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Considerations in composing healing music and a study of healing elements

from *Sounding the Inner Landscape-Music as Medicine* by Kay Gardner

Analysis of *Listening* by Joanne Dusatko

Kay Gardner (1941-2002) was a musician, (primarily a flutist), composer, author, teacher and musical producer involved in using music for creative and healing purposes. Her compositions include works for orchestra, choir, flute, voice and piano.

Kay outlines 9 elements that contribute to healing through music and sound.

The most important is *intent*. She writes “Without purity of heart and mind, true and lasting healing cannot occur. At the beginning of every healing process, whether or not it involves song and music, a short prayer or blessing should be uttered.... Before I sit down and write a composition for healing, I clear myself of all negative thoughts and say a short prayer stating my intentions. Even before choosing music for healing, a prayer helps me focus on the purpose for healing music”.

How her musical process would often begin- a phrase would come to her repeatedly, obsessively until she would write it down and develop it.

Eight elements upon which composers may build healing works-

- 1) *Drone* is the bed upon which all other music elements rest. A long uninterrupted sound on a single pitch can touch the human organism in a specific area. By finding the resonance of organs, glands, or muscles and duplicating the pitch frequency with a drone tone, blockages may be dispersed and tensions released. The harmonics naturally occurring above the drone will balance the auric fields surrounding the body while the drone tone touches the physical center of the dis-ease. Using toning, the human voice can be an effective drone instrument, as can many world instruments such as the tamboura or dijeridu.
- 2) *Repetition*, as found in vocal chanting or instrumental ostinato, creates a healing modality that the listener, through eventual familiarity with the repeated phrase, becomes comfortable with it. (An ostinato is a short melodic phrase repeated throughout a composition, sometimes slightly varied or transposed to a different pitch.) When comfortable with the repetition, the person can relax and accept healing techniques while in a receptive state. As with all the musical healing elements, repetition can stand alone or with other elements in a musical piece.
- 3) *Harmonics* help to balance the physical body with the “unseen bodies”- emotional, mental and spiritual- that form the aura’s layers. Each harmonic “step” vibrates and tones the corresponding auric layer, bringing it into balance with the fundamental tone and the physical body. Harmonics sound anytime music sounds. (more or less harmonics for some instruments) For healing purposes, a drone-sung or played- gives harmonics more time and space to resonate and balance the listener.
- 4) *Rhythm* functions in healing music by duplicating the healthy pulse. Of all the many pulses in the human body, the easiest to duplicate musically are the heart rate, the breath cycle and the various brain waves. By using the ‘iso’ (equal) principle- that is, beginning the rhythm at the evident pulse rate, the pulse may then be moved into entrainment with the rhythmic stimulus beating at a healthier rate. Kay notes that the heart beats in duple (multiples of two) time. A simple example of a heart beat rhythm is the beat of the native drum- **1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4** Interestingly, an anapestic rhythm **1&2&3&4&** is *against* the heartbeat and can confuse the entrainment process.
- 5) *Harmony* is the emotional content of music. Intervals can evoke specific feelings, from sadness to joy, from mystery to comfort. Intervals may be used to both harmonize the emotions and also bring dis-eased organ’s molecular relationships into harmony.
- 6) *Melody* helps us transcend pain by making us unaware of our physical bodies. Engaging the mind with melody, thus distracting us from pain, is as effective as pain-killing drugs for some patients. Melodies in various scales, modes and ragas can evoke shapes and images. Knowing the effects of

the different scales can be invaluable for any patient who is using visualization and imagery to mentally re-program the course of her or his dis-ease.

- 7) *Instrumental colors*- i.e. the timbres of orchestral and electronic musical instruments - have the healing function of penetrating the physical body as specific locations and balancing auric layers. The fundamental sound of each instrument touches the physical body, the unique set of harmonics activated by each instrument vibrates the corresponding “unseen bodies.” Each instrument, depending upon its construction, shape, materials harmonic content and its playing technique vibrates a different part of the human body, mind and spirit.
- 8) *Form*, or design of a song or composition, determines the direction in which the listener travels while the music plays. Music that contains many changes of mood and tempo can stimulate the listener, whereas music that stays on a steady and predictable course can be used as a sedative. Music in cyclical forms, particularly compositions structured with the “divine proportion” may be most useful in the guided imagery process, a one-on-one or group therapy technique whereby music is used to help heal mental, emotional, physical and spiritual dis-ease.

Thought on the composition of *Listening* My intent was to bring hope, reduce stress, and bring peace.

-It starts rather activating with a downward curve to peace.

The piece varies from 60-64 bpm which is in the alpha range which can aid relaxation and stress reduction.

-I used a synth drone which has odd overtones to set the stage along with the percussion instruments.

-I used a quickly moving melody with activating minor 2nd intervals along with many calming minor 3rds.

The guitar, being a steel string instrument is rather activating as well as the metal bells in the middle section.

The djembe rhythm in the shaker/bell section is set to a heartbeat rhythm which is easy to entrain to.

The voice brings in peace and calm along with a moderate tempo descending melody.

The water (from my kitchen sink!) was to denote movement and peace.

In order to examine the effectiveness of the piece, I had 6 people listen to it. I provided a questionnaire of how the piece made them feel emotionally, physically and spiritually. Following are some of my findings

Guitar section – Compelling and calming/stimulating and a bit agitating, a call to attention and alertness/
powerful reassurance everything’s going to be ok/two people said “an invitation”/gemstones
swirling/emergence/welcoming/two people breathed deeply/focus on torso

Bell shaker section- Everyone said dancing/energizing, being prepared/empowering/pulsivity/meditative

Vocal section- Reassurance and comfort/big exhale, relaxed, limp arms/ All said calming and peaceful/flood
of angelic presence/mysterious/divine singing to me/

Water Many said liked it but sad voice stopped!/Breathing slowed down/peace no matter what

HOW IMPROVE SONG

Add binaural beats

Lengthen vocal section

Consider golden section where climax/most tension occurs a little over half way or about 2/3 of the way through a song.

More a more calming effect, use less changes of sections/styles

Create a future piece based on divine proportion as that is how nature is based and we as humans relate to it strongly.