

Bringing Harmony to the Soul: Consciously Using Music and Sound to Orchestrate the Moments of Our Lives

Kent Rautenstrauss

“Everything that throbs, or moves, or stirs, or palpitates—sunlight summer days, nights when the wind howls, flickering light, the twinkling of stars, storms, the sound of a bird, the buzzing of insects, the murmuring of trees, voices, familiar fireside sounds, a creaking door, blood moving in the veins in the silence of the night—everything that is, is Music.”

~ Romaine Rolland

“Wow, was I out of sync last week!” “My rhythm was way off; there was nothing harmonious about me.” “I obviously wasn’t of sound mind!” We’ve all heard these metaphoric expressions suggesting that music is life and life is music. These statements bring smiles of understanding to two renowned musical scholars Don Campbell and Alex Doman, whose fascinating new book, *Healing at the Speed of Sound: How What We Hear Transforms Our Brains and Our Lives—From Music to Silence and Everything in Between*, combines the joy of music with the strength of science. Their watershed book on the power of music and sound, published in 2011 by Penguin Group, contains a vast selection of audio, visual, and textual enhancements that can be experienced on the Healing at the Speed of Sound website. These links, as well as online classes, blogs, free music downloads, and scientifically designed music CDs give practical, multisensorial, entertaining, and, at times, amazing auditory and visual demonstrations and uses of how music and sound can “tune up” one’s soul throughout the day and throughout one’s life. The authors contend that the conscious, intentional use of music and sound can buffet even the mightiest winds of change, accelerated for many these days. And they concur with the Sufi saying that music is the “picture of our Beloved”—a direct radio station to the Divine.

“The year 2012 is a time of great transformative change. What ‘vibrations’ are moving forward and what ones are we leaving behind?” asks Alex Doman, intentionally selecting the metaphor of “vibration” in a conversation about sound. A third-generation member of a family internationally recognized for its pioneering role in the field of human development, Doman is founder and CEO of Advanced Brain Technologies (www.advancedbrain.com),



Don Campbell

and co-author of *Healing at the Speed of Sound*. The book is co-authored by and presented in the writing “voice” of musician Don Campbell, the “dean of sound healers” according to author Julia Cameron, and himself the author of twenty-three books, including the best-selling *The Mozart Effect: Tapping the Power of Music to Heal the Body, Strengthen the Mind, and Unlock the Creative Spirit*.

“I have been both privileged and enormously gratified to witness a wave of new research in the areas of music and the brain and the effects of the sound environment on health,” writes Campbell in the book’s introduction, noting that the book shares the results of more than three thousand new scientific studies, surveys, and other investigations in the sound–mind–body connection that validate one premise: “An

improved sound environment can lead to a healthier, happier, more fulfilling life.” Campbell and Doman are united in their passionate mission to spread the good news that sound and music have a purpose beyond just fine art and entertainment. Says Doman matter-of-factly, “Sound is an unrecognized pillar of our health.”

Sound Health

Let’s face it, sound is always coming into the body—from wind rustling in the trees to the car racing by with rap music pulsating from subwoofer bass speakers. “It’s a 24/7 pervasive force,” says Doman, “and we want to ‘sound the alarm’ that sound can do harm or healing.” Campbell agrees. “Do you actively provide yourself with nurturing sounds and block or filter noise, or do you just let the sounds of your world wash over you without paying much attention to what’s there?” he asks, noting that “empty sounds” such as the noise of a coffee grinder or the television playing in a nearby room are like “empty calories.” He says, “They do not nourish. They can also affect mood, and in extreme cases, present a ‘significant threat to human health.’”

How can a person control unwanted, empty, or even harmful



Alex Doman

sounds? The book offers several sonic tools, including “masking,” the process of using sound to cover up other sounds that are disturbing. “You may not be able to abolish the traffic noise outside your window, but you can mask it with a sprightly Bach concerto,” Campbell says. Other commonsense recommendations include waiting until you leave the room to turn on the dishwasher; holding a blow-dryer at the back of the head, not toward the ear; or wearing sound earmuffs or headphones when mowing the lawn. The goal is decreasing the “aural chaos” and realizing that sound is vibration, which has the power to affect the smallest of atoms.

Soundtracks for Our Days

Given that sound is constantly present 24/7, the authors suggest designing the “musical soundtrack” that best suits daily optimum health and joy. For each person, this “soundtrack” will be different. “Whatever works best for you is best. The important thing is to choose your sonic nutrition consciously.” Doman and Campbell suggest embarking on a musical excavation by asking key questions, such as what music energizes and makes us alert first thing in the morning? At the gym, what music do we play from our iPods that

accelerates our workouts and makes the StairMaster seem easier? At the office, what music or sound keeps us focused, yet engaged in our tasks? On the drive home, what music allows us to “chill” and prepare for precious personal time? Finally, what music guarantees a restful, peaceful night of sleep?

“Essentially, you want to create music playlists that provide the best ‘sound mileage’ for the energy you expend in listening to them,” the authors state. They share that music has different gears, like those on a car. “Low-frequency sounds tend to be grounding, for example, while high-frequency sounds energize. Slow tempos calm us, while fast tempos invigorate.”

The authors also suggest taking daily breaks from music and noise to renew in silence, noting that moments of silence are part of the music.

“Sometimes, the best gift we can give our ears is simply silence,” Campbell and Doman write. “If your most treasured time alone occurs on your daily commute, turn off the music or the news for at least five minutes to clear your thoughts and settle your emotions before you arrive at work or at home.” They further recommend the use of acoustical nature recordings, such as seagulls and crashing waves, to give a mini “sound vacation.”

Accompaniments to Life

Music and sound not only “tune up” the moments of one’s day, they also tune up the chapters of one’s life. Included in the book are examples of how music and sound mitigate pain and heal the body by the very nature of their mathematical and physical properties. “Life is actually an exercise in pain management,” Campbell says, “but with music, we can go to these places of harbor and sweetness.”

A powerful link on the Healing at the Speed of Sound website shares the story of a terminal cancer patient, paralyzed from the waist down, dancing with her hands and arms to the music of the harp. The former dancer was able to leave a video memento for her family and friends that involved music and motion. Creating the precious

video greatly improved the patient’s sense of physical well-being, which doctors felt may have contributed to her surviving for more than a year longer than expected.

The book shares a compelling fact that the inner ear is the first organ to fully develop in utero during the third trimester of pregnancy, beginning at week twenty-eight. No coincidence, the authors say, as sound is a key to the brain’s development. The book also documents using music and sound to ease labor pain and increase breast-milk productivity and to teach young children language skills through rhythm. In the teenage years, when a seventeen-year-old can feel a bit outside the mainstream, the authors recommend family drumming to let out powerful emotions lodged in the body and to connect everyone in a common musical conversation.

Listening to favorite music is shown to transport seniors back to special times and memories in their lives, which can enhance the psychological state. Parkinson’s patients improve the gait of their walk while listening to music by focusing on detailed movement and using the mind-body connection. Couples connect in their hearts when hearing “their

song,” rambunctious puppies calm down when their master hums a lullaby to them, and students receive higher SAT scores when certain kinds of structured music are played. Campbell chuckled when he remembered how an inner-city girl in Chicago told him with such innocent excitement that she used the structured components of classical music to help her study and receive good grades. “You taught me how to cheat with music!” she exclaimed.

The book also claims that amateur as well as professional musicians continue to average 15 percent more gray matter well into their sixties, and a baby nestles much more easily when hearing his or her mother’s voice spoken or sung. The book’s examples make it clear that conscious, intentional use of the power of music and sound enhances life.

Of Special Note to Baby Boomers

Don Campbell has a special “note” to baby boomers: look at your relationship to noise, and begin to unclutter your mind in order to hear quality sounds, including silence. “We get so busy. The question is not ‘What’s next?’ It’s ‘What’s now?’ Music can bring us to the now.” Alex Doman shares

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that there is a high correlation between high-frequency hearing loss and depression among baby boomers. “Science cannot currently repair hearing damage, but there is promising research ahead.” In the meantime, he implores the listener not to play recreational music too loudly and to take a proactive approach by wearing earplugs at high-volume events such as race-car rallies and concerts. “Protect your assets,” he says, referring to the ears. Both men agree that baby boomers sometimes feel the compression of life financially, physically, or relationally at a midlife stage and can better navigate this life passage with the use of quality and selective sound and music—a sound “Rx,” according to their findings.

**Music and Sound:
A Spiritual Gift to the Divine**
Ravi Shankar, the legendary sitarist, composer, and India’s most esteemed musical ambassador, said, “The highest aim of music is to reveal the essence of the universe it reflects. Through music, one can reach God.” Doman and Campbell agree, encouraging the use of sound and music as a spiritual practice to connect to the Divine. “Today with the help of science, we continue to explore the links between sound and

human spirituality. Every day, miracles occur in the experimental realms with singing crystal bowls, tuning forks, improvisation, chanting, and movement, as researchers attempt to identify the mechanisms that allow us to access altered states of consciousness and to heal ourselves through tone, vibration, and rhythm.” They add, “Carefully constructed rituals involving prayer, chant, rhythmic music, song, and dance can enable us to shed our everyday personalities and become one with God or some other form of ultimate truth.”

The authors encourage the use of humming, toning, and chanting to connect a person to his or her inner spiritual essence. “Of all the forms of song meditation created in the history of humankind, Gregorian chant remains among the most beautiful and transcendent,” they write, adding, “If you find that you rarely have the opportunity or desire to chant alone at home, listening to recordings of Gregorian chants might make for a satisfactory alternative. The beauty of the chants will bring a sense of timelessness and tradition to your ears and heart.” They conclude, “Music serves to evoke the prayer, the praise, and the pulse of the known and the unknown.”

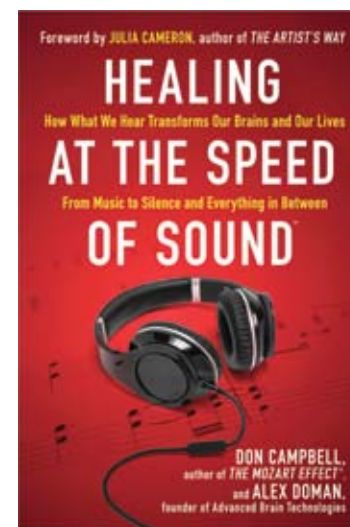
A Symphony of Sound Choices

Don Campbell is justifiably excited about *Healing at the Speed of Sound*, saying he wanted to bring forward practical music and sound research because “we’re all overwhelmed with what’s out there. I really pondered, what do we need now? What will pick up traction and go forward? What has real muscle?” The result is a book that, thanks to the online enhancements, is constantly being updated. “The joy of this book is in knowing it has a perpetual digital life” and that it’s “not about the ‘woo-woo,’ it’s about the how-to. This book is about heart, beauty, and the mind of knowing; knowledge, then actualization.”

Above all, the noted musicologist wants the reader to know that picking music is highly subjective and should never be cookie-cutter in approach—as if to suggest that one type of music is valid for all. “It’s not as simplistic as saying this tone works with this chakra. It is rather about finding the music of your life—and the music that brings you life.” Doman nods in agreement, adding “May your music—and your life—be harmonious!” So bring out the Grateful Dead on vinyl, CD, or MP3, they entreat. Recognize the immense joy and happy memories the music

brings, and by all means, play it a little more quietly than that first time in 1974! ■

You can watch amazing videos at scienceofmind.com/healingsound and see powerful demonstrations of the power of sound. You can experience the transcendent music of Liberia, a boys’ choir, singing a famous movement of Dvorak’s New World Symphony, witness the joy of a paralyzed patient who discovers the art of dancing with her arms, and observe the impact of music on a child’s brain.



To order *Healing at the Speed of Sound* by Don Campbell and Alex Doman, visit scienceofmind.com or call DeVors & Company at 800-382-6121.