



A Sound Approach to Altered States of Consciousness



by Steven Halpern

As Director of Spectrum Research Institute, I have been intimately interested and involved in finding out why, how, and where certain sounds affect people as they do. For the past ten years, I have read everything that I could get my hands on (and some things I couldn't), and have enjoyed the privilege of personal communication with many of the most innovative researchers in this field of psychoacoustics. The following reflections are based upon that groundwork sound-work.

Although my primary focus has been oriented towards the use of music as a therapeutic and healing modality, it's obvious to anyone who looks or listens to our present reality that most of what we get to hear is anything but healing. So part of what we will examine will relate to the matters of sonic pollution and aural assault that affront and confront us all. We will also not limit ourselves to the definition that the Western European tradition has prescribed to music.

A Look at the Record

Since time immemorial, the human race has been hip to the fact that sound vibrations could exert a very powerful influence on our physical bodies as well as on our motions. Many of us have read the exquisite things Plato, Confucius, and Pythagoras had to say about this topic.† In the Bible, we read the anecdotal account of how David laid a number on Saul and cooled him out. Or, on the other hand, how the horn section brought down the house at Jericho.

Many cultures employ music in all major rites of passage: birth, puberty, war-making, marriage, death. Information in *The Secret Life of Plants* tells us that fertility dances and songs were used to increase the harvest. Only recently is "modern" science acknowledging that some of these folklore activities had significant statistical

significance; the question comes to mind: who "discovered" these things the first time 'round?

To complete our brief overview; we are told that the priests in Ancient Egypt used sound to help transform the Initiate, but we don't know *what* sound. There has been, in fact, a whole tradition of using music as a specific treatment for disease, or as a conscious tool for transforming one's consciousness (or the consciousness of a whole population), but this has fallen into obscurity within the last several hundred years.

So this rebirth that we are experiencing is actually a rediscovery of our basic orientation towards sound, but there are some highly interesting differences, differences that alter our response-ability. Let's see why.

Of all the things that differentiate our time from previous times, the level of ambient noise is perhaps the most pervasive. In the old days, unless you got caught in a thunderstorm, or lived in a town with a mighty church organ (the better to hear the voice of God) you rarely experienced a high decibel sound. It was quiet. A few birds, a babbling brook...quiet. There were no jets taking off or flying overhead, no machines, generators, refrigerators, cars, busses and televisionradiostereos constantly filling the airwaves with the unseen but not unfelt ambient noise of a decibel range in the neighborhood of 40-50 dB.

Dr. Kenneth Pelletier, noted biofeedback researcher, points out that the body never gets a chance to fully relax and come down from one excitation or irritation before another one pumps up the plateau. Long before this accumulated tension from nonspecific sound sources in the environment manifests as disease, there is a definite physiological and psychological dis-ease that each of us must deal with. Whereas, former cultures could start from a zero point to begin to attune and transform themselves with tone, it's almost as if

we are playing catch-up just to get back to a place where we can begin to work.

Atomic Symphony

There's another tradition that we should examine to bring our discussion into greater focus. For centuries, yogis have been saying that everything in the universe, both animate and inanimate, is vibrational in nature. Modern physics is saying the same thing. We can accept a sound as something produced by something vibrating (a string, a reed, a bell) because we can hear the sound. But even before the string was plucked or the bell struck, the object was vibrating incredibly rapidly. A well-known chemist from Johns Hopkins, Dr. Andrews, wrote in a book called *The Symphony of Life*, that if we but had the right ears, we could hear these atoms humming and singing.

We really hear a fraction of the electromagnetic spectrum. What happens to the rest, from dog whistles on up? Many of us are familiar with the phenomenon of striking one tuning fork and having another one of similar pitch being set in motion by the first. We call this a resonance phenomenon: one fork triggers a response in another by tapping into some vibrational frequency that is already there in the other.

It doesn't require a large leap of faith to consider that our bodies, as conglomerates of vibrating atoms and molecules, can in turn be set in other modes of motion by incoming sound stimuli. After all, we are made up primarily of water, which is certainly not as dense as the metal of a tuning fork. Logically, it would seem that we might be even susceptible to such stimulation. Empirically, this is indeed so. This resonating effect upon our nervous system occurs whether we are aware of it or not. It goes on at a level other than that of the apprehension of sound that comes in through our ears

and travels through the basilar membrane to the auditory canal and thence to the brain.

There are a number of books that chronicle different attempts to catalog the pathways of these responses. The problem with this is that each operates from its own ideological, iconoclastic perspective, missing the proverbial forest for the trees. And it has been this intra-disciplinary chauvinism that has hampered a fuller understanding of what happens when we respond to music and sound — until recently.

With the advent of recent technological breakthroughs in hardware, we are now able to measure energies too subtle to be picked up by earlier instrumentation. Sophisticated bio-feedback equipment like GSR polygraphs, Kirlian photography, and infra-red thermography, allow for a holistic monitoring of the organism and its overall energy fields, rather than merely monitoring the discreet perspective of blood flow through a finger or other previous parameters of investigation.

Perhaps the single most significant ramification to date afforded by these



new windows on the world has been the confirmation that there is indeed an electromagnetic energy body that surrounds and permeates our physical bodies. This concept, that we as humans possess more than "body," has been ignored and vilified by the scientific, intellectual, and religious communities for years. Now, it appears that what psychics and other sensitives have called the "aura" is very much a reality, part of a greater reality.

Formerly "occult" teachings tell us there are a number of bodies; accounts vary, but most include a physical body, a mental body, and spiritual body. These are composed of finer, more subtle vibrations which simply means that they are vibrating at faster and faster rates as you go on up the continuum.

In chemistry, there is a law of octaves, in which most chemical elements tend to repeat essential characteristics at every eighth element. In music, we have a similar phenomenon: an octave occurs every eighth note (in a major scale). In this case, doubling the frequency rate of a given tone will produce its octave. For reference, the best singers can produce no more than five octaves, and we couldn't hear them if they did. So it is not out of the question to extend our musical metaphor to conceive of a system of organization in which the song that is you is sung at characteristically higher and higher octaves; astral and other bodies might be related to our physical bodies as harmonics of a given fundamental frequency.

Assuming for the moment that this were so, phrases like "getting high" and "good vibes" would achieve greater than allegorical relevance; it would mean that we were getting in closer touch, in closer harmony, with other parts of ourselves ordinarily slightly (at least) out of tune. We would be functioning on more levels more efficiently.

Healing and Music: Bringing Oneself Into Harmony

So far, we've been establishing a conceptual framework in which the world of vibration is what's happening and within this larger context the thing we call music is a specific subset of vibrations organized into certain generally accepted and culturally-conditioned parameters. Can this shed some light on how sound can take us into other dimensional areas?

It turns out that another thing yogis have been telling us about concerns the system of energy centers in the body which hooks up our physical bodies to our supraphysical bodies. These centers, or **chakras**, are generally

considered to reside along the spinal column; research has related them to the endocrine glands. It is now known that they do correspond precisely with major acupuncture points, and that the electrical conductivity of these points is markedly different from that of the surrounding area.

Chakras are considered to have characteristic geometric forms associated with them, as well as characteristic color and tones. Now, if we accept the fact that the mystery schools, and others, were correct in the first place, they might be on to something that we can use relative to our "sound approach" to healing. With this in mind, let me suggest a model for working with this construct: Given a range of flexibility to take into account our individual differences, within a frequency range that we all share, it would appear that each of us has a generally similar harmonic hook-up based on the archetypal, genetically, pre-programmed vibrational structures of our bodies. "There is a blueprint for each life," says Yale's Dr. Harold Saxton Burr. It's an electrical pattern of perfection that provides the guidelines

for the physical vehicle to grow into.

For the above-mentioned reasons of sonic-caused distress, as well as for the less proven but equally viable ones, such as thought (...as a man thinketh...), most of us go through our existence out of tune with our own vibrational makeup. Metaphysics speaks of Self and self, but as more and more scientific evidence comes in, we may see that getting a "tune-up" might not be something we should do solely (soul-ly) for our car, but for our own bodily vehicle as well. Again, "attunement," good "body tone" (getting in shape) are not merely linguistic lapses or accidents. Someone knew what they were saying back then. Mantra and chants didn't come about by chance.

Practical Application

There's a book called *Toning: The Creative Power of the Voice* that offers a simple process of intoning certain pitches to get an individual into greater harmony with him/herself. The system is based on a model used in many countries that traces its lineage to Pythagoras and beyond. The working

hypothesis seems to be this: as we go through life, we pick up vibrational debris, deposits of psychic sludge which tend to decrease our vitality and efficiency. If we clean our automatic spark plugs to eliminate unwanted deposits, why not do the same for ourselves? Discordant sludge may be shaken loose by vibrating tones of proper values. Could something so simply really work? Try it.

One of the most fascinating and exciting aspects of such a cleansing is that when you get one energy center cleansed (more in tune with its own perfect pattern of creation) it acts to help to get your other centers in tune with themselves. This bio-entrainment can be experienced during meditation, when the body is allowed to shut out worldly distractions and deal more with its own intra-organismic needs. That's why one of the characteristic responses of meditators is that they want to keep

on doing it; it feels good. The body knows when its ON.

The fact that this occurs during a traditionally "spiritual" activity is only now being understood as part of a larger bio-energetic reflex and relaxation response. Just as we lose sight of the stars in the blaze of the midday sun, so, too, do we lose the subtlety of the experience of the exquisite harmony of our birthright in the barrage of the environmental stimuli.

Many nonwestern cultures are more sensitive to this harmony; the Hindu system of ragas attended to this notion with a somewhat poetic exegesis of scales and rhythms to be played at certain times of the day and year. Moreover, each note in a raga is not just the edge of an interval as it is often considered in the West, but each note represents a state of being; tones are living entities not just notes (even though the two words have the same letters). With the exception of a few

romantic composers, few in the West have considered such specifics of the responding organism. No source material for investigating such possibilities were even available, until recently.

A growing body of music is manifesting in this New Age that defies conventional categorization but is openly oriented to and is acknowledging concepts of rapport, cooperation, and transformation with other levels of existence. With the Findhorn experience providing dramatic evidence for interspecies and inter-dimensional communication, the historical concepts to which composers and poets refer, such as their Muse or their daimon, become more than flights of fancy; they may give us a look behind the scenes of the mystery of artistic "creation." It may be that "translation" would be an appropriate ancillary term.

Whatever the source of the inspiration, there is an album of music put out

by Spectrum Research Institute that appears to tap into the archetypal energy centers we discussed several paragraphs ago. Judging from the Kirlian photographs studies and the reactions of thousands of people, something very unusual is going on with this music. The form sounds so simple, but the content is compelling. Why? Tompkins and Bird, in *The Secret Life of Plants*, report that we, as living organisms, can be likened to a crystal receiver set. Perhaps this is the reason why so many individuals experience *Spectrum Suite* (See Jan.-Feb. *Journal*) in a similar fashion: The tonal centers that the songs are composed in consecutively tune in various receiving channels, like tuning in a radio station.

By way of contrast, with ordinary "music" compositions, 75%—at most—of the listeners will have a similar reaction to the music; i.e. they agree that the music made them feel happy, or sad, or whatever. With this new bio-music, upwards of 95% of those who hear it describe their experience as being one of extraordinary calm and peacefulness. They say it makes them feel like they are "float-



ing," or "being drawn upwards, through their heads, out of their bodies." This is exactly the reaction we could expect if indeed a sonic stimulus was consecutively resonating the physical and etheric energy centers. Getting them "tuned up" would raise their collective vibrational frequency because they would be working together harmoniously rather than fighting each other with discordant inharmonious vibrations. In essence, the system would be operating more efficiently, and thus experience a natural tendency to tap into higher octaves of functioning.

Along somewhat related lines, Drs. Bentov and Sanella have already begun conducting pioneering investigations into a physio-kundalini effect related to resonance factors in the body. Reverend Raahn is affecting chiropractic-type adjustment by playing tones of the specific frequencies of particular muscles and organs. The potential is obvious. But could you imagine what an "organ recital" would sound like?

Many listeners have commented that the music of some of these new age artists reminds them of something they had heard in a dream. Dream researchers tell us that many of us go elsewhere when we sleep. Is it possible that some of these new sounds have been brought back, or directly channelled, from other realms?

Music of the Spheres

From time beyond time, journeyers on the path of enlightenment and self-knowledge have spoken of the radiant glory of the light and sound of inner planes of existence. We're all familiar with the image of a Celestial Choir who just hang out and sing all day. But let's look beyond the metaphor.

The modern view of the atom is that it is essentially a tuned system consisting of a nucleus surrounded by waves of one or more electrons. (A tuned system, like a guitar string or an organ pipe, is one which can play only notes of certain wavelengths, that is, integral multiples/divisions of the length of the string). Such waves are called standing waves. It is this fact that allows us to detect a star's chemical composition; their atomic structures lead them to "broadcast" this information in a musical way. Music is here defined as a series of tones based on simple integral relationships—as opposed to noise, which entails a random and nonintegral cacophany.

From a purely mechanical standpoint, leaving for another time the notion that stars and planets are actually living beings, we have a universe literally saturated with frequencies of sound. Some of these our higher senses may perceive as "music of the spheres."

But there's another interesting consideration, one that traces its origins back to the legendary Muses. (I mean, they even lent a linguistic clue to our word music, right?). The question of the source of creativity has occupied

many a writer, but no totally satisfactory conclusions have been drawn. Yet in case after case, we hear a composer saying he "writes down what he heard in his head"; a poet says "the poem writes itself"; a mind-boggling solution "appears" to a genius in a moment of reverie, or comes in a dream. Granted, the energetic exercise of ego-stimulated discipline and technical precision can account for much artistic production. But after a certain point the vehicle which carried you there becomes that which blocks further progress. An examination of the literature of this field reveals that this process often has a will of its own; it occurs on its own timetable, and not necessarily on the artist's

It would seem that what goes down as "composing" is often a form of subliminally or supraliminally tapping to musical vibrations and thought forms that are already permeating and circulating through space. Of course, this would be subject to one's own programming, which would filter out a great deal. But it would also seem plausible to suggest that the vast

realms of the ethereal auditorium are enhanced by the continued service of "composers in residence," beings in spiritual (higher octave) dimensions. The reality of some form of reincarnation, at the very least, would suggest that certain individual expressions of the creative life force might well continue doing elsewhere what they had done here on earth. (Rosemary Brown and Liszt's work is a case in point.)

If we recall that as living organisms, we are actually oscillators and resonators, it is not unreasonable to hypothesize that there could be some sort of arrangement whereby different celestial composers might have access to various wavelengths to broadcast their "concert." The phenomenon of resonance might then account for the ability of certain individuals to monitor these performances by attuning themselves empathically with that composer. There is a law of like attracting like; might then sounds from somewhere else have a tendency to draw us closer to that somewhere else?

There are tons of quotes from

playwrights, philosophers, poets, and musicians that relate to this possibility. Who knows, perhaps it's time to place less value on the ego-personality of the "composer" and greater acknowledgment on the process of "cooperation." This is certainly part of the message of Findhorn, and it's hard to argue with a 38 pound cabbage growing out of sand.

Another source book that might be relevant is *Keys of Enoch* by Dr. I. Hurtak. Dr. Hurtak suggests a special synthesis showing how the new music and the new teachings will come together. Sound patterns and light geometries both organize in very definite ways the bio-physical and electromagnetic fields via vibrational resonance phenomenon. The time feels ripe for paying closer attention to these sensual stimuli for getting a clearer view of where we stand in this space-time continuum and for seeing how we might fine-tune our apparatus for a sharper reception of our cosmic connection. ▲