

MUSIC AND SOUND FOR HEALTH AND HEALING

By Stephen Dankner

Though I'm a musician trained within the classical tradition, I've tried over the years to develop an awareness and receptivity to music and sounds outside the classical canon and its staid traditions. Being a composer has helped; we're generally attuned to both audience tastes, which tend to be conservative, and to adventurous trends and styles, which pop up every so often that pique the public's interest. World and ethnic music is hot right now: Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Project and the Yiddish-inflected tangos of Osvaldo Golijov are two examples of the intrusion of non-Western music into the concert hall. And the trend, as I see it, will only grow, with smooth jazz, folk, rock and new-age hybridizations already making their presence felt. This is, and will continue to be, music for young audiences.

Something new and radically different, though, is also happening, and the baby boom generation is the targeted audience. It's music – really sound – for healing and therapy – a homeopathic alternative to traditional medicine and as therapeutic treatment for mind and body, both palliative and long lasting. Can sound relieve pain – even cure what ails you? Read on.

I spoke with Dr. Jeffery Thompson, Director of The Center for Neuroacoustic Research in Encinitas, CA, in practice since 1980, who described his work. "I use sound healing – specific frequencies tuned with computer analysis of the heartbeat, to resonate with the autonomic nervous system. My goal is to achieve homeostasis in patients to reduce stress. Stress causes disease. If we were able to maintain a state of homeostasis, we'd be impervious to disease. I also target sounds, often using the colors of the flute, cello and human voice, to the brain stem, to bring patients to a stress-free state. Once these brain and heart resonances have been matched to the individual patient, a CD is burned and the patients can listen to these sounds on their own, after treatment. The effect is that the brain stem becomes a medical device."

I asked Dr. Thompson how his treatments compare to traditional medicine. "Stress is endemic; 70 million people can't sleep," he said. "Medicine is a patch-up job for healing; it's a heroic intervention. My approach is different. There are ways to scientifically use sound to create entraining brainwave music in order to establish an environment for the brain to enter a state of

relaxation and deep healing. This is where art and science will merge in the 21st century. It is the future of medicine.”

David Gibson, of the Globe Sound Healing Center in San Francisco, is another practitioner of alternative health and healing techniques using sound targeted to the specific organs of the body.

“High frequencies activate a person, while low frequencies induce a state of relaxation,” he told me. “Repetitive sound patterns cause the brain to relax. In my work, I use sound to take people to higher states of consciousness, which I’ve defined as three categories: spirit, divine love and spiritual love. Each state focuses on specific sound frequencies. The acoustic laws of resonance transform the body’s natural resonances that occur in all the organs – the heart, brain, muscles, tendons and blood. In addition to specific frequencies, I calibrate tone colors, musical intervals and intensity of sound to match the body’s vibrations.”

Like Dr. Thompson, Gibson sees his work as an indispensable part of medical treatment in years to come. “Within five years, sound healing will completely change the medical field. Everyone who has worked with sound has seen how incredibly powerful it is. I urge people to seriously investigate the full spectrum of treatment, techniques and technology of the application of sound therapy for the purpose of increasing a sense of well-being and healing.”

My research for this story into these new approaches to using music and sound as mechanisms for relaxation, therapy and healing has shown it’s clear that Boomers, in significant numbers, are seeking alternative paths and approaches to making music an integral part of their lives in a new, integrated and holistic way. I asked myself: Is the Boomer generation open to music composed specifically for their health and longevity aspirations?

It’s conceivable – even likely – that in the future composers will target the vibrations in your body to produce sympathetic musical pulses. Skryabin and Messiaen – each in their day - would have been eager to home in on these frequencies. I, as well, would like to try my hand at it.

‘New Age’ music also attempts to transport you to the same ethereal homeopathic plane, if by less scientific means. Gregorian chant, George Winston, Lyle Mays, Keith Jarrett, Brian Eno and Tangerine Dream - all

have produced music for the purpose of meditation, yoga, massage therapy and stress management, which serves to induce a state of relaxation.

The idea gaining currency among researchers – both traditional and alternative - and with people attaining an age where serious illnesses start to appear, (that's us Boomers,) is that strictly scientifically targeted sounds, extracted from any musical context can do all this and more. There are even documented claims for tumor remission and lowering blood pressure.

In his book “The Energy Healing Experiments,” (Atria Books, 2007,) Dr. Gary E. Schwartz describes sound energies as “having been employed for thousands of years: singing, chanting...and the playing of bells, bowls and drums. Today, practitioners use CDs of natural sounds ...placed on acupuncture points to achieve “needle-less” acupuncture effects. Music plus nature sounds – ocean, wind, birds and rain – are being used before, during and after surgery to reduce stress, decrease pain medication, and speed healing time.”

Schwartz concludes his book with, in effect, a benediction for Boomers everywhere. He writes: “Our personal capacity to be energy healers - for ourselves and others – will grow over time. Science and spirituality will become connected in a manner that fosters our capacity to promote health, peace and vitality for the planet as a whole.”

Fascinated, inspired or skeptical? For more information on the people quoted above, their research and their institutions, visit these sites:

www.soundhealingcenter.com

www.neuroacoustic.com

www.drgaryschwartz.com

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