



Prof. Dr. Gunter Kreutz: "I felt that the question of what music does actually does with people wasn't getting enough attention."

"I am giving singing a lobby"

In cooperation with the Pius-Hospital Oldenburg he founded "Chordipus", a choir project for people with lung diseases. Gunter Kreutz is investigating why singing makes people happy

In the cafeteria of the Pius-Hospital Oldenburg, singers are sitting around the piano. The choir and chapel master Michael Wintering starts the warm-up exercises. Prolonged vowel holding and hissing sounds fill the room. The only unusual thing about this choir is that many of its members suffer from chronic or irreversible lung diseases.

Dr. Gunter Kreutz, a professor for Systematic Musicology at the University of Oldenburg, is sitting in on the choir practice. He started the choir together with Dr. Regina Prenzel, director of the

Clinic for Internal Medicine, Pneumology and Gastroenterology. "Chordipus – community singing for people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and other lung problems" is the title of this unusual project.

"In Germany alone, over five million people suffer from COPD," Kreutz explains. "It is very widespread." Singing helps preserve health, according to new research. "Singing activates patients' breathing. The voice, breathing and relaxation exercises used in choir practice open the lungs and help

maintain their capacity." At the same time singers improve their posture and strengthen the musculoskeletal system. "We want to use Chordipus to research these factors and observe how singing contributes to wellbeing."

Kreutz is in his element. For more than fifteen years he has been researching the effects that listening to music, singing, dancing and playing music can have on body, mind and soul. A wide field of research – which became the focus of his interest only as his scientific career progressed. Kreutz

studied musicology first in Marburg and later in Berlin. He followed the classic approach of starting with historical musicology. "People always think of musicology in relation to the work of art. You have a composer who produces music – and musicology is dedicated to this art form and the artefacts it produces. And there's nothing wrong with that," Kreutz says.

The scientist came to realise, howe-

"Replenishing our reserves of positive energy"

ver, that this approach was not for him. "What does music actually do with people? What do people do with music? And what effect does music have on people in return? I felt that these questions weren't getting enough attention." And so Kreutz decided to study Systematic Musicology with Prof. Dr. Helga de la Motte, who had just founded the field of Music Psychology Research in Berlin.

In 1998, as a research associate at the University of Bremen Kreutz attained his PhD with research related to musical performance. "I wanted to know what happens when a pianist hammers on the keys," the scientist says, smiling. "Are the notes arbitrarily long or short, is playing loudly or quietly a reflected decision?" Following on from performance research, for his postdoctoral qualification Kreutz examined emotions and their expression. "Particularly in the field of music, right into the 2000s emotions were not given the attention they deserve – or the research."

He began asking choir members about their moods and analysing the different emotions that pieces of music trigger in the listener – also using magnetic resonance imaging and EEG. Eventually he discovered that what he really wanted to work on was wellbeing and health. "Society is gradually gearing up for serious changes in demographic structure. And cultural techniques like singing and dancing

play an enormously important role here," the researcher says.

These days Kreutz can draw on a broad spectrum of empirical studies. He has researched the psycho-physiological effects of couple dancing and the relation between learning an instrument and cognitive development in children. Together with colleagues at the Bremen Institute for Prevention Research and Social Medicine (BIPS) he discovered that professional musicians are four times more likely to develop tinnitus than the rest of the population. And few years ago together with British musicologists Raymond MacDonald and Laura Mitchell he published a book titled "Music, Health and Wellbeing" that features insights by internationally recognised experts into the relationship between these three issues from interdisciplinary perspectives and presents the latest findings from musicology, psychology and medicine.

When asked what motivates his work, Kreutz points to the numerous questions that remain unanswered despite all the progress and the exponential increase in knowledge in recent years, even in niches such as music psychology. He talks about Scandinavian studies which have shown

that music can help combat states of anxiety better than psychopharmaceuticals. He cites gerontology studies dealing with dance courses for people with dementia, which showed that the subjects' quality of life improved in the mid-term. "Music and dance are a unique resource that can help people to better manage their everyday lives or particular life situations. But these things take time. There's no such thing as a quick fix. Project cultures that do not provide long-term financing for interventions destroy potential instead of utilising it consistently. The cutbacks on music lessons in schools do nothing less than rob entire generations of potential quality of life," Kreutz asserts.

Choir singing in particular has huge potential in the musicologist's eyes – which is why he also published a book this year, "Why Singing Makes You Happy", an overview of scientific research for singers and above all potential singers. "What is the best way to stay healthy? Social contacts, positive emotions and movement." Singing in a choir is good for all three, he says. "It seems that singing makes us more resilient. It can replenish our reserves of positive energy. And to that end I will gladly use my research to lobby for singing." (tk)



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