

Theosophical Saturdays Arts Class 1 of 6

(Music, Dance, and Theosophy) Dan Smolla Sep 13, 2008

“Music as Spirit”

The first function of art is to transport the mind past the guardians--fear and desire. In short, music is a powerful energy, poetically, love--a love more powerful than the barriers to love. “Music,” said Beethoven, “is a higher revelation than all wisdom and philosophy.” One sort of testament to the spiritual power, the higher revelation aspect of music, is the fact that it plays the key role in so many different creation stories throughout the world.

In Egypt, the “singing sun” created the world with its “cry of light.” In ancient Egyptian scripture it is written that through “the tongue of the creator...all Gods and everything in existence were born....”

In another Egyptian tradition, Thoth, the god of the word and of scripture, of dance and music, creates the world by repeating his: “laughing word” seven times.

From Mexico, we learn of a creator God who casts of his frozen state to sing and create. “Inaudible and motionless,” says the mythology of the Aztecs of Mexico, “was the creator. An Iceberg! Silent as a stone. One day, however, he cast off the iceberg and broke his silence, as he was no longer able to resist his deepest wish to create the world and mankind. He sang: ‘This world shall be!’ and the world came into being.”

“And the WORD was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth”
John 1:14 (100 AD) (according to John, the literal translation of “The Word” meant “Pristine Harmony”)

Even today, in Brazil, “many Brazilian drummers and percussionists know which rhythm belongs to which ‘god.’ That’s the way they put it: Each rhythm “belongs” to a specific god.”

Of Brahma it is said: “He meditated a hundred thousand years, and the result of his meditation was the creation of sound and music.”

Plato in his famous dialogue Timaeus, tells that the creator constructed the world-soul (which to Plato means the idea of the cosmos) according to musical intervals and proportions.

This is a very short sample; the list of creations stories involving music as the key to creation is almost endless.

There is as well, in the most focused and absorbed experiences of praise singing a return to the original act of creation. “Praise signing does not only mean the act of lavishing praise or bestowing power and magnificence on another being, but bringing one’s own innermost nature into harmony with the world of creation from which all creatures have sprung. In the religions of the Brahmans, both of these duties of the praise song were one and the same because Atman, the highest God, resides in the innermost part of every person, and his redemptive power and truth must be revealed through song alone. Every being who has found his true center and hence his perceptions sings in the same way, sings as the Creator did in the original act of creation.

The Shatapatha Brahmana says, “When the Earth was created and felt itself perfect, it then sang the Gayatri verses...and ever since, every being who feels perfect begins to sing, or to rejoice in song.”

Examples of pure spirit singing matter into manifestation through praise works to show not only the absolute unity of spirit and matter but also the wisdom in seeking not so much transcendence, for if spirit pervades and informs matter absolutely as these creation myths seem to reveal, transcendence is not necessary—one cannot be out of or away from Spirit. But these myths show that in coming to the present moment, the present space, we come to eternity and to eternal space, and that in coming to absolute stillness, our absolute center, we come to original Creation.

Because music affects simultaneously at many levels and with many means--emotionally, spiritually, psychologically, intellectually, physically, imaginatively, etc--it will necessarily reach and affect and move many parts of ourselves which are not usually affected, moved, or known to our more mundane, non-musical consciousness. As we all know, the word “heal” comes from the word “whole,” and that in inviting more of ourselves into connection and consciousness through music we make ourselves more whole: we heal. In *Music is Medicine*, Doren Antrim summarizes, “It has been found that musical vibrations make their impact upon the entire body, being picked up by the nerves, spinal column, and even by the bones. This is why people who are deaf can react to music. It has also been demonstrated that music affects the pulse, respiration, and blood pressure; but its deepest effects, and those from which most of its curative properties are derived, are mental and emotional.”

The deepest music flows from and fills our deepest longings, our spiritual longings. Even a song of romantic love, if written spiritually, is ultimately celebrating the spiritual level of union. In admiring a singer, poet Wallace Stevens, shows how a worldly reverence, if viewed from a spiritual perspective, becomes a timeless reverence:

It was her voice that made
 The sky acutest at its vanishing
 She measured to the hour its solitude.
 She was the single artificer of the world
 In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
 Whatever self it had, became the self
 That was her song, for she was the maker...

Consciously approaching spirit through beauty may actually make a great deal of sense. Emerson called beauty the pilot of the soul and religions have long recognized the value of stained glass, art and music as a way of inspiration to worship. The tendency to control through rigid classification may satisfy our desire for linear neatness, but spirit, like quantum mechanics, and like music, has little to do with linear neatness. Approaching the spirit from an intellectual perspective may give our fears some comfort, but Spirit is under no obligation to confine itself to the limits of our intellectual understanding. The final meanings and maps of Reality may finally have more resemblance to song than to concept. Albert Einstein once confessed, “If I were not a physicist, I would probably be a musician. I often think in music. I live my daydreams in music. I see my life in terms of music.” Victor Hugo summarized the spiritual necessity of the music language, “Music expresses that which can not be put into words and that which cannot remain silent.” Igor Stravinsky summarized, “The profound meaning of music’s essential aim... is to produce a communion, a union of man with his fellow man with the Supreme Being”

G. de Purucker, in the *Occult Glossary*, defines Music of the spheres this way:

”Every sphere that runs its course in the abysmal depths of space sings a song as it passes along. Every

little atom is attuned to a musical note.”

Sufi mystic Inayat Khan explains that Spiritual Listening, that sort of listening in which we can receive the deepest aspects of a spiritual piece of music, takes practice.

“The first step is learning to hear,” Inayat Khan said, “wanting to hear, releasing the chaos within oneself, releasing it in the way one releases the body in physical death. This step means that one no longer wants to interfere, to change things....the ability to hear is a difficult thing, even if most Westerners do not want to believe this.”

Different Theosophists have stated that musical skill--playing and listening--is one of those skills that stays with us through reincarnation.

Spiritual music is created from and goes to the depths, and what it unlocks may initially have as much to do with forgotten and blocked sorrows, angers or wounds as it does frenzied excitement or pleasant reveries. As Lord Edward Bulwer Lytton said, “Music is the mysterious key of memory, unlocking the hoarded treasures of the heart. Tones, at times, in music, will bring back forgotten things.”

Spiritual music is written by a composer as part of his her own communion with the Higher Self, commercial or audience reactions are irrelevant. Another less traditionally artistic spiritual music is that created by professional music healers using indigenous instruments--natural instruments of wood and animal skin--accompanied with the inclusion of binaural beats or tones. The vibration of these perceived tones are set to those produced by the brain at the deepest levels of meditation achieved by the most advanced, gifted meditators. When these beats are mixed with indigenous instruments with sounds of nature and occasional use of melodies, the affect can profoundly deepen the realization, insight, concentration, calm, and healing achieved during meditation.

Mundane desire in music is expressed in the sort of pop music aphorism "I must have" and this sort of desire can never really be satiated. The spiritual perspective toward desire is more of a profound nostalgia; a longing revealed and satisfied a memory of a poetic home. As Saint Augustine said, "I have learned to love you late, Beauty, at once so ancient and so new! ...You were with me, and I was in the world outside myself...You were with me, but I was not with you...You shed your fragrance about me; I drew breath and now I grasp for your sweet odor. I tasted you, and now I hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am inflated with love of your peace."

Music, probably more than any other mode of communication, can bring us to this sort of relationship with Spirit, with our Higher Self, our Higher Home.

As we are all direct expressions of the Creator, we are all worthy of celebration, yet there is a quality to the world which makes us forget our divinity. Music can be especially helpful in bringing us back. As Maureen McCarthy Draper said, “The energy behind the notes in music is the same energy that grows the seed, the tree, the child.”

Emma Jung explained the unusual and significant qualities of music this way:

“Music... gives sensuous representation to our deepest associations and most immutable laws. IN this sense, music is spirit, spirit leading into obscure distances beyond the reason of consciousness its content can hardly be grasped with words—but strange to say, more easily with numbers—although simultaneously, and before all else, with feeling and sensation.”

The mystics most adept at describing their experiences in helpful ways had the ability to respect and integrate all the emotional nuances of their journey, to live with them, to meditate and pray with them rather than against them. A purely intellectual approach often ignores, minimalizes and even suspects or vilifies strong emotional energies as mere distractions, irrelevant or dangerous. But many mystics have poetically declared these great emotions as our closest angels, bringing important messages. And that music which touches us deeply, of course, sings this truth loudly. The poet Rumi describes it this way: “Today, like every other day, we wake up empty and frightened. / Don’t open the door to the study and begin reading. Take down a music instrument. / Let the beauty we love be what we do. There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.”

Perhaps because Eastern and Western classical music critics have been traditionally closer to the environments of scholarship, the transformative potential of music has mostly been discussed with classical music, and, later, jazz music, in mind. More recently, though, a newer wave of scholars and healers have pointed out how popular music deserves to be taken more seriously. Thus it does not have to be the mathematical precision of Mozart or Thelonius Monk, or the romantic melancholy melodies of Beethoven which inspire discussion on the healing and profound transformations inherent in musical relationship. It is just as legitimate to discuss the alchemical affects of the moaning blues of a Ray Charles or Robert Johnson or Billy Holliday, or the mystical ecstasies of Van Morrison, or the force of nature explosions of a favorite punk artist.

Though studies on the affects of music on plants has shown that plants love the mathematically complex nature of Western classical, jazz, and Eastern classical music, for human being sometimes simplicity is most nourishing. The following pop song by Louis Armstrong is disarmingly beautiful with its simple melody and sentimental lyrics of celebrating life.

Theosophy announces that it is the individual's responsibility and privilege to define and follow his/her own spiritual path. This is of course, equally true, with defining and following one’s own spiritual music path. And the golden compass in this context can only be one’s own heart. But, as well, as you find that music which reaches you most deeply, you may find, as well, that the opening created helps you to hear something of the profound music everywhere: As William H. Kirby The Theosophist Nov. 1908

“He finds the Eternal Voice in Nature, he finds it in men; everywhere in everything, in its myriads of varieties, in its countless rhythms, in its endless tonalities, everywhere and at all times God’s word is being uttered. Any wonder then that his attitude should be one of listening, should be that of attention?”

Music is the root to our deepest being and a portal to the path of unity. We are only beginning to approach the complex nuances of expression in the songs of birds, whales, and dolphins.

Many great painters have aspired to express the qualities of music in their painting. Paul Klee and Kandinsky were fascinated with music. Chagall and Pollock listened to music while painting. Chagall said listening to music changed his painting style.

Composer Roger Sessions believes music goes to the Source, the archetypes. “Emotion is specific, individual, and conscious; music goes deeper than this, to the energies which animate our psychic lives, and out of these creates a pattern which has an existence, laws, and human significance of its own.

The nature of art is to renew the ancient energetic truths in new forms when you are exposed to an art infused with this archetypal immediacy, burning with archetypal potency, “inner springs of ecstasy and

vital aliveness are tapped and come surging up” it reminds you of who you are at the deepest level. This confrontation used to be done primarily through dramatic immersion in religious ritual, but today is primarily experienced through art. Joseph Campbell called artists the mystical and shamanic guides for most of contemporary Western Culture.

As advertising and the movie industry have shown, nothing captures the imagination like an image accompanied with music. Most contemporary films are extremely dependent on the soundtrack to give emotional clues. In fact, the best music videos being made today maybe ley emotional moments in contemporary feature films.

With an aesthetically successful film, the director uses music and images to take the audience to as close an approximation of his vision as possible. Music, though, works more like a shamanistic devise, using melody, rhythm, and images to make depth suggestions, creating and traveling through the vision is largely up to the individual listener.

All of this supports of Albert Einstein’s famous quote that “Imagination is more important than knowledge,” for it is only imagination, not information, that can take you to these deeper places where change, healing, and profound insight and celebration occur. Einstein explained more completely, “Imagination is more important than knowledge, for knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and to understand.”

Albert Camus believed our life’s task was to recover, “the two or three simple and great images which first gained access to our hearts.” Many depth psychologists and all serious artists believe it is images the soul needs more than answers. The great mystical, spiritual poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote that in modern society we need to caution ourselves against too much irony. Emotion, today, especially the deepest messiest emotions, if treated at all with the logical , conscious mind, is usually treated with distancing irony. The artist, though, communes with emotion, dances with it, respects it, paints a picture in honor of it. As Maureen McCarthy Draper says, “in drawing us closer to our emotions, music prepares us for the great task of love.”

James H. Cousins stated in a 1916 edition of *The Theosophist*, “Imagination is the link to the deeper self. The inner world of the ideal is the only truly real.”

George S. Arundale stated, “The imagination is a wonderful bridge between the known and the unknown, between the existing and the desirable, between the actual and the unattainable.” –

Scott Miners in a 1978 *American Theosophist* article showed one example of putting imagination more directly in a spiritual context, i.e., a context necessarily holding unity and brotherhood ahead of all else:

“The challenge for us then is to find and use our own intuition and creative imagination in order to help build a world where there is a closer understanding of the life in and around us,” Miner said.

Marilyn Ferguson, in a 1978 *American Theosophist* issue suggests an esoteric view toward imagination, that it pours more powerfully through those who would not so much use it as be used by it for helping others: “As far as imagination and profound intuition go,” Ferguson said, “the universe rewards those who seek to create without (personal desire for) favor.” Ferguson went on to say that in addition to right motive toward imagination, there must be willingness to self-sacrifice in that significant creative action and thought will meet significant resistance.

One of the teachings that the main character in the novel, *Dune*, Paul, received is that you cannot understand a process by stopping it. You can learn to sort of dance with it and be with it at a deep level but not necessarily solve it. Paul is reminded that life is process as well.

The Sufi mystic teacher and musician Inayat Khan states that music is divine because it communicates without form and thought. There is no object. There is no idolatry, nothing to separate musician or listener from the breath of the Source. It is helpful and perhaps sometimes interesting to talk about the healing and transformative aspects of music from a scientific point of view, usually done with vibrational frequencies in mind. But then the beautiful miracles of life—birth and death and compassion and dance and song and laughter—are not made richer by reducing them to vibrational frequencies just as the mystery of a human being is not made richer, not treated with appropriate reverence and significant understanding when talked about in terms of skeleton, bones, muscle tissues and electric impulses.

That ability of music to suggest the timeless with its nonconceptual, flowing nature is exhibited beautifully in Pachelbel's *Kanon in D*.

Another important aspect of music of course is its physicality. Very few children, for example, can sit still indifferently when they hear music. There is a famous Eastern legend that speaks to the importance of the body and the physicality of the phenomenon of music. God made a statue of clay and asked the soul to enter into it. The soul, loving its unrestricted freedom, wanted no part of the restrictions, the prison of the body. God asked the angels to play their music. They did. The soul was moved to ecstasy. Through that ecstasy, in order to hear the music more clearly, the soul entered the body. There are of course a myriad of revelations in this short simple story filled with paradoxical truths. To experience spiritual music fully, i.e., love which is of course eternal and limitless, we must limit ourselves by taking this incarnation. The poetic statement, that we need the full sensitivities of the various energies of the human body to hear music most clearly is key for our discussion. Thus, though the body is ephemeral and transient and clay, etc., it is also, in many ways, the key to our experiencing, uniquely, deep eternal sacred experiences.

Healers who use music and sound state that the essential goal to healing is to return the body, or a part of the body, to its natural rhythm. Contemporary music therapists would agree with the ancient, Novalis "Every illness is a musical problem—the healing, a musical solution..."

Cancer, for example, is seen as a section of the body which has lost its natural rhythm and is now out of harmony with the rest of the body. Out of harmony parts of the body are returned to their respective natural rhythms through entrainment with the music and vibrations of nature or specially produced spiritual healing music meditation.

"For who can grasp in the easiest way the vital power of art?" Nicholas K. Roerich asked, and then answered, "the simple people and the children, the people of nature."

Vibrationally speaking, the sounds and rhythms we sense in deep nature are profoundly nutritious. More than just an escape from the rushing assault of urban city sounds; they are fulfilling part of the psyche and body's deepest needs.

In addition to the gift of the revitalizing music of nature, we have available to us the gift of spiritual music, written by composers who have journeyed to the depth of the archetypes with their music, music being their primary form of meditation, and returned with this primal news energetically transformed, made new with original rhythms and melodies.

Of course, what is deemed "spiritual music" will and should finally come down to an individual's deepest feelings and beliefs about what spiritual means to him or her. As well, there will be as many

different ways to discuss spiritual music as there are to discuss spirituality. For Sufis, for example, music is not entertainment, period. Spiritual music received by spiritual initiates is divine purification, contemplative prayer, or literally the face of the Beloved. “Sufi” means pure and music for Sufis then is a pure exposure to the Divine, which means necessarily that there may be as much pain as there is ecstasy in the experience. This sort of spiritual pain that may be experienced in a deep musical exchange is a type of purification.

Jazz Saxophonist John Coltrane cannot separate spirituality from his music. “I have experienced, by the grace of God,” Coltrane explains, “a spiritual awakening which was to lead me to a richer, fuller, more productive life. “I think the main thing a musician would like to do, “Coltrane once stated, “is give a picture to the listener of the many wonderful things he knows of and senses in the universe. That’s what music is to me—it’s just another way of saying, this is a big beautiful universe we live in, that has been given to us.” As well, after his spiritual awakening, Coltrane explained that music was his form of meditation.

There is not one among Indian classical musicians, Hindu or Muslim, likewise, who doesn’t see music first and foremost as something spiritual. They have all grown up with Nada Brahma, with an awareness of the Brahma sound that is reflected in their music. For this reason each tone they generate comes from Brahma, from God.

Ethel Rosenthal, in “The History of Indian Music” stated, “Musicians must possess firm devotion to God and must be pure in mind and body, for unless they realize the spiritual power of music, they will be unable to gauge the science underlying their art.”

No art form entices, ignites, and invites the imagination like music does. Music calls our core into movement, but the directions, patterns, temperature, colors and contours of the movement is up to the individual imagination of the listener. Imagination, that force which creates because it is in its nature to do so, has been equated by Theosophists with Fohat, the bridge between the purely divine and the manifest. Fohat makes the possible possible, and thus nothing is more important to spiritual evolution than imagination.

Dara Eklund, in a June 2001 issue of *The Theosophist*, said those who use imagination at the deepest spiritual level are really becoming one with the Absolute Imagination, or as Eklund put it, imagining “the plan in the mind of nature. Imagination can be especially helpful in developing our sympathy for others—we may not be literally able to walk in their shoes but we can imagine it, as we can also imagine their deepest needs and concerns.

Music, more so than any other art form or mode of communication, involves co creation, equal use of imagination by audience and artist. “Sounds [are] the most potent and effectual magic agent, and the first of the keys which opens the door of communication between Mortals and the Immortals. H.P. Blavatsky stated in *The Secret Doctrine* vol1 p. 464

As important as it is to find personally affective spiritual music, it is also empowering, freeing, and healing to create music as an amateur.

Especially in West, due to celebrity cult, there is a sort of hierarchical deference to known musicians as the only ones who can gain the potentially infinite benefits of creating music. There is an especially adhered to sort of set of unwritten do’s and don’ts—whether they are cosmetic or tonal—may buy into the idea that if they cannot create music in the same fashion, rhythm, style, way etc of celebrity musicians than creating music is not legit for them. Punk music—which essentially embraces the antithesis of this—was especially helpful in breaking this sort of thought form fixed pattern and

reminding many young people of their absolute right to create music in any way and fashion and style they see fit.

If you are not in the habit of spending time in private on occasion and making music from your heart—in any way that suits you—you should try it and see how empowering, affirming, and just plain fun it is. The key, especially if you are new or recently unpracticed at making music, is to find a private place and let the emotion and music flow in anyway you feel—this practice is between you and your soul, exclusively. There is no such thing as an un-musical person.

Like meditation practice or starting a new diet and/or exercise program, beginning a spiritually musical life will take considerable will to adopt new habits and to begin to literally hear and experience all things musically. As Thomas Carlyle said, “See deep enough, and you see musically; the heart of nature being everywhere music...”

It is possible to live, sense, and interpret life musically, and the results can mean a life which becomes as beautiful as our imagination will allow it to be. The following is an example of an entire culture that lives musically”:

“When a woman in a certain African tribe knows she is pregnant, she goes out into the wilderness with a few friends and together they pray and chant and meditate until they hear the song of the unborn child. They recognize that every soul has its own vibration that expresses its unique flavor and purpose. When the women attune to the song, they sing it out loud. Then they return to the tribe and teach it to everyone there. When the child is born, the community gathers and sings the child's song to him or her. Later, when the child enters education, the village gathers and chants the child's song. When the child passes through the initiation into adulthood, the people again come together and sing their song. At the time of marriage, the person again hears her or his song. Finally, when the soul is about to pass from this world, the family and friends gather at the person's bed, just as they did at their birth and they sing the person into the next life.

When I have shared this story in my lectures, a fair amount of people in the audience are moved to tears. There is something inside each of us that knows we have a song and we wish those we love would recognize it and support us to sing it. In some of my seminars, I ask people to verbalize to a partner the one phrase they wish their parents had said to them as a child. Then the partner lovingly whispers it in their ear. This exercise goes very deep, and many significant insights start to click. How we all long to be loved, acknowledged and accepted for who we are!

In the African tribe there is one other occasion upon which the villagers sing to the child. If at any time during his or her life, the person commits a crime or aberrant social act, the individual is called to the center of the village and the people in the community form a circle around them and sing them their song. The tribe recognizes that the correction for the antisocial behavior is not punishment. It is love and the remembrance of identity. When you recognize your own song, you have no desire or need to do anything that would harm another.”

A friend is someone who knows your song and sings it to you when you have forgotten it. Those who love you are not fooled by mistakes you have made or dark images you hold about yourself. They remember your beauty when you feel ugly, your wholeness when you are broken, your innocence when you feel guilty, and your purpose when you are confused.”

So if we do not necessarily find ourselves in a culture or environment which so gracefully sings the soul of experience, community, love and acceptance with the beauty and sensitivity of this African tribe, we can begin, nevertheless, right where we are. We can begin creating that ideal musical community first within ourselves, with spiritual listening and musical meditation and, as well, to

remind ourselves that we are never less than the miracle of music, by creating music in privacy in any way we see fit. The song of the universe is all around us all the time, but sometimes it is very shy and quiet.

As we begin to find those spiritual music pieces which sing especially to us individually, our deepest fears and desires will be revealed, gradually, but also transformed via the great gift of the human experience and the great gift of the musical body.

We are all beginning to realize that joy is not a stage one must control or grow out of, and music can remind us daily of this. It is time to listen and sing.