

The Noetic Post

A Bulletin from the Institute of Noetic Sciences

FALL/WINTER 2011 | VOLUME THREE, NUMBER ONE | INSTITUTE OF NOETIC SCIENCES



The Power of Sound to Heal

BY JASON K. NORRIS

CLOSE YOUR EYES. LISTEN DEEPLY. WHAT DO YOU HEAR? WHERE DO YOU FEEL THE SOUNDS in your body? How are these sensations affecting your consciousness?

Too often, we listen with only our ears. But sound is more than just auditory; it's somatic. It permeates and resonates in our cells. Our bodies receive and are affected by the vibrations in which we are embedded, and everything vibrates. Considering that we are mostly water, it's easy to imagine the effect sound has on us. Set a glass of water next to a stereo speaker, and the sound waves will become visible. With each vibration we encounter, our own vibration changes. Different vibrations resonate in different parts of our bodies. Lower frequencies tend to move us from our lower chakras, while higher frequencies tend to stimulate our upper chakras. Certain frequencies cause agitation, while others promote relaxation. The impact of a leaf blower is very different from a bird chirping. So too is the impact of a negative thought versus a positive one, for even our thoughts have vibrations. Tuning in to the quality of sound in our environments—both externally and internally—we can begin to understand the power of sound on our consciousness and everyday health. We can begin to envisage the future of *vibrational medicine*.

The art of sound healing is rooted in ancient wisdom traditions and spans cultures across time. It combines sound with the intention to heal and transform. While Indian sages chant mantras for healing, Peruvian shamans sing medicinal songs known as *icaros*. Tibetan monks ring singing bowls, and West African communities drum. The typical sound healer's toolkit includes a variety of instruments: flutes, drums, harps, shakers, bells, singing bowls, didgeridoos, tuning forks, pianos, strings, synthesizers, and—one of the most powerful—the human voice. The Greek word for soul, *psyche*, is also translated as “breath.” Toning, chanting, and singing are all effective ways to explore consciousness through the embodiment of sound.

Today sound therapy is finding its place in Western healthcare as a viable alternative and complement to allopathic medicine. Currently, sound healing practices are being applied in hospice work, addiction recovery, injury rehabilitation, stress management, wellness programs, and in the treatment of a wide range of ailments, from mood disorders to osteoporosis and cancer. These new prescriptions of frequency and rhythm are based on a variety of concepts.

The Architecture of Sound Space

An emerging field in the science of sound is *acoustic archaeology*, or *archaeoacoustics*, which explores the interrelation between sound and location. Sound needs a container, which also affects the sound. For millennia, cultures have mapped this out, building singing tombs, sound temples, amphitheaters, and cathedrals. Books such as

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Paul Devereux’s *Stone Age Soundtracks: The Acoustic Archaeology of Ancient Sites* and Susan Elizabeth Hale’s *Sacred Space, Sacred Sound: The Acoustic Mysteries of Holy Places* are great explorations of this. Sound can be shaped through architectural design and woven into the aesthetics of any environment. The science of such soundstates has become the focus of an emerging discipline called *ecomusicology*.

Managing the dynamics of sound in our own environments can be as simple as unplugging electrical devices that buzz or ring at unpleasant frequencies, such as overhead lights and computers. If you enjoy the sound of running water, get a table fountain. If you like wind chimes, hang some up. Limiting sonic distractions to create a harmonious ambiance helps to reduce stress and balance energy.

Frequency Resonance

We say that we are “on the same wavelength” with certain people, ideas, or even physical objects. When two frequencies echo each other vibrationally, each increases in amplitude. This is *frequency resonance*. Every vibration has a frequency—the wave’s number of oscillations per second, measured in Hertz (Hz). Frequency therapy is the science of working with our natural frequencies to help identify, balance, and sustain a healthy vibration through resonance. Research established by Dr. Royal Rife in the 1930s suggests that every disease has a particular resonance and so can also be cured with frequency. Nanotechnologist and biochemist James Gimzewski is conducting research at UCLA with a science he calls *sonocytology*, or “cell sonics,” looking at the ways in which cell walls vibrate and “sing” under different conditions. The idea is to develop a diagnostic system that would sonically scan the human body to detect diseased cells. Healthy cells respond with a different frequency than distressed cells.

Bioacoustics pioneer Sharry Edwards designed a sound healing program that “frequency analyzes” the human voice to detect underlying stresses that could potentially lead to illness. Through vocal profiling, the program charts the frequencies of a voice and refers to a database that holds the frequency equivalents of various nutrients, toxins, genomes, and pathogens. This spectral analysis determines what frequencies are missing, weak, or in need of balancing and delivers specifically generated tones from its database that compensate.

Tuning forks are another way to effectively explore frequency resonance. The use of sonic vibrations on or around the body can stimulate the cellular release of toxins, repattern behaviors, induce relaxation, and trigger mystical states of awareness. Like acupuncture, weighted tuning forks can be used directly on the body to stimulate muscles, nerves, bones, and joints. Unweighted forks are held around the ears or moved around the body. Dr. John Beaulieu’s book, *Human Tuning: Sound Healing with Tuning Forks*, as well as his website (www.biosonics.com), are excellent sources of additional information. One set of Beaulieu’s Biosonics tuning forks corresponds to the Fibonacci sequence (an underlying pattern in mathematics and nature) and is used to activate the pathways between the pituitary and pineal glands, which open alternate realms of awareness. Other sets are designed to resonate with particular brain states and planets. One is even calibrated to the frequency of OM.

The Chinese Theory of Five Elements also invokes the power of frequency in healing. It proposes that each of the five elements—wood, fire, earth, metal, and water—corresponds to a particular sound that activates specific organs, such as

the liver, heart, spleen, lungs, and kidneys. If we are having kidney problems, for example, we can vocalize the syllable that corresponds to the kidneys and invoke the water element to stimulate detoxification.

Rhythm Entrainment

When we're having trouble sleeping, we usually put on some classical, new age, or down-tempo music. When we feel depressed or sluggish, we put on something upbeat and energetic. We are not only resonating with particular frequencies when we use music in this way, we are actually conforming to them. This is the process of *entrainment*—when one vibration changes to match another. Every vibration has rhythm. Certain rhythms are correlated with heart rate and brain wave patterns, which are also associated with emotions and states of awareness.

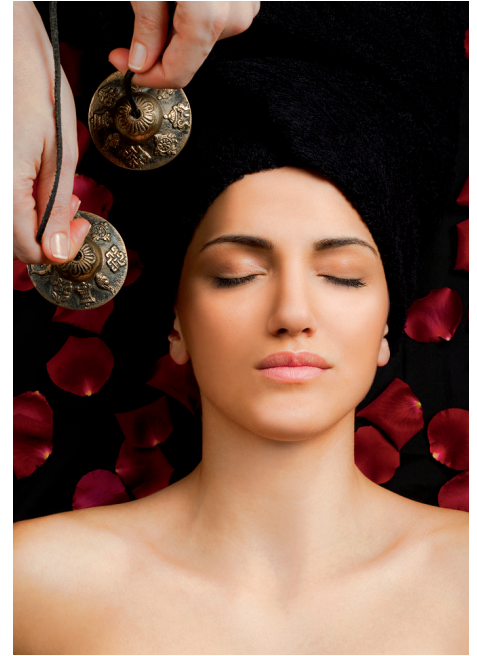
OBE (out-of-body experience) researcher Robert Monroe developed *Hemi-Sync*, a program that uses subliminal rhythms, or binaural beats, delivered via headphones to synchronize the hemispheres of a person's brain and to induce altered states of consciousness. When a 300 Hz tone is played in one ear and a 306 Hz tone is concurrently played in the other, the brain will perceive the difference as a 6 Hz pulse and entrain to it, resulting in a theta brain state associated with meditation (4–7 cycles per second). The Strong Institute offers a program called Rhythmic Entrainment Intervention, which combines specifically designed rhythms to address a variety of conditions, including autism, ADHD, PTSD, depression, chronic pain, stroke, learning disabilities, and brain injury. The Strong Institute also has individualized audio programs based on personal assessment as well as non-personalized compositions for calm, focus, and sleep.

The organization Drums and Disabilities uses hand drumming to help children and adults with developmental disabilities. Remo, Inc., has a scientifically researched and peer-reviewed program, *HealthRHYTHMS*, that brings group drumming into clinical practice for a variety of populations. A means for community-building, conflict management, stress reduction, and mood enhancement, group drumming has also been shown to help develop social skills, improve cognitive functioning, increase circulation, stimulate coordination, alleviate physical tension, boost immune system response, and cultivate an overall sense of well-being.

Sound as Medicine

Edgar Cayce proclaimed that sound would be the medicine of the future. Rudolf Steiner predicted that pure tones would eventually be used for healing. Roberto Assagioli, the founder of psychosynthesis (a transpersonal approach to psychology), also wrote about “Music as a Cause of Disease and as a Healing Agent.” With its ancient roots and modern applications, sound healing holds great promise for the future of medicine—and it's gaining ground. Ultrasound has been around for at least fifty years. Kaiser Permanente is integrating music therapies into its health and wellness programs. Various organizations are implementing bedside singing, harp, or flute in hospice and end-of-life care.

While much of the science behind these practices and programs is still in its infancy, the message is clear: sonic vibrations can transform us. How are you harnessing the power of sound to heal? 🕒



Online Directories for Sound Healers and Music Therapists

American Music Therapy Association

<http://www.musictherapy.org/about/find/>

Sound Healer's Association

<http://www.soundhealersassociation.org/member/>



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“The Power of Sound to Heal” was first published in the Fall 2011 issue of *The Noetic Post*, the bi-annual print newsletter of the Institute of Noetic Sciences, ©2011

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For more information, visit www.LucidDrum.com.