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Finding Their Voice: Aphasia Patients At CSU East Bay Form Singing Group

By Garvin Thomas



<http://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/Finding-Their-Voice-Aphasia-Patients-At-CSU-East-Bay-Form-Singing-Group-366949861.html>

Those who suffer from aphasia, a communication disorder common among those who have suffered strokes or brain injuries, often have great difficulty speaking. Singing, however, is not out of the question. (Published Thursday, Jan. 28, 2016)

The songs they sing are nothing short of beautiful, thanks not just to the music on the stands in front of the singers, but the stories behind them.

Stories, like Carmen Preston's. The 70-year-old lost the ability to talk after a stroke seven years ago and has worked very hard to regain much of her speech.

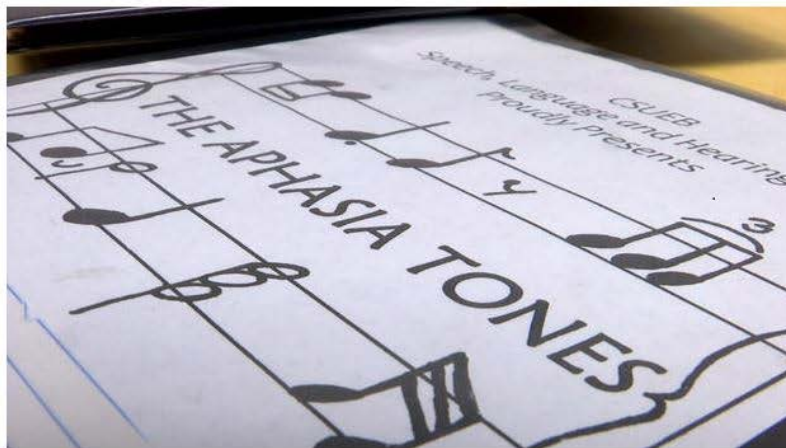
One would think singing, in front of others no less, would be a daunting task.



It is, but that isn't going to stop her.

"Like we say, you can do it. If you are patient," Preston said.

Preston is a member of the Aphasia Tones, a singing group conceived in 2009 by Ellen Bernstein-Ellis, Director of the Aphasia Treatment Program at California State University East Bay in Hayward.



Bernstein-Ellis' research had told her that people with Aphasia, or difficulty communicating due to stroke or brain injury, could often still sing. But would they want to?

"We had 12 brave members who started out and after our first performance or two, the other members started to see that we are having a lot of fun," Bernstein-Ellis said.



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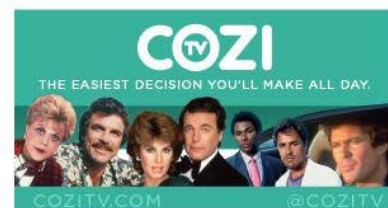
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Bernstein-Ellis has spent her career working with, and listening to, people with Aphasia and they have never sounded so good to her.

Rehearsals have become the favorite part of the week for many of the singers. Their performances, a chance to show themselves, and perhaps more importantly others, what they are capable of.

"For a speech pathologist I'm almost a little speechless to try and describe just what an incredible experience it is to see people shine through music.



Shining, perhaps, because after losing their words, they have finally found a voice.

Published at 10:10 AM PST on Jan 29, 2016

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