Objectives and Goals  “Sing Yourself Free” (SYF) is both a novel method of singing therapy and a way to rediscover natural singing. It can be developed to any level of performing skills up to the demands of perfect and effortless, yet virtuous belcanto singing. It is based on the observation that the physiological process of optimal phonation in speech or singing needs not to be learned as a technique, but is part of the inherent “knowledge” of any human body, starting from the very first cry. It could be called a part of the ‘basic program’ of our organism which may be inhibited by various kinds of conditioning occurring in one’s biography. Fortunately, it can never be lost completely and can therefore be reactivated at any point in life. Experience with more than 400 clients of SYF suggests that freeing the natural breath, apart from improving singing and speaking, does not only foster a profoundly transformative and re-integrative process on the psychological level, but improvements of various medical conditions not directly related to breathing and singing. Therefore, we hypothesized that reactivating autoregulative properties of the breath by means of SYF might also improve the autoregulation and basic health capacities of the organism as such.

Methods  The setting was a three-day workshop in SYF with 14 participants, consisting of an elaborated sequence of verbal introduction, bodywork, group supported individual sessions, partner exercises, meditation, work on breathing and sharing sessions. During the total 72 hours of the workshop, all participants were monitored with the “HeartMan” (www.heartbalance.org), a digital high resolution ECG recording device originally developed for space medicine. The participants were advised to note their activities during non-workshop-hours. During workshop hours, activities had been tracked by the therapist. The recorded ECGs were used to record the heart rate variability (HRV). The data was analyzed and visualized in form of “Autonomic Imager” (ACI) which display in which periods the organism has been dominated by the sympathetic or the parasympathetic nervous system.

Results  The data analysis showed an increase of sympathetic activity due to the increased amount of physical activity. The participants were unaccustomed to the amount of physical activity they performed during the sessions of the workshop. Physical training is used to lead the organism through an activated period which triggers it to reactivate its autoregulative potentials. The assumed positive effect of this therapy is supported by other findings detailed on this poster. To demonstrate the longterm effect on HRV, all participants should have undergone a 24 hour ECG before the intervention and an additional 24 hour ECG three days after the workshop. For economic and organisational reasons, this was not possible at the time of the study.

Conclusions  These preliminary results show that the singing therapy SYF does have physiological effects, though distinctly different ones depending on the individual. Obviously, the autonomic nervous system responds immediately, and unexpected spectral phenomena in HRV arise. The chronobiological parameters of blood circulation, closely correlated with the basic rhythms of the sympathetic and parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system, seem to react to SYF with the typical effect of a - presumably transitory - increase in sympathetic activity due to the emotional and physical stress triggered by the therapeutic process. According to observations made during and after other similar interventions, we assume that follow-up measurements would show a positive long-term vagotonic effect of the therapy. Our observations also show that the precise analysis of HRV may be a valuable tool in understanding physiological processes occurring during the singing therapy SYF. Further research will be necessary to validate our hypothesis. Future studies should include 24 hour HRV measurements and analyses conducted 1-2 weeks before and 4-8 weeks after the therapeutic intervention to determine its long-term effects.