

Saltire Travel Bursary

My name is Marie Claire Breen and since 2012 have been a founder member of a unique and groundbreaking project called Breath Cycle. Breath Cycle was a study led by Dr. Gareth Williams in partnership with Scottish Opera and Gartnavel Hospital which explored the benefits of singing lessons for sufferers of Cystic Fibrosis. Cystic Fibrosis is a genetic condition which produces thick mucus primarily affecting the lungs, causing clogging which can lead to life threatening infections.

My involvement with the project was as chief vocal coach. It was my job to create a singing programme that our participants were able to combine into their daily lives. Since most sufferers have to have vigorous physiotherapy and medication on a daily basis to keep the lungs healthy, the singing lessons were designed to compliment and mirror the physio techniques already in place. I worked closely with the physiotherapy team at Gartnavel Hospital to produce a 12 week singing lesson plan which was engaging and manageable as well as having physical benefits.

More detailed information can be found at www.breathcycle.com

Following the completion of Breath Cycle we presented a conference detailing the project and the medical and artistic outcomes. There were signs of improvement in lung function and breath control but since this was a pilot study more research is required to see the full benefits of singing therapy for CF patients.

Breath Cycle is a fascinating and important project and work is ongoing to create a larger study. The project originated in Scotland and is now focussing on the possibility of expanding across the country. This project has sparked a desire for knowledge in me. It is unlike anything I have been involved in before or since and I am fiercely proud of the work I have achieved. However, to continue my research and knowledge I am seeking opportunities to explore different vocal techniques and breathing techniques beneficial to singers with CF.

Since the project I have been in communication with a young opera singer living in the USA who has Cystic Fibrosis. If I were awarded a Saltire Travel Bursary I would visit with this young artist in New York, where she is based, exchanging vocal knowledge, singing together and discovering how she has combated this condition and formed a singing career. I would also like to visit the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation in New York to explore their ideas and initiatives in dealing with this disease.

Exchanging and sharing knowledge is pivotal in developing as an artist. I have learned so much about myself and of my ability to communicate through music during this venture. I would relish the opportunity to expand

my understanding of how the voice and lungs work with this condition and further techniques which can be implemented as this project grows in - and hopefully one day, outside of Scotland.