

# The NEWS Minute

## [A dose of music: Is sound healing the next wave in holistic therapy?](#)

After meditation and yoga, sound healing could be the next step in holistic therapy as it starts to gain a foothold in the country.

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Aurelio using sound healing therapy at Svaram



Chimes, metallophones, resonating tubes, granite blocks. These are some of the musical instruments you will find at SVARAM, the music center at Auroville near Puducherry. Dr. Aurelio Hammer, the founder and Director at SVARAM explains that these are specially crafted instruments that can be used for healing patients with certain ailments. He takes the granite stone, applies a layer of water on it and rubs it with his hands, causing it to emit a deep hum. Says Aurelio, “The person is stimulated through exposure to selected frequencies to generate and re-activate self-healing powers. All these instruments are tuned to natural tonal systems such as the Indian 22 Shruti or Pythagorean frequencies.”

The use of sound in a person’s well-being has historically been a part of traditional Indian culture. As far back as Vedic times, mantras were composed with specific emphasis on rhythm, tone and melody. Transmitted orally for generations, they were created to be chanted, and equal importance

was given to the sound structure as to the actual meaning of the words. People believed that the sound waves from the chanting could cure people of ailments.

Over the years, the study of using sound for healing and well-being lost momentum, as focus changed to scientific study of disease and the use of pharmaceutical drugs for cures. However, with the resurgence of interest over the last few decades in holistic therapy, there has been a renewed interest in using sound for healing purposes.

Austrian born Aurelio has spent the last 25 years studying acoustics, listening traditions, music pedagogy and healing arts. He eventually settled down in Auroville, and started SVARAM to further explore the role of traditional musical instruments and sound in healing.



### *Soundbed at Svaram*

The centrepiece of SVARAM is the sound healing space, consisting of a sound bed, surrounded by the instruments. The sound bed consists of a hollow resonance chamber, with tuned strings underneath. The patient lies down on the bed and the strings, when played, cause the sound bed to vibrate.

While some use live instruments for sound healing, others have turned to the electronic medium. Dr. Jeffrey Thompson, founder of the Centre for Neuroacoustic research, USA, has spent the last thirty years experimenting with the effect of sound on the body. One outcome of the research has been a series of music CDs containing specific soundtracks for sleep, meditation, relaxation and so on.

“The soundtracks aim to recreate the primordial sounds that are heard by a child when in the womb of the mother. For the initial months of its development, the foetus mainly hears liquid sounds from the amniotic fluid, sounds of the mother’s heartbeat and the small and large intestine. Nature sounds, like bird sounds, are overlaid on that,” says Dr. Thompson.

Dr. Thompson uses an electronic sound bed with attached speakers and headphones, through which the sound is played. Unlike a normal sound bed, the electronic sound bed can be made to emit any

frequency as required. These sound beds are used in India as well.



*Dr Jeffrey Thompson at work*

How and why does sound healing work? There is no definite answer to this question. While there are many theories, none have been conclusively proven in a scientific study. One theory suggests that the physical vibrations from the sound bed cause vibrations in the bone or joint, reducing the pain. Another theory suggests that the sound waves interact with brain waves using a process known as entrainment. Yet another theory suggests that the sounds are relaxing, calming the patient and putting them in a meditative mental state which helps in healing.

Body pain is a complex phenomenon, and a significant portion of pain is psychological rather than physiological. Results from a large experiment run in Germany in 2007 show that patients who received a fake acupuncture treatment, where the needles are inserted in the wrong place, still reported a significant reduction in chronic back pain over a six-month period compared to another group that was treated using conventional drugs. It follows that if the patient is guided into the right mental state, then a reduction in pain elsewhere in the body could follow.

Says Aurelio, “It is the totality of the phenomena, the setting, the contact, the experience, the assimilation and integration of which can bring the patient into a growing awareness of the causes of disharmony and it’s possible rebalance.”

In order to expand the reach of sound healing in the country, SVARAM recently started a year-long Integral Sound Healing certificate programme. The programme consists of a hundred hours of training on the concepts of sound healing, music theory, instrument play and its effect on the body. Sandhya Chandrashekar, a participant of the programme, says, “I have a background in psychology, music and yoga. Experience has shown me that sound such as music and chanting has a profound effect on our system. I wanted to explore this further. We had sessions on sound-based meditation, music, psychoacoustics and body rhythm. The programme has attuned me to hear differently and changed the way I relate to sound in my practice.”

A few decades ago, techniques for well-being such as meditation and yoga were dismissed as new age spiritualism. Today, they are widely recommended within the mainstream. What is the future of sound medicine?

“The future of sound will be holistic medicine in all aspects--physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Sound is medicine for a sick body, mind, negative belief system and for spiritual pain which robs a person because they do not know themselves,” says Dr. Thompson.