As Wednesday’s launch event I was delighted to see and hear from the tutors on the course – David Douglas, Daniela Hathaway and Jessica Leary, who talked about different aspects of the course. I was particularly happy that the audience got invited by David to join him in the first Five to Warm-Up, of which I have many fond memories. Songwriting facilitators – composer Gareth Williams and writer Martin O’Connor – talked about their involvement in the course and their delight in the songs participants produced. We also heard very moving personal accounts from some of the course participants.

Scottish Opera’s community choir joined singers David, Jessica and Gareth in performing some of the songs. It was amazing to hear the simple fragments we had the opportunity to sing turned into full-scale performances with violin, cello and piano accompaniments from Teresko Koronis, Sarah Harrington and Karen Mackay. Medical theatre singer Kirsty Findlay and Admiral Fellowship’s Louis Abbott gave very individual performances of two other of the songs. The song that moved me most deeply in the course was one called A Week Without Voice, which expressed the anguish of being unable to utter a sound and the joy when the voice was re-found: my tears welled up as I remembered the feeling – RED voice, I’ve missed you! Did you miss me too?

The whole evening emphasised the embarrassment and joy that comes from singing as well as the improvements in health that can come with regular practice, at whatever level one is able to reach. Breath Cycle doesn’t aspire to produce professional singers, but to encourage everyone to develop their singing skills, improve their mental and physical health, and have fun along the way.

And now we come to the good part! The Scottish Government has awarded Scottish Opera a grant of £86,812. With an estimated 187,500 people in Scotland living with Long Covid, the grant will enable Scottish Opera to reach more people, including those in remote communities, increase the number of participants who can take part in the project’s workshops, deliver a training programme for nine session tutors and promote the issues around the condition in general.

Scottish Opera’s website now gives access to a new set of free, online resources for Breath Cycle II which are available to individuals, choirs and singing groups worldwide. You can also listen to, sing along with, and contribute to The Covid Composers Songbook, a pieces musical legacy of the past two years, which form part of the digital resources materials available to download for no charge from Scottish Opera’s website.

The final block of singing and songwriting workshops begins on 15 February and ends until April. Registration for the February sessions is open now, and the registration for the April sessions opens in March. The free sessions take place on Zoom and are limited to 50 participants. To register your interest and access the resources visit www.scottishopera.org.uk/op/long-covid-cycle/.