

Sounding Bowls Some field reports.

Dear Members

Some two years ago *HT* carried an article about the Sounding Bowls that I am graced to make. There I tried to give some idea of the process by which in 1986, during a quiet meditation I was first shown the image that resolved into my making wooden bowls with strings across. After some design development and technical solutions to such issues as carrying the two thousand pound tension that can be placed on the wood by the strings the tone of these instruments began to speak in such a way that healers and therapists applied them in their work.

The very first one was a Dr. of Music therapy in a hospice in Oxford. Dr. Lee found that even a simple little Sounding Bowl could reach people in a way that other instruments he was using did not. This was particularly clearly shown with a patient who was slipping into coma. She had really enjoyed music with Dr. Lee and would respond to his singing voice after other instruments no longer reached her. Days after she no longer responded to his voice, Dr. Lee found that her breathing would calm and deepen and her face relax when he played to her on the Sounding Bowl.

Since that time so many stories have come back to me that I wanted to share some with you. Also to wonder in print about processes that can allow special forces to come in through what we do and what we make. How is it that every where they go Sounding Bowls create ripples in people?

After hospice care children with multiple special needs were the next group who experienced Sounding Bowls. Here a trained music therapist found that where most of her work was to persuade a child by one means or another to engage, to take an interest in what she was offering, given a Sounding Bowl such children would typically reach out and engage of their own accord. More than one such therapist has now told me of children who managed to avoid contact over several sessions until the therapist acquired a Sounding Bowl. On seeing that the child would then spontaneously engage, first with the Sounding Bowl itself, touching, stroking, exploring with fingers, then finally making sounds; and after, engage with the therapist herself. Often this was a really significant breakthrough for the child, heralding a slow transformation of their personal relationships.

The next area of therapy work that engaged with Sounding Bowls was psychiatric care. In this field the suffering of the soul can easily lead to personal violence and steps that engage the suffering have to be slow and careful meaning that it can take many session before a meaningful intercourse between healer and client can be established. A recent customer reported that the new situation she was beginning therapy in would have taken months to get underway if she had not had a Sounding Bowl. "all my work in the first few meetings is with the Sounding Bowl" she told me. "nothing else enables me to reach to them without risk or delay." Another famous high security psychiatric hospital that got their Sounding Bowl a few years ago felt that "The Sounding Bowl takes our work onto a whole new level, adding vibrational healing into the music therapy." And added that some of their clients who had reached maintenance level years before began to make progress again, sometimes making dramatic progress.

Perhaps I focussed too much on this area of work, keen to establish some credentials for the potential of the Sounding Bowl, for it was some years before any healers not also practicing a recognised therapy began to use Sounding Bowls. Once they did feedback began to flow in from this field also. A common experience was for the more sensitive client to exclaim, on first plucking a string or two "WOW, the sound goes right through me, runs right down my body, awakening each chakra as it goes" or "it's as if the sound is flowing up both my arms making my heart one circle with the bowl" it is rare for anyone, healer or not, to first play a Sounding Bowl and NOT express astonishment of one kind or another. Perhaps that is why so many hospital therapists tell me that it is hard enough getting the staff to put it down, never mind the patients.

Feedback from healers typically tells of beings standing behind the player or of white light flowing from the bowl into the hearts of people. One healer was leading a closing meditation at an angel conference using his Sounding Bowl to focus the meditation. He noticed that white light was flowing from the instrument over the whole audience. Stepping down off the stage he walked right around the meditating crowd, watching in amazement as the white light continued to pour out and over the audience then spiral down into each heart, changing as it entered into what ever was needed to meet specific needs. He was also delighted when one woman came up to him afterwards and confessed to having had her eyes open and told him all about just what he had also seen.

A Sounding Bowl in Kent was on display during a house party and a healer coming in felt drawn straight to it. Touching it he quoted the lines of mantra that began my meditative life and have always been central to me. He also saw a particular being behind the bowl when it was played and felt that this being was both behind me, as the maker as well as behind anyone who uses them in any form of healing.

I do not see beings much myself, nor white light really, but for all that have always had a strong feeling of purpose in making the Sounding Bowls. When I fitted the first string to each one for at least the first fifty I made I got a very strong feeling, as though the shape began to breathe and took on a life it could not have had before. Often I would feel as though someone were leaning over me from above feeding something through me that I welcomed but could not identify. Sometimes the feeling was particularly powerful: then it became as though the sky itself, starry and blue was being pulled down into a point that entered into the form and kissed it with life. The sound issuing from the first string then spoke back to the sky, like child to mother, filling me with wonder.

How this power came to be flowing through me I do not know. I do believe that we as human beings have choice to allow it if we can, yet the power to heal cannot be taken if it is not offered. It would be interesting to see a discussion of what kind of soul and spiritual activity people find empowers their healing abilities. It seems to me that finding a sort of living humility, distinct either from self abasement or from loftiness is contributory to allowing this energy of Love to flow through us. I also wonder whether an acceptance of the pain of life, without wallowing in it, is part of opening the channels in us through which healing energies can flow to others. But then I am not a healer of people myself and do not know how much of the effect is caused simply by the form of the instruments or how much it may be connected with the attitudes which conceived and make them.

Even though I doubt very much that I could lay my hands on for specific cures I have myself experienced some remarkable events. Waiting for a train I am joined by a man with two boys, maybe eight and ten. The man is angry at the delay, angry at a previous cancelled train, a closed platform, the slow taxi, everything and anything that has made his day tough. But most of all he is angry at the boys' mother for not collecting them herself and derides her personality and abilities roundly. The boys ask him what I am carrying in those round cases. He tells them it is drums and that I am a travelling musician, but I get out the Sounding Bowls and show the boys. We all sit on a bench and play, the father, reluctant at first then comes to hang over us. Not three minutes have gone past before he is a changed man and speaks positively with the boys about things. Even remarking that their mother is not a bad person, is even a good mother to them, that he'd just got grumpy.

One day a woman came into my workshop for a piece of minor domestic woodturning. Asking about my work, she met there a Sounding Bowl. On taking this onto her lap and plucking a note she dissolved into tears. From that moment she began a sea change in her life that she had been seeking and hoping for, for years.

Many others than therapists and healers have chosen to use Sounding Bowls. There is a movement amongst orchestra musicians to use their playing as healing. On taking their seat they allow their eye to settle on someone who they feel may need healing and then play their heart out for them particularly. Sometimes the person will come backstage afterwards and confess that they felt healed in some strange way as though the player were focussing the music on them particularly. A violinist using this technique told me that he also likes to take his Sounding Bowl to hospitals and the like, finding people at random who might benefit from being played to.

In Gloucestershire a small group of people, calling themselves 'Empathy', is exploring what musical experience can offer to the dying and to people affected by serious illness. Their co-founder, Zambodhi Schlossmacher wrote this:

Yesterday I took a 7string Melody Bowl into our regional hospital and brought it to Linda, (*not her real name*) who is completely paralysed following a stroke. I play a larger, ten string bowl to her once a week and took the smaller bowl to see whether she might be able to play on it herself. She has a bit of movement left in one finger and uses this finger, pointing to letters on a chart, for communication. Sure enough she wanted to try and together we worked out how she could play all the 7 strings. It was amazing and she was thrilled that she could play a well know folk tune all by herself. She didn't want to stop playing. Normally I play for her about 15 min, then she gets tired, this time it took almost an hour before she wanted to end. She was delighted to play the bowl again the following week, and one week later spent the entire session playing it herself. It was a profound experience for me to witness, how after eight months of being restricted to pointing to letters on a chart, this person could suddenly play music.

'Empathy' offers workshops and courses for individuals, groups and organisations using conversation, stories, biography, art movement and music. The work is carried by a group of professional therapists and inspired by the work of Rudolf Steiner, Marshall Rosenberg and Elisabeth Kuebler Ross. Contact: empathy@keme.co.uk.

Many others have chosen smaller Sounding Bowls simply to use in personal meditation. The bright tone of a single string, if really focused on leaves a clear space as it dies away, through which the source of all creation can be felt. The interval created by two notes can be used to explore the "space between" that uniquely human experience of free choice, with all it's pain and potential. Three notes can be used to explore the relationships of the Trinity or of the white, the red and the black aspects of the Goddess. Feedback from meditation is necessarily muted, one cannot lay open these private moments without loss, yet it is common for those working with these littler Sounding Bowls to report a deepening of their experience.

Thus these subtle forms bring more to people than their simple beauty would suggest. All over the world now, in all sorts of practices people are being touched by Sounding Bowls. The ripples spread out. Even as their maker I do not know what the origin of these ripples is. Do you?

Contact Tobias via:

Phone; 01364 642 837

E-mail; Tobias@SoundingBowls.com

Or view more at www.SoundingBowls.com

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