**Healing with sound**

Interview with Dean Carter by Karen Hamilton-Viall



On a recent visit to Glastonbury, I attended a soundbath run by Dean Carter from the Centre for Pure Sound. It was my first ever soundbath. I was encouraged to attend by a friend and I'm very glad I did. I had an amazing deep level experience with colourful visions, whilst remaining awake. Sound seems to be an amazing route to meditation for me. I wanted to find out more about how Dean had discovered pure sound and what had drawn him into becoming a teacher and healer:

**How did you get started with soundbaths?** At the end of the nineties, I was completely non-functioning with ME (Chronic Fatigue Syndrome). I was a musician and music teacher but suddenly I wasn't able to function properly. I was bed bound and had no life anymore. It was gone, and I couldn't even listen to music. I certainly couldn't play anymore. There wasn't much being offered at the time as a way of improving my lot, and I thought, sonically, there's got to be something in sound that's helpful. I dug out a Tibetan bowl I'd bought years before. I didn't know how to play it or anything about it. A curio almost. I did that [strikes Tibetan bowl]and thought, ‘I actually feel better!’, which got me more interested in the field.

**Are you a lot better now?** Yes, I would say the sound has been my main healing cure for ME. It wasn't overnight. I still spent a lot of time in negative and exhausted spaces, but gradually I overcame it. So basically, I developed my interest from there. I had actually encountered overtone singing, which is one of the three things I work with, before in my musical journeys. I also work with Tibetan and crystal bowls.

Tibetan bowls are interesting instruments in that they're a bit like bells. When people hear church bells, your ears are a bit confused because it sounds like there are two or three notes there at once, and that's actually true; there is. When normal instruments are generating their overtones, you can't hear it, they're hidden within the sound. With a Tibetan bowl, or even just a bell, there's one, two, three notes going on there. The overtone’s audible, so you're getting pure sounds, overtones out loud. Audible ones!

The voice work: normally, if you sing a note [sings], it sounds like one note, actually there are dozens of notes within that note, buried by the root note. Overtone singing is making the usually hidden overtones audible, and then again, if you're experiencing an audible overtone, it's a pure sound [sings to demonstrate]. You can hear all these other notes going on top.

I went to do a course in this, but the people running the course hadn't figured out what was what was going on with each of the three types of instruments they were using. Now the most popular form of sound therapy seems to have become gongs. That's because it's got pure sounds in it as well as percussion sounds, and there are a lot of different things going on there. I don't use gongs, because it's a whole other area, but it's an area in which I think it's relatively easy to do healing sound, with no musical training, or having anything to do with harmony.

Whereas with the crystal bowls, I found they would sometimes ignore the basic laws of harmony. When using the wrong two bowls together, you're getting a really nasty clash, and your ear will tell you, "Oh no! That's not good. We don't like that." These are universal principles. Harmony isn't just an accidental or subjective thing. If you play B next to C, it hurts, because beats are set up within the sound. The people I was training with said nothing about this, and were quite happy to use crystal bowls next to each other, which are incredibly powerful, and would contravene the laws of harmony, and then it wasn't sound healing. Then it was actually quite disruptive and painful. Being on the receiving end of some of it, I was thinking, in some instances ‘that works, that's good, I feel better’, and then sometimes going, ‘Ah, that's actually made me feel worse.’ That's not good. So they weren't aware of the power of what they were doing and how a lot of that related to actual harmony. I trained as a sound therapist in their way, for my benefit to get myself better, and in doing so I found the approach of the people with whom I was training wasn't adequate. It wasn't taking on board the musical side.

**So you were a musician yourself, before you did all this?** Yes, I'm a musician myself. I've been developing my own approach to sound therapy. I have my set of twelve notes. They're not in the order that they go straight up the piano. They were next door to each other in fourths and fifths, because that's the most consonant interval, otherwise it's painful. I found [using the bowls in this way] *was* working on myself. I was also discovering there was a degree of ignorance of the basic harmonic laws which are universal among general sound healing practitioners .

[Demonstrates overtone singing}. When I did that, those overtones are going to pop up in that order. They can't do anything else. When you sing, it's like you've got a string inside you, and the string vibrates. There's an air column, and the behaviour of the air column is exactly the same thing as a vibrating string. Exactly halfway up the string is where the first overtone would happen. I'm a guitarist, so I know that if I want to do a harmonic, which is the musical term for an overtone in normal music (it's normally understood how to produce such a thing)...you place your finger halfway up the string, and you ping it. Then the next place is a third of the way up the string, and a quarter of a way up the string, and a fifth of the way up the string, so it's very sort of mathematical.

Harmony and music are a matter of bodies vibrating, and they do certain specific things. The people I was training with didn't know any of this, so in my own approach, I've deviated from them, and I use that added knowledge to produce sound baths where there aren't nasty discordant intervals. At that level, with the pure sounds, it's actually damaging. It's not just unpleasant, it's problematic. I was feeling very unwell on the receiving end of badly played and thought out crystal bowls, so I wanted to ensure when I was doing it for myself, I was doing something other than via this not-very-well-informed course.

I then started as a one-to-one practitioner. I've actually found, however, that group sound baths are an easier way in for people. It's cheaper, and it's like attending a yoga class, rather than having a one-to-one yoga session all the time. They can be, as you've already found, profoundly powerful, often transformative and healing.



**Do you plan the sound baths? Do you have a script of the music, or is it just as it comes?**

Pretty much, yes, I plan them. I've got the large crystal bowls arranged in what's called the cycle of fourths and fifths. On a piano, if you play C and G together, it sounds nice, and that's called a fifth. If you play D and A together, that sounds nice, and it's called a fifth. I've got my bowls in that order. Within the tenets of esoteric knowledge of harmony, if you go on the fourths direction, it's yin and ‘feminine’, and downwards and inwards, and if you go in the yang direction of fifths, it's outwards and ‘masculine’. So there's already a yin yang, masculine, feminine polarity just in those terms. So I go yin on the crystal bowls at the beginning, to produce an inward and downward effect.

The tuning of the Tibetan bowls is a bit more random. You often find Tibetan bowls have overtones on top that aren't very pleasant. I ensure I don't have any of those.! [On] all *my* Tibetan bowls, the overtones are fifths, or fourths, or thirds. They are all going to work harmonically. I remember you had to buy Tibetan bowls on the course I attended, and they sounded horrible. I was thinking, "I can't work with this". I walked into a Glastonbury High Street shop one day, and picked one up and went, "Ah! That's the sound I'm after." The overtones in that one were nicely tuned and fit[ted] nicely. Otherwise, it's very unpleasant, and on the verge of musical torture.

You're on the verge of doing something harmful if you're using these tools and instruments without using these very handy ear things! We know what works and we know what doesn't. I think many people switch off their ears when working with theory, or a lack of theory, that's related to the true harmonies. Because these are the harmonies of the universe. This overtone scale also relates to geometry. Most people now know a little about the Golden Mean, and the Fibonacci sequence, and all these other numerical patterns in nature. The overtone scale, from which we derive our main intervals, demonstrates all those features.

Which is one of the things we were doing in my course the other day, because I run courses in overtone singing. Rather than people buying a complete set of crystal bowls, when you've got my training to work with, I have recordings of my crystal bowls and their tunings, and you do the overtoning with them. One thing we were doing the other weekend was singing a Pythagorean right-angled triangle! People think of geometry as ‘boring maths we had to do in school’, but actually, the Pythagorean right-angle triangle exemplifies the whole of the overtone scale harmonically. That turns out to relate to things like the ratio of the earth to the moon and the sun, and many absolutely amazing cosmic, astronomical, natural tie-ins.

**How do you think sound heals? How does it work?** It's a pure sound, which is rare in nature, and because of the long sustain, it seems to act on your nervous system differently than normal sound. It seems to bring you into a meditative state, almost naturally. It takes you into deeper brainwave states. I spent years being the person at the back of the meditation class who when they said "Now calm your mind." I’d say, "How do I do that?" Yeah, great, calm your mind. That's exactly what I want, "How d’you do it?" How I did it the first time was [taps Tibetan bowl], *it* did it. The sound actually did it. It shuts your mind up enough for you to meditate once that happens. Mostly, in the waking state, we're in Beta waves. They can get overexcited, and up into high Beta, which is then 'fight or flight', worry, negative stuff.

**You had chronic fatigue, but does pure sound help to heal all sorts of things?** Yes, as soon as you go into the deeper brainwave states, your left and right brain rebalances, you're out of fight or flight. Fight or flight comes out of a lifetime of too much over agitation and stimulation. As soon as you're in fight or flight, you're killing yourself, essentially. The cortisone release you receive is for you to be doing a hundred metre sprint to avoid being eaten by a tiger. It should last for thirty seconds, but in humans, it can last for years. So, anything that takes you out of fight or flight and into the deeper brainwave states has got to be good. The sound is essentially promoting deeper brain wave states. As soon as you're in, left and right brain rebalance, you're no longer killing yourself. Chemically, you're not producing cortisone. You might sleep in a session. You might go into deeper brainwave states, where you have transpersonal level mental experiences, so it's like having lucid dream states. All the good stuff happens in the deeper brain waves states. Traditionally, you learn a meditative technique, but this seems to be a meditative technique in its own right. When meditators start the session with a gong, they should keep that going. That's the stuff that's taking you into meditation, into deeper brainwaves.

**Do you do any other sort of meditation?** Yes, once I had absences from mental overload through the sound, I found I could then also do it using non-‘sonic out loud’ techniques, such as quiet inner mental meditation. I had a greater amount of waking and sleeping time in better brainwave states. It brought about bigger remissions from symptoms, and now I don't get ME symptoms any more. I would still be in negative brainwave states, but it no longer had the concomitant effect. One thing that happens with ME is you're rarely in a deeper brainwave state. When we're asleep, we're usually in deeper brainwave states. The deepest of all is Delta waves. That's deep level sleep. When you're an ME sufferer, you can sleep twenty hours a day, but you haven't had your Delta waves. You don't get into the Delta waves, so you don't get restorative sleep. On a physiological level, we desperately need that, because what most doctors don't realise is that the lymphatic system only works when you're in Delta waves. So if you don't get Delta waves, you're poisoned, which is basically what ME is. You're in a chemically poisoned state the whole time, because you're never getting lymphatic release. You can be in Delta wave state, through meditation, through sound, or when you're asleep. Snoring is a good sign in our sound baths. It's unfortunate in a group setting, but if you have a one to one, it's great! You can snore all the way through then. It doesn't matter.



**In no other workshop, would snoring be a compliment!** [Laughs] I've gone from being a musician who wants a big response to the exact opposite, someone who wants people to get to the end of the session and go, "It's only just started!" They've literally been asleep. Which is good, because they'll hopefully have been getting deeper restorative level sleep, while it's been happening.

That's two of the ways. The other way it heals is that it gives you a strong physical detox. We've only discovered that as we've been doing it. Do you remember me mentioning about drinking a lot of water afterwards?

**Yes, I was going to ask why that was so important?** What happens is, [demonstrates ringing the crystal bowl with water in it, which churns up the water]**.** Because we're all bodies of water, the sound is literally physically fizzing us up inside. It's like getting an inner sound shower. Especially it seems with the crystal bowls.

So in a soundbath for example people can have interesting transpersonal experiences where perhaps for the first time, they've been able to get into the deeper transpersonal layers of the mind. At which point, almost anything can happen, and that in itself is a healing journey. They'll have a great time, but then afterwards, it'll be like having a hangover, because on a physical level, the toxins get stirred up in just that way. Then they're floating around in your system. You then need to drink water to flush them out. I still get taken by surprise myself, at the extent to which I need to drink water afterwards. Otherwise, you get exactly like a hangover. It's a toxic overload. You get fizzed up. The toxins come literally shaking out of wherever they've lodged in the cells, and they're floating around in you freely, so you then need to drink a lot of water afterward. There's a really physical level effect, but obviously good. One needs to be continually detoxing oneself as much as possible. We live in a toxic time.

**You had some other instruments. You mentioned the crystal and Tibetan bowls, but you had an ocean drum and a rainstick?**

The ‘grounding’ is the opposite of the pure sound. It brings you ‘round and breaks the spell. We've got lots of gentle, natural sounds, of rain sticks and ocean drums, shakers break things up. That's fairly well known in established shamanic-type practice. At the end of the session, and the end of healing, you need to break the energy up. Even just [claps hands] clapping. It's interesting how that relates to normal performance music. You play a piece of music, and then everyone claps. It's breaking up the spell for the next level, just in case you don't want the energy of the previous one that you had. So yeah, that's an important part to rounding off at the end. That's the non-pure sound element, because it's white noise.

**So the crystal bowls are the healing sound?** Yeah, you call rainsticks and ocean drums grounding instruments. It's not unhealing. It's again fairly pleasant, but it's to break the spell and cut the energy at the end. I rarely use it during a one to one, because there's usually no time limit, and people can come round in their own time. With group sound sessions, you're always in a space that's rented by the hour, and you have to be out at a certain time. Everybody has to be functional enough to leave.

**What's different about a one-on-one session to a group session?** Well, it differs very much in my modality. I believe there are quite a few ways in which what we do is unique. We have this unique pairing of the various types of sound, and knowing that it's pure sound that unites them. Using harmony and so forth.

With one-to-one work, there's a further level of uniqueness in the way the sound relates to the scales. The usual theory re the Do, Re, Mi scale, CDEFGAB, the Major scale that we use in western music, is that it relates to the chakras: everybody's root chakra is C, everybody's second chakra is D, everybody's third chakra is E, and so forth. There *is* a relationship, but *we think everybody is in a different key*. Nearly all crystal bowls pitched at a C note come with a sticker at the bottom saying ‘root chakra’, and all Ds are ‘second chakra’, etc. But we believe that everyone's in a different key; in the same way, there are twelve notes on the keyboard, and there are twelve keys used in Western music. We think everyone's in an individual key. So what we do in one-to-one sessions is we find out what that key is. I'm a B flat, for example!

**So it's more personalised to you?** Absolutely, yeah. And then I only use the bowls in that key. In one to ones, I don't use the Tibetan bowls until we've found out what that person's key is. Then I'd match the actual pitching of the notes. Rather than use them randomly.

Also, with one-to-one work, you can see what the state of a person's chakras are beforehand. On the healing level, one area I haven't touched on is the energetic level. How does it feel energetically, and how can you tell? We can tell by dowsing the chakras. I have nothing sophisticated like Kirlian photography. I use a chakra dowser. A crystal dowser to see what shape someone's chakras are in. And after every session I've ever done of sound, short ones, long ones, group ones, individual ones, the dowser reading is always positive afterwards. The chakras are left in as positive a state as they can be. Whereas before the reading, they can be blocked and sluggish. There can be all sorts of things wrong with them. So we train to read the chakras, before and after a sound bath.

**Is that a pendulum dowser you use?**. Yes, we use pendulum dowsers. They spin corresponding to the level of functioning of the chakra. If they're not spinning clearly, then the chakra's not functioning at all well. They can also spin negatively, and be leaking. All sorts of things can be going on with them. The sound always provides a positive reading afterwards. I’ve a slight degree of clairvoyance, but it's not really mega. I can't compare with people like Barbara Brennan [a world-renowned healer], and people who can see all sorts of energy. I can see that the energy field is bright and improves. The dowsers are a visual signal. It's something you can share with other people. The client can see, if it's spinning like mad, that's a good sign.

**If you have some clairvoyance, do you have spirit guides?** Yes, but I'm often not aware of them. Other people are more aware of them than I am. My dominant form of dialogue with my guide is using the dowser. I ask lots of yes/no questions. That's just me, you know. The level that I'm at, but yes, there's definitely higher level beings involved at all points. Including the overtoning that we teach to people.

We consider Sanskrit to be a sacred language, to the extent that every sound is an angel. That's why we call them Angels of Sound, so that even if you're just making abstract vowel sounds, you're invoking sonic angels. Sanskrit is a phonetic language, as well as being a sacred language, and all its phoneticism is part of its sacred character. The letter "O" is pronounced as "O". That's its sound, and that's what it is. It doesn't have any other sound. It has that particular vibration. That particular power. In Sanskrit, they all have a natural level of meaning. The very first letter in Sanskrit would be the equivalent to the sound Uh for us, as in the word *us*. That's the first one, and it's primal. It's the beginning of the whole series. Its qualities are those of the underlying void, even before phenomena are actualised, so it's a very profound sound.

We all know about ‘Om’, but actually every vowel sound, and every consonant, is in its own right, a sort of 'Om’, if you know what I mean. It isn't just ‘Om’ that's ‘Om’! All of them have a significance, so there's quite a sacred dimension, very much a sacred dimension, to the toning.

On that level as well, on a conceptual level, as well as the fact that when you're toning, we try to turn it also into overtoning, so that you get the pure sounds on top. Toning lends itself just to singing. [Toning] the vowel sounds are the beginnings of going into the overtoning.

I can't say much else about that other than come and do our workshops. It turns out, in all traditions, the sacred names of the Gods are just a vowel sound series. The reason for that is, when you're moving between vowel sounds, the overtones happen completely naturally. You don't even have to force it. When I demonstrate voice overtoning to people, they ask, "How do you do that?", because we're not used to people doing it. That's because it would have been the sort of thing that only the priesthood would know about and would want to retain their power in doing so, because it was a form of sound healing. Which is why Divine Names are the ones which you can't say! Only the priest can say that, and they can only say them in a certain way. In fact, they *sing* them, and tone them. It's what they were doing in the pyramids. There's a very famous quote from a Greek traveller, saying, "When I went to the pyramids, they were just singing vowel sounds. What's that all about?" That was five hundred BC. Proof positive. *They were overtoning in the pyramids*, so it's a very ancient healing art that we’re reviving. The one fully modern instrument we use is the crystal bowls.

**Have you ever met anyone that isn't receptive to sound healing?** I haven’t found anyone who’s owned up to it yet. I’m sure there will be some. I don’t think I’ve ever known anyone have a negative reaction. If they have, I haven’t heard about it. There’s bound to be somebody. They might not go into a deeper brainwave state in any way that they can appreciate, but again, every time I’ve always done an aura chakra reading before, and afterwards, the effect is there, so I’d say, even if they think they haven’t, they will have. They [may]’ve been too mentally shut off to go into a deeper brainwave state. [Or if] they’re on a mission to say ‘I won’t let this affect me.’ Normally, it’s very difficult not to be affected. There have been people that have wanted to stay alert, in the lotus position, and responsive all the way through. I think two people have managed to stay upright, and not go into fully prone state.

**If people want to hear your music, what's the best way for them to do that?** Come to our sound baths. Visit the website, and have a look around. If it's a difficult thing to attend our events, in the West of England, we've got a range of CDs. We've got a full CD sound bath, called 'Divine Union Sound bath', which is pretty representative, and works well with a reasonable playback system. We've also got CDs just of the crystal bowls, and the cycles of fourths and fifths. Each one (bowl/track) will play roughly for five minutes. They're safer to have on as background. Our full sound bath CD, we don't recommend as background. Don't play it when you're driving, or operating machinery! It might take you into a drowsy version of the deeper brainwave states. Alpha's drowsiness, Theta's REM sleep, Delta is dead to the world sleep. You can experience these deeper brainwave states lucidly via meditation, and sound produces that meditative state. However, live is always best, if possible. I do offer both one-to-ones and occasionally group sessions on Zoom, but live we found is better. If live isn't possible, then we can arrange something via Zoom. To my surprise, it seems to work quite well.