

**W**e have all experienced how music can change our mood whether it's uplifting joyful music or soothing relaxing music. What is not fully recognised is the incredible power of sound to heal and transform.

# The healing power of

# SOUND

Sound can be described as "the meeting place of the abstract and manifested idea." To quote St John "*In the beginning was the Word*" and other spiritual traditions describe creation through sound. My conviction about the transformative power of sound comes from my own experiences described below. Acknowledging the limitations of writing about something essentially experiential, I aim to encourage you to develop your own relationship with sound.

The concept of healing with music is very ancient. Music was used for stimulating growth of plants and crops, increasing fertility and healing the sick. Recent studies have shown how cows produce better quality milk when there is music in the cow sheds. The Mystery Schools of Egypt, Greece and Rome understood that vibration is the fundamental active force in the

universe and developed specific chants and tones for healing and achieving altered states of consciousness.

I believe that illness is caused when we are "out of tune" with ourselves so sound can help bring us back into alignment. Jonathan Goldman illustrates this in his book "*Healing Sounds*". He gives examples of healing using electronically created sounds either on tape or projected out of the end of an instrument, which can be explained in a scientific manner. Since 1961, Dr Peter Guy Manners MD, an osteopath, has researched the effects of sound upon the structure and chemistry of the human body. He has developed the Cymatic Instrument which responds to the different harmonic frequencies which are the healthy resonant frequencies of different parts of the body. With this Cymatic therapy he has successfully



By Susan Lever

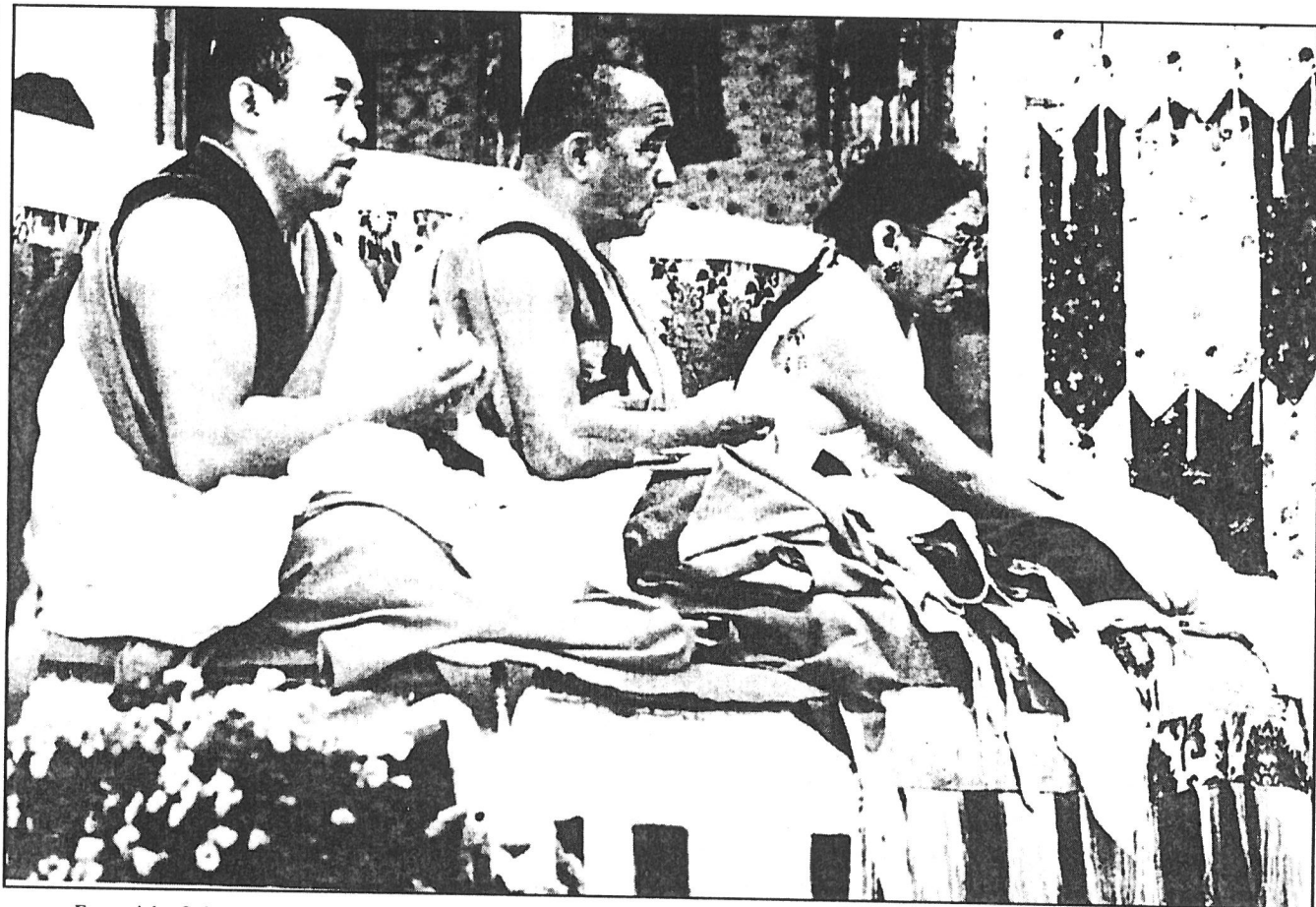
treated imbalances including asthma, colitis, diabetes, glaucoma, heart and kidney disease and multiple sclerosis.

Even more inspiring are the miraculous results with the human voice and healing, not requiring an expensive piece of equipment of something outside ourselves. One method is through toning, a term coined in the early 1960's, although no doubt the first cave man made a sound when he stubbed his toe!

To quote Jonathan Goldman, "*Toning*



Tibetan bowls from Phil Hardy's extensive collection.



*From right: Sakya Trizin, Ganden Tri Rinpoche and Drikung Kyabgon. Chanting is very much part of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.*

is the use of the voice to express sounds for the purpose of release and relief, or to resonate the physical body and the etheric fields." Unlike chanting, it is non-verbal sounds and can incorporate sighing, moaning and humming. To understand how this works I recommend learning with a skilled teacher. I have worked with the Australian Chris James, who will be in England this summer.

All sound is energy. Healing sound comes from the heart. An illustration of the difference this makes was researched by Jonathan Goldman. He was tested by Dr John Diamond, MD, while listening to a piece of classical music performed by the same orchestra with two different conductors. Dr Diamond has worked for years with behavioural kinesiology, a method of muscle testing. Kinesiology can test a person to determine if their muscle was strengthened or weakened by an external force or stimulus. With a well known conductor loved by his orchestra, Jonathan's muscles were strong and he breathed deeply and regularly. With the second conductor, Jonathan had weak muscles and was breathing shallowly with a fast pulse. It

was discovered that the second conductor was a strict regimented man who created fear in those with who he worked. The same sound had a very different influence.

One description of how the different rhythms of the body may be changed through sound is known as "entrainment". This involves the ability of the more powerful rhythmic vibrations of one object to change the less powerful rhythmic vibrations of another object, and cause them to synchronise their rhythms with the first object. Therefore through sound it is possible to change the rhythms of our brainwaves, as well as our heart beat and respiration.

In Shamanic work, the steady monotonous drum beat is used to aid "journeying". This is a process of undertaking a journey into the underworld through creative visualisation to meet power animals and other helpers. The drum produces changes in the central nervous system, effecting the theta waves (\* please see end), speeding up this process of letting go. In a different context, dance rhythms played on a drum can compel even the most self-conscious dancer to

move their body and let go of their inhibitions. The drum beat can also create a trance state.

My passion for the healing power of sound comes from my own experience. I enjoyed an early enthusiasm for singing but like many people believed others who told me I couldn't sing. When I studied Shamanism, the Native American traditions, I was introduced to the joy of chanting. With chanting simple repetitive words and tunes, I did not have to worry about getting the notes or words right and gradually my voice became stronger and more open. I loved chanting with a group noticing how, without instruction, my own sounds would develop softly or loudly, blending with the other voices. I discovered how easily through sound a collection of individuals united as a group. The atmosphere in the room would liven up or calm down according to the nature of the chant.

Encouraged by people to take my voice "seriously" in 1992 I started singing lessons. I was aware that sometimes my voice would feel wonderful but other times feel forced and I had no concept of what I was doing to make the difference. A whole

## The healing power of sound

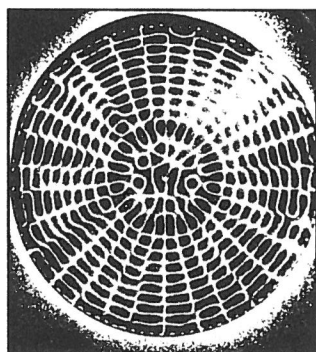
— continued

hour with a teacher tuning into me, helping me focus on breathing from my centre, was a revelation. Sound is a vibration of the air and breath. Singing is not about coming from the throat but the diaphragm. People know from Yoga the power of breathing and sound enhances this. It enables us to express our truth through the timbre of our voices. I felt I was bringing the inner me into the outer world. In feeling connected to myself, I felt connected to everything around me.

Previously I had tried various methods of meditation but always struggled to practise them consistently.

our own right to be heard. Sound also can teach us to listen, especially to our inner selves. I recommend 'Voice workshops' to help free up your natural voice. They will offer simple techniques to help release the fear, including a variety of movement and relaxation exercises and rhythmic and wordless games to bring you into the present. Sharing sounds with other people is wonderful. Valuing how we all have unique voices and listening to the sound of them blending when people are able to let go, is a magical experience. There are a number of good workshop teachers. I personally can recommend Frankie Armstrong, who has been running Voice workshops for over 20 years.

Another way of healing, I have found,



Illustrations reproduced from 'Meditation in a Week' by Naomi Ozaniec. Pub. by Headway. Price £5.99.

The more I tried to quiet my mind the more busy it would seem and the more agitated and frustrated I became. Through sound and connecting to my centre I find a stillness within and a new found strength. I've experienced being strengthened by sound so that I am not overwhelmed by feelings or over identified with them. When I sing I find a place inside that's strong, a place beyond those feelings. Sound also helps me express my deeper feelings and can transform my anger or sadness into something more whole, more grounded.

Through singing I started listening to my own voice, started expressing my true self. From never having written poetry before, I started composing original beautiful songs. They flowed out of me, teaching me song-writing, guitar chords and singing, and giving me an 'aliveness' I had rarely experienced before. In four months I composed and recorded a musical autobiography, "Beyond the Wall".

If you can speak, I believe you can sing. Many people believe otherwise because of the messages they were given as a child. We need to reclaim our right to enjoy heartfelt sound and

is through listening to 'Tibetan Bowls', sometimes called 'Singing Bowls'. These are becoming increasingly popular in the West. They are bowl shaped gongs made from a mixture of metals with a high gold content, originally used in Tibet and Nepal for storage of grain. The sustained sound that can be made from them can last up to as much as five minutes. This resonance helps draw you into yourself. Their vibration creates an atmosphere that offers stillness, and from that an opportunity to let go of the mind, open the heart and observe in a non-judgmental way thus releasing any emotional stresses buried in the subconscious. Philip Hardy has been working with Tibetan bowls in healing for a number of years and has had successful results with a wide spectrum of clients, including those with drug addictions and eating disorders.

I now know, beyond doubt, that everyone is capable of creativity, however blocked they may feel at present. All that prevents us is our judging minds and the negative programming we have taken on in our upbringing. Before working with sound I always thought that creativity was

## Editor's Comments

Many thanks to Susan for her interesting account. Susan now runs a mail order catalogue which specialises in *Sound for Healing* offering books, chanting, dance, and relaxation tapes. She will be running Voice workshops from the Autumn. Further details from Rainbow Express, 4 Maldon Road, London, W3 6SU (081-992-5987).

\* Different brainwave rates have been equated to different states of consciousness. There are four basic categories of brainwaves, based upon cycles per second (hertz or hz, the measurements given to sound) They are:

*Beta waves* - from 14 - 20 hz which are found in our normal waking state of consciousness.

*Alpha waves* - from 8 to 13 hz, which occur when we day-dream or meditate

*Theta waves* - from 4 to 7 hz, which occur in states of deep meditation and sleep, as well as in shamanic activity

*Delta waves* - from 0.5 to 3 hz, which occur in deep sleep and have been found in very profound states of meditation and healing.

something other people were involved with. Sound is freeing me up, helping me find my connection with the Source.

Healing with sound is now at the centre of my life's work.



**BEYOND THE WALL by Susan Lever is available from Rainbow Express, price £6.50 (inc. p&p).**

The tape is a very pleasant lyrical compilation, composed and sung by Susan, accompanied by an acoustic guitar. Susan writes and sings from her own experience and the result is certainly 'heart-felt'.