“In the course of our lives we develop a social voice which disconnects itself from its natural richness in sound, the primitive voice. This physical voice can be used as a tool for people with speaking problems, or in personal development to loosen blocks and to discover your own personality. In theater and singing the primitive voice allows one to discover all the possibilities for self-expression.”

— Jean-Rene Toussaint

Jean-René Toussaint and Anne-Marie Blink are partners at Stitching Rondom Stemwerk® (Foundation Surrounding Voice Work.) Their foundation is located in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Stemwerk® is a protected name for the unique voice work, developed by Jean-Rene Toussaint.

Toussaint is a French actor, director, theatre and voice teacher. He has been developing his voice work for the past 20 years, and has served as founder and director of Stitching Rondom Stemwerk® since 1988. He has collaborated with many artists such as Jerzy Grotowski, Robert Wilson, Annick Nozati, and companies such as Festival d’Avignon, Theatre de Radeau, Theatre de Feu, The Living Theatre, Bread and Puppet Theatre and the Roy Hart Theatre to name a few.

Anne-Marie Blink is a Dutch singer, performer, and teacher. She gives about twenty performances a year as a singer. One of her more recent performances, Tangos, was based on Argentina (Carlos Gardell and Astor Piazzolla). She has also created performances and a recording based on the work of Edith Piaf and is currently the conductor of the female-choir “Elles.” Blink has been busy with her work surrounding the typical strength of women and voice since 1997.

Toussaint has traveled through parts of Asia and India studying diverse ancient vocal practices — from Afghan Sufi to Mongolian, Tibetan and Japanese vocal traditions.

The roots of his approach to are found in his extensive work with deaf children. Through
this experience he discovered the importance of the physical experience of sound and became fascinated with raw sound (a primitive voice, unpolished by societal norms, values and culture).

Stemwerk® can be used as a tool for singing and also for speaking in the theater. The work is useful for expression, communication, pedagogy and personal development. All these have a place together and are centered in the Stitching Rondom Stemwerk®, where Toussaint and Blink and several guest teachers have a place. Toussaint is devoted to the aspect of the work in personal development, all the didactics and the Theater Department. Blink is the caretaker of both singing and children’s activities.

Over the past 10 years, Toussaint and Blink have had more than 4500 people actively working with the primitive voice. They are continually developing techniques relating to the body and the voice, and using them creatively, in expression, re-education and personal development.

In the summer of 2002 the foundation opened its doors in a new location in Turkey (Avanos-Cappadocië.) This location will continue to be used as a summer-residence of Stemwerk® and will be a part of the International Center for the Voice. In Toussaint’s words, “This is a magical place where you can meet your voice, and our culture surrounded by the beauty of wondrous mountains and dreamy landscapes.” Last year they began with three workshops under the direction of Toussaint and Blink. This year there will be at least 10 workshops, which will hopefully feature guest teachers such as Jonathan Hart and Kristin Linklater.

Toussaint made his U.S. debut in December of 2000, offering both professionals and non-professionals an opportunity to explore the potential of their own voices. I met him during a workshop in Boston and was inspired to continue investigating his primitive voice work. I joined Toussaint and Anne-Marie Blink, as their guest, for ten days of intense voice work that consisted of daily private sessions with each of them and a three-day group workshop with non-professionals entitled, Being Nomad Again. It was honestly some of the most
deeply satisfying voice work I’ve ever experienced or witnessed. It was especially powerful for me to work so deeply and primitively with my singing voice. The demand for this work is growing steadily; and I am pleased to announce that both he and Anne-Marie Blink will be offering a workshop sponsored by VASTA at ATHE this summer in New York City. The workshop is entitled *Daring to forget our borders: The primitive voice sings the scream of being.* The workshop will be a double session held on August 2nd from 5:15 pm - 8:30 pm.

Jean-Rene Toussaint and Anne-Marie Blink will also be offering the following workshops throughout the spring and summer months:

12-13 April, Choir Festival Aberystwyth (Wales-UK) Anne-Marie Blink guest teacher
07-11 July, Orvieto - Fordham University (Italy) Jean-René Toussaint workshop leader

For more information visit their website at http://www.stemwerk.com