



MUSIC MAN: Adrian Bawtree, 43, is programme director at Sing For Your Life

GIPM20120321B-003_C

Adrian on song for better health

My Canterbury Tale



Lowri Stafford
lowri.stafford@KRNmedia.co.uk
01843 578167

THEY say music is good for the soul, but professional organist Adrian Bawtree believes its benefits reach much further.

Armed with his trusty music box, which he loads with backing tracks created in the "Man Shack" at the bottom of his garden, the 43-year-old travels to care homes and hospitals around the country as part of his work with the charity, Sing for Your Life.

The singing sessions, which are a more interactive form of Karaoke, have been shown to improve the health and wellbeing of dementia patients, Parkinson's sufferers and autistic teenagers.

Adrian invited Lowri Stafford to the home he shares with wife Victoria, 37, sons Matthew, eight, and Theo, five, and Rosie the sausage dog in Bekesbourne Lane, Littlebourne, to share his Canterbury Tale.

How did Sing For Your Life start?
It was in 2005. It developed out of research by the Sidney De Haan Research Centre at Canterbury Christ Church University, into the benefits of singing for health and wellbeing in older people.

What does the charity do?
We deliver singing sessions, called Silver Song Clubs, across the country. We have facilitators, who travel to the care homes with equipment, which is a bit like a Karaoke machine. We also develop programmes for residential care homes.

What kind of programmes?
They're music packages that can be played on the music boxes we provide.

What else can the music box do?
Pictures can be downloaded onto it, the tempo and key of the song can be changed. It gives the person operating it the same amount of skills as a keyboard player or a guitarist. I'm a pianist, but I don't like being stuck behind a piano. The music box is hands-free, which lets me to engage with people more.

Where is it used?
Mainly in residential care homes. We also hold workshops at the Stoke Mandeville Hospital in Buckinghamshire, for younger patients who may be paralysed and facing a long stay. It provides a creative and artistic outlet for them. They've even started a choir there.

What are the health benefits?
Based on the research, we've adopted the mantra "a song a day keeps the doctor away". Regular singing is good. It lifts the spirits, helps with breathing and you can do it sitting down. The Care Quality Commission recommends increased activity for older people. There aren't many things you can do in groups as you get older, but this is one of them. And everyone can sing.



HEALING POWER: Adrian travels to care homes with his music box, encouraging the elderly to sing

GIPM20120321B-004_C

And dementia patients?

Yes, it's of huge interest to occupational therapists who work with dementia patients. It has an unlocking power. I met one woman with Alzheimer's in Hull, who hadn't spoken for a long time. Then when she heard the music, she started singing. Another dementia patient said "I arrive with my carer and leave with my husband," after a singing session. That's the kind of feedback we get. It can also help "unfreeze" Parkinson's sufferers. And we've found some stroke victims can't talk, but they can sing. The brain just rewires itself.

What about younger people?

We're looking into how it can help teenagers with autism.

How is the charity funded?

We used to rely on being commissioned by the NHS, but that hasn't happened for the past three years. So we sell the music boxes, and the programmes that go with them. We are also developing a training programme to teach volunteers and activity staff in care homes how to run the sessions.

How does it differ from Karaoke?

Karaoke is all about the starlet at the front, whereas the music box is the equivalent of bringing a piano into a room. It's not a spectator sport. We also create bespoke music that people like, without stereotyping them – not all older people like old songs.

Why has it proved so popular with older people in particular?

Singing is what the older generations are quite used to. In the past, families would gather round the piano and have a good sing song. Our music box is a 21st century pianola.

How did you start at Sing for Your Life?

I was a professional musician for many years, but performing was never quite enough for me. I became involved with Sing for Your Life as a freelance facilitator, and asked the director to tell me if any jobs came up.

How long have you been interested in music?

I started playing the piano when I was five, and had a brilliant blind piano teacher. Then by nine, I became interested in the organ, which I played while I was at Christ's Hospital boarding school in Horsham.

Where did you train?

I went to the Royal Academy of Music, and then I was an organ scholar at Worcester College, at Oxford University. Then I did a post-graduate course at the Royal College of Music in orchestral conducting.

How did you meet your wife?

Victoria was chairman of Southampton University Chamber Choir, where I conducted. Then we both went to teach music at Christ's Hospital. We were there for 11 years and I became director of music.

Any children?

Yes, Matthew, eight, and Theo, five, who both attend Junior King's School in Sturry. Matthew is interested in learning the bassoon and Theo is dabbling in the piano, but we're not quite the Von Trapps yet!

Why Canterbury?

I realised I had spent 18 years of my life at Christ's Hospital, and wanted to move on. When I got the job at Sing For Your Life – which is based in Folkestone – we decided to move to Littlebourne. We've been here since June. I just love Canterbury.

Any hobbies?

I conduct a choir in Lyminge and I compose music in my spare time. At the moment, I'm working with a Canterbury singing group called The Mustard Seeds. I also really enjoy running and cycling. Right now, though, I'm enjoying the quiet life.

Dream dinner party guests?

Beethoven. I think he'd be quite a riot. The philosopher and psychotherapist Karl Jung. He was an antidote to Freud. He was less prescriptive and enjoyed the mystery of life a bit more than his famous contemporary. And the modern composer Philip Glass. I'm very interested in his music. It's minimalist.

First record?

It was Love Over Gold by Dire Straits.

First car?

A brand-new Maestro which cost £7,000.

■ To find out more about the charity, visit singforyourlife.org.uk

The Quality Furniture & Recliner Specialists



We have a large selection of quality Oak and Mahogany furniture, Sofa's, Sprung and Memory Foam Mattresses plus much, much more.

Beautiful furniture to enhance your home

Celebrity
Maison Furniture Limited

Ancient Mariner

Restwell

Alstons

Sherborne
Gifts & More

Faversham
Furnishing

ASK ABOUT OUR 'PRICE PROMISE'

8 Preston Street, Faversham ME13 8NS
01795 532227 (Opposite Boots)
www.favershamfurnishing.com

Free local delivery