LETTING THE SOUND DEPTHS ARISE*

SARA JANE STOKES, PhD, RMT, AMI Fellow*
Adjunct professor, Duquesne University
Co-Director of the Mid-Atlantic GIM Training Institute
Virginia Beach, Virginia

Abstract: Guided Imagery and Music [GIM] is presented as a music-centered transformational psychotherapy. An overview of the genesis and evolution of GIM by Helen L. Bonny and other pioneers in the field of consciousness is reviewed, including an emphasis upon the development of the music tapes. A short case study is presented demonstrating imagery content, psychodynamic implications, and sample guiding interventions. A discussion of music as the "co-therapist" follows, concluding with a client's journal entry describing a breakthrough session.

"People say that what we're all seeking for is a meaning in life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive. That's what its finally all about..." Joseph Campbell

We want to be fully alive, but there may be blocks in our psyche that deaden and numb us. Forgotten wounds and hurts may lessen our participation in the fullness that life has to offer. Many people are searching for the "missing something" in their lives hoping to find what is lost. Within a therapy context, the experiential type therapies seem to hold much promise in offering an in-depth process of releasing and healing wounds. This is because they directly engage the sensory and feeling levels and help to uncover the truth of what is real.

It is a wonderful miracle that the human psyche contains the potential to regenerate and heal itself, regardless of how wounded we may be. The psyche [or soul] contains

---

* This article first appeared in Music and Miracles Ed., Don Campbell, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Illinois, 1992.

an innate pattern of wholeness, unique to each individual, and is always drawing us to hear its call - sometimes as a whisper, at other times being chased down by the "hounds of heaven". The challenge in any helping process is to be able to access this inner call in a direct participation with the very depths of our being —to know the truth that will set us free.

Music, especially the great music of the masters, infuses and attunes us with the mystery that resides in our depths. This too is a miracle. The healing power of music can awaken our patterns of wholeness, while simultaneously evoking the stories that can reflect the blockages to growth. This uncovering process can unleash one's potential for becoming radiantly alive.

Music, the language of the soul, is at the very center of the potent therapy approach called the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music [GIM]. It is helpful to distinguish GIM from other similar techniques which utilize visualization and imagery paired with music, usually referred to as "guided imagery" or "music and imagery". GIM is essentially an uncovering process used as an experiential therapy for individuals and groups. It depends upon the skilled intervention of a trained guide and uses specially designed classical music programs.

A hallmark of this method is that the flow of imagery is spontaneous. It unfolds in its own time and in a way much like an awake dream. This is in direct contrast to imagery techniques which use visualization for a desired outcome or goal [i.e.relaxing at the beach; or shrinking a cancerous tumor]. In GIM, the client is encouraged to be their own healer and discover their own answers. The GIM guide draws upon such qualities as intuition, "presence" and specialized guiding skills to help with problem solving and catharsis. The GIM guide artfully leads a client to their own insights and A-ha's!

Music, the primary healing agent, acts as a catalyst and container of the altered state experience. The music "informs" beyond the rational mind, evokes feelings, stimulates problem solving, and awakens the healing potential of the body, mind and soul. In GIM, we are "played" by the music and are attuned by it to the miracle of our capacity to heal and be whole.

The genesis of GIM began in the early 1970's with Helen L. Bonny, Ph.D., a music therapist and Research Fellow. She was invited to participate with a team of renowned researchers in the field of human consciousness who were developing new therapy interventions through the use of psychedelic drugs. Located at the Maryland Psychiatric Institute in Baltimore, such populations as terminal cancer patients, alcoholics, drug addicts, and other psychiatric categories were treated.

The researchers were particularly interested in the human capacity for peak experience [Maslow, 1971] and the profound healing that sometimes occlude. Bonny's role was to design special music programs to amplify and compliment the action of the mind-expanding drug experience. As a musician and violinist, Bonny was well acquainted with the music of the Western classical tradition, especially the great Masses and Requiems. These high masterpieces were used to help sustain healing and integration during the peak state of the therapy session, after conflictual

material had been worked through. It has been her genius to know which selections to use and how to best sequence them for the desired effect.

Research conducted by Bonny and Panhke [1972] found music to be a powerful catalyst in achieving their objectives. They reported music's effectiveness in some of the following ways: facilitating the release of intense emotion; directing and structuring the experience; providing a sense of continuity in a state of timelessness; and contributing toward the desired peak experience.

As the research evolved, non-drug methods began to be developed for continuing this depth work. Bonny was encouraged by Hanscarl Leuner [1984], a European psychoanalyst well known for his work in imagery techniques. He suggested she combine the music with his method of therapy called Guided Affective Imagery [GAI]. Bonny found that the same music, when listened to in a deeply relaxed state, provided a safe yet effective way to access the unconscious. This approach opened the possibility for much wider applications with a variety of people and situations.

Following her original tape themes and design, Bonny [1978] condensed the listening programs to 30-45 minutes for use in more conventional settings. Some of the tape names reflect the thematic material to be evoked: Nurturing, Grieving, Emotional Expression, Death-Rebirth, and Peak to name a few. As mentioned earlier, it was found that the hallmark of this music-centered process, unlike Leuner's directed imagery process, was a spontaneous emergence of imagery, feelings, and insight. Much like an awake dream, the client's psyche was free to heal itself, in its own time and way, by an honoring of the wisdom of the inner self. The dynamic power of the music, the imagery experiences, and the creative interaction between the GIM guide and client combine synergistically to elicit the miracle of transformation.

Currently, GIM is used with individuals and groups by trained GIM facilitators, called GIM Fellows. Trainings are being established in several different countries, and are approved by the Association for Music and Imagery, the national credentialing group. GIM guides and clients alike develop a profound appreciation for the opportunity to work with this method and are continuing to pioneer a growing number of applications.

JOURNEY OF HEALING

The following case is an example of one woman's healing journey through GIM. It reflects her own story and is interspersed with comments in brackets which refer to specific psychodynamics of her process, as well as guiding and music interventions. The case is followed by a discussion of music as the "co-therapist".

The Bottomless Pit

Caught in a web of indecision, Susan felt desperately alone --seeking solace in an addictive

affair and secret drinking. Appearance belied her inner turmoil. A 39 year old attractive redhead, Susan had a well paying consultant job and what outwardly looked like a happy marriage. One of her hobbies was singing in the community chorus, and she was intrigued by the idea that music could be used as therapy. She had tried traditional talk therapy in the past, but intellectual insights had not led to change. Her affair and the drinking was getting harder to hide and she knew something had to give. [Many people escape from their loneliness in substance abuse and co-dependent relationships in order to numb themselves. Without real help they will continue down a path of self destructive behavior].

Susan and I contracted for a series of 10 GIM sessions, and planned to meet weekly. In the immediacy of the GIM process, Susan easily took to the music. Her early key images revealed a sad little girl, a faceless High School cheerleader, a bottomless pit in her stomach. and a foreboding dark cave. The music helped her connect with her feelings by triggering significant memories that had been frozen in her psyche. In her 3rd session, we began to see the dynamics that contributed to her aloneness.

As Susan lay relaxed on the mat, she listened to the opening measures of the Mostly Bach tape, well suited for depth exploration. The repeated musical pattern of the fugue form in Bach's "Passacaglia and Fugue", in C minor, evoked a physical sensation of spiraling downward. Though she felt apprehensive, she reported, "The strings seem to say I have to go down to that cave and go in". There in the hidden recesses of the cave, she encountered her dead brother who had committed suicide. In her imagery, she cried out in anguish, " How could you do this and leave me -you were my best friend!" Selections from the Grieving tape facilitated Susan to fully feel the pain of abandonment that she had never resolved. [Many times we never fully feel the tragedies of our life and experience their pain. When this happens, the psyche may gradually become frozen and the capacity to give and receive love is impaired].

As a result of this session, Susan willingly co-operated with her healing process by working with other difficult and painful material from her childhood. She read Homecoming, a classic book on recovery, [Bradshaw,1990] and started a journal. In her 6th session, Susan came into the office feeling depressed. She and her husband Ken had been arguing and she felt, as hard as she tried, she couldn't trust him with her feelings. She felt impelled to keep her secret affair going, though she felt guilt pangs. I used the Nurturing Tape to help Susan again face her emptiness. The music of Britten, Vaughan Williams, and Berlioz allowed the psyche to unfold its trauma in a session we later entitled "The Bottomless Pit".

Sharing her imagery, Susan reported, "The sky is brilliant blue, the scent of Fall is in the air --I hear the crowds cheering. I'm 16 in my blue and gold cheerleader outfit at the game. I look bubbly on the outside but I know something is wrong". I suggested that Susan step into her imagery and be that 16 year old once again. [The music was influencing below the level of awareness, with

a mood of longing, and was working as my "co-therapist" to trigger feeling and memory].

Susan continued in subdued tones, " I look happy - but on the inside I feel hollow and split. I encouraged her to stay with the inside feelings- to really experience the "hollow and split". Once she was firmly anchored into the feeling, I asked her, "what needs to happen?" [This kind of well timed guiding question enables the psyche to problem solve from its own depths. In GIM, it is important not to rescue people or give advice. The wisdom of the inner self knows exactly what it needs]. "I want to be whole and stop hurting", Susan softly cried. At this point the melancholy yet tender melody of the music was giving support to stay with the wounds of the past. "I am slowly sliding down into that black hole in my stomach now", Susan said in a resigned voice. "It's that familiar feeling again- the bottomless pit place". Susan wept, " I have no soul, no heart".

Later in her session, as her tears subsided, Susan was able to take the music with her down inside the hole. The lovely voices of Puccini's "Hummingbird Chorus," from Madame Butterfly, seemed to be caressing her and she felt their gentle harmony as angels of mercy. Susan's face was relaxed now. "They are comforting me", she whispered, " and the darkness is beginning to lift. They are telling me its going to be alright... I'm going to bring the cheerleader and the little girl in here with me... It's OK now...I'm able to give them love as the angels are loving me...I feel their presence...they are singing to us... I feel their light..." As the music ended, Susan deeply sighed, I'm ready to come back now".

Afterwards, as we discussed the significance of her session. It appeared that today had been a pivotal point in Susan's therapy, as she confronted the emptiness within and was then able to begin a process of re-parenting herself from the roots of her childhood. She was amazed at how real the angels were and although she did not consider herself religious, she accepted them without question. [In GIM, the working through of such core wounds in the psyche, often allows the emergence of transcendent or spiritual levels of being. In Susan's case, the angelic "helpers" brought their treasures of love and light to assist in the miracle of deep transformation and reconstruction of the personality].

In Susan's 8th session, she found herself on a bridge of indecision, still churning about the dilemma of not ending her affair. She was feeling better about herself but still felt stuck. The Transitions Tape was used to facilitate further exploration of her issues. As the music began, Susan found herself on the middle of a bridge, surrounded by a barren landscape. She felt stuck, standing in the middle, unable to choose between going back to her husband Ken, or going forward to her secret lover. Neither seemed to feel right. "I can't decide...it feels overwhelming...I don't know what to do", she lamented. I guided Susan to stay with the feeling of indecision, really feeling the tension of not being able to act. [This allowed for a freeing up of the stuck energy in the psyche by acknowledging heretofore unconscious patterns. The music acted as co-therapist by "containing" the intensity of the emotional conflict until it began to be released].

As Susan "felt" her stuckness, breathing techniques were used to assist her in breaking free. The "Adagio" Movement of Brahm's 2nd Piano Concerto suggested a spontaneous shift to a totally new scene- an old fashioned ballroom filled with dancers. To her surprise, she and Ken were dancing and feeling the rhythm of their movements harmonizing together. "It's natural", she said amazed, "Our steps are in time and in tune without effort. I know we can be this way...maybe I can someday try to trust again. [In this session, the imagery clearly reflected how inner psychological conditions may undergo change. By directly experiencing the stuckness, being on a lonely bridge in a barren landscape dramatically shifted to the richness of relating "in tune and in time" with a partner in a beautiful ballroom].

During the following week, Susan's homework was to explore her dance image as a metaphor for exploring some risk taking with Ken. Could it really be any different? As her GIM journey came to a close, Susan's imagery unveiled new possibilities as her outer choices reflected her inner changes.

In her last session, Susan revisited the dark cave where she had once grieved over her lost brother. This time a curious thing happened. She relayed, "I'm here in the cave and I see a pool of water. There are ripples on the surface...it's the kind you want to get into..." She was silent and then continued, "There is a kind of glow coming up from down under...it is sort of a diffused light...its coming up inside me and all around me". "Oh, my aura is glowing", she exclaimed, "it's wonderful!" The gorgeous strains of the Peak Tape provided a beautiful background to this ineffable experience of light. Later, during Wagner's exquisite masterpiece, "Prelude" to Lohengrin, Susan closed the session with a memorable reunion. "John, my brother is here", she declared, "we are holding each other...he is proud of me... I feel so grateful... there are no words".

Today, Susan regards herself as being a different person. She states she is generally much more open emotionally and willing to try new things. She and Ken actually signed up for ballroom dancing classes, something they had always talked of doing. Susan feels more confident and reports she and Ken are getting along much better. To Susan, GIM was a miracle. The dark cave, the bottomless black hole in her stomach, the bridge of indecision no longer plague her with loneliness and self-doubt. She is free to love, to grow and risk —to be fully alive.

GIM AS CO-THERAPIST

Beyond Language

In the GIM process, music plays a unique role of "co-therapist" to the GIM guide. Music has its own special vocabulary of rhythm, melody, harmony, pitch, tone, and timbre. Music speaks directly to the unconscious and is a moment to moment experience. Music is a sound presence, a palpable and living force. It goes beyond words into the heart and soul of the matter. A few

examples from Susan's case [*in italics*] describe some of the many possible interventions that the music makes:

It dissolves the ego's defenses:

" the music is relaxing me and helping me to let go"

It stimulates catharsis:

"how could you leave me !"; "I just can't decide,... its overwhelming"

It provides a moment to moment continuity:

"the music is here with me in the black hole"

It becomes a projective screen:

" the voices are like angels bringing me love and comfort"

It supports moments of healing:

"we are dancing in rhythm, in tune and in time"

It allows for the transcendent to emerge:

" the soft diffused light is coming up inside and all around me"

It celebrates moments of integration:

"John, my brother and I are holding each other... I feel so grateful "

Meaning and Transformation

Bonny [1978] fully discusses the movement and mood of the music and its ability to bring about change. It is interesting to note that the great composers used archetypal motifs such as death-rebirth in an attempt to grapple with or musically solve the great existential questions of life. This is true of all great art.

The powerful influence of music as co-therapist upon the client, serves to assist their search for meaning for answers to their own lives- "Who am I?" " Where am I going?" "How can I be free?" These questions always surface in times of crisis and change. In GIM, it is possible to let the sound depths arise, allowing the deeper self to reveal its innate wisdom and truth.

In closing, I would like to share one last example of a transformative event within a GIM session. Doris, a woman in her 40's, had been struggling with issues of identity, both personal and professional. She imaged vividly in the metaphoric and symbolic realm. In this session, Doris incorporated the well known "Adagio for Strings" and the "Offertory and Sanctus" from the St. Cecilia Mass by Gounod. This music is sequenced as the climatic sections of the Positive Affect Tape. Doris experienced a direct participation with the motifs of union and regeneration contained in one powerful symbol, representing wholeness. In her own words, as she later wrote after her session.

"I felt I was giving birth to this very difficultly birthed child. The labor was long and painful. As it was born, a sonorous voice rang out in the distance and announced, "It's a champion! ...It is done

!" As the music held me in its power and strength, I had the feeling of a warm afterbirth pouring out of me- and a penetrating light and euphony of a full bodied major chord played by a full orchestra surrounding me. When the delivery was over- I discovered I had given birth not to a child, but to myself...a huge brilliant sun-moon. I was alive with ecstasy!"

REFERENCES

Bonny, H. [1978]. The Role of Taped Music Programs in the GIM Process. Monograph #2. Salina, KS: Bonny Foundation.

Campbell, J. [1988]. The Power of Myth. New York: Doubleday.

Leuner, H. [1984]. Guided Affective Imagery: Mental Imagery in Short-Term Psychotherapy. New York:Thieme-Stratton.

Maslow, A.H. [1971]. Toward a Psychology of Being. New York: D.VanNosrand Company

Association for Music & Imagery