already within.” (71) However, he finds inhibition is not always the key to change; sometimes there needs to be focus on what is desired:

*I have found it of no use whatsoever to try and get a student to stop pushing down and out on the in-breath by using Alexander’s concept of “inhibition.” The combination of hours of practice with a completely wrong idea as to how breathing works—and what it actually looks like—guarantees that the habit (for it has become a habit through hours of practice) will win every time. What does work is drawing attention to the exact point where lumbar spine (L1) meets and supports thoracic spine (T12) which stabilizes the rib cage and prevents the upper body from collapsing... therefore, far better results can be obtained by this kind of retraining, emphasizing to the student what is desired and concentrating on that. (124–126)*

*Continued at bottom of following page.*



---

**Born to Sing**, *continued from previous page.*

The DVD includes audio recordings of Murdock performing art songs in many languages, a video clip from a group class, and two videos of him singing. I would have loved more opportunities to watch Murdock's poise while listening to him manifest what he teaches. The group class is an opportunity to watch him work with students, but, sadly, I couldn't raise the volume high enough to understand all the instructions.

Those who love to read about the voice will be happy to include *Born to Sing* in their library. Singers and voice teachers will find his approach of interest. Those who want to better understand how the Alexander Technique supports developing the voice will find what they are looking for in this book.

*See page 14 for Ruth Rootberg's biography.*