

Inner Rhythms

By Randy Crafton

Liner notes from the CD "Inner Rhythms," composed and produced by Randy Crafton.

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Rhythm – Ancient Medicine For Modern Times

Since the beginning of recorded time human beings have been drawn toward rhythm. Long before rhythm was used for entertainment, it was used to create a sense of community, to define ritual space and to heal both physical and psychological maladies. Rhythmic singing, drumming and percussion are the basis of many ancient healing practices, some of which will exist today. These traditional techniques of healing through rhythm are rooted in personal intuition and experience, and in the collective knowledge of the community as well. This distinguishes these techniques from the laboratory-based methods of modern science. There is without a question a place for both traditional and modern approaches, and the points where the two meet and agree are worthy of close attention. Organizations such as Rhythm For Life™ with which I have had the privilege to work, are striving to bring ancient intuitive forms of rhythm medicine into the lives of as many people as possible. Nothing complicated, nothing mysterious – just the simple and pure enjoyment of nurturing a conscious awareness of rhythm.

Vibration And Energy Forces

The nature of everything we perceive is vibratory. Anything vibrating regularly produces a rhythm on some level. There are countless rhythms going on around us and within us that we do not perceive as musical rhythms because they are too slow. Some of the slower rhythms around us are the changing of the seasons, the rising and setting of the sun and moon, the orbit of the earth and its relationship to outer planets. Astrologers throughout history have been "rhythmists," studying the nature of these large-scale rhythms and cycles. Anyone who has worked in health care, from traditional special education to nursing and mental health, can attest to the influence of a full moon. The gravitational pull of the moon is a force so strong that we are powerless against it; it can change the level of the oceans. The human body, which is itself 55 to 65 percent water by weight, is influenced by this force as well.

Each human organism is a symphony of rhythms, some so fast that they resonate in audible frequencies, some so slow that we can barely detect them. The rhythms of two completely healthy human bodies will not move at the same speeds, but certain ratios will be consistent in all healthy organisms. Once something is pulsating fast enough to be measured according to the number of beats per minute (bpm), it enters into our microcosm of musical rhythm. Among the inner rhythms most easily translated to musical terms is the heartbeat, which is normal in the range of 55 to 85 bpm. The second most obvious internal or physiological rhythm, the breath, cycles in a ratio of 4 to 6 heartbeats for every full in-and-out breath. Slowing the breath often acts to slow the heartbeat, and vice versa. Other more subtle inner rhythms that can be measured in this way include the craniosacral rhythm which occurs at the rate of 8 to 12 times per minute, the rhythm of the gastrointestinal tract, which contracts 3 to 12 times per minute and the pulses of brainwaves which are measured at frequencies of up to 25 cycles per second. Many rhythms in the human body are organized around a 24-hour cycle, or Circadian rhythm. In the North Indian system of music, certain compositions are associated with different parts of the 24-hour Circadian rhythm. Our body temperatures will be higher by day and lower by night; and the left side of the body is warmer by night, while the right side is warmer by day. Many of us many not ever have noticed that approximately every three hours we alternate which nostril we primarily breathe through.

Vibrations And The Senses

All that we perceive through our senses is vibrating. If something is vibrating very slowly, we may hear its vibrations as a rhythm. As the speed or frequency increases, this vibration becomes a steady pitch. The mathematical ratios between these vibrations become the most important factor in how we perceive them. In the realm of rhythms, polyrhythms, (two rhythms played simultaneously) such as 3 beats against 2 beats, occur in

many different musics around the world. There is an underlying physical logic that explains why such polyrhythmic ratios are very pleasing to humans. The polyrhythms of 2:1, 3:4 and 3:2 and other such simple relationships are the building blocks of all percussion-based music. They affect us physically and psychologically with the same clarity as the most stable of the harmonic pitch relationships whose vibrational ratios follow the same pattern. For example, the ratio of 2:1 is an octave; the ratio of 3:4 is a perfect fourth, and the ratio of the perfect fifth is 3:2. These simple relationships are very appealing to us aesthetically. More complicated relationships such as 11:12 become more esoteric, or less readily accessible to us. These primary rhythmic relationships resonate in all of us because they exist within all of us.

Synchronicity

Healthy living organisms are not only internally rhythmic; they are also synchronized with their environment. The widely accepted Cosmic Resonance Theory states that the human organism, acting in accord with rhythmic changes in light, temperature, cosmic rays, barometric pressure, ionization and magnetic fields, is not only in rhythm with itself, but is attuned to the large-scale rhythmic structure of its environment. A living organism is, at one level, a very delicately balanced rhythmic machine, and yet it remains highly adaptable to many environments and physical challenges. As Dr. Erwin Bunnig wrote in 1960, "There must be a rhythmic harmony between cell behavior and the whole organism in health, probably organized around the unit of a day." Our bodies could be compared to factories that are rhythmically synchronized for optimal production. One cell cannot secrete what another is not prepared to use. When these relationships are not synchronized, we become sick. It is common when we are not feeling well to say, "I am a little out of synch today." This is a very accurate observation.

Rhythmic Entrainment

Entrainment is the tendency of objects moving in a similar pattern and tempo to align with one another. Scientists have recognized this tendency through simple experiments. The most classic example is that of two swinging pendulums mounted on the same wall which over time gradually align and begin to swing in unison. Nature adheres to the law of entrainment on many levels. When birds fly together in migration patterns, they will flap in rhythm together and glide at the same times. Women who cohabit can confirm that their menstrual cycles often synchronize over a period of time. Once we begin to observe its influence on our environment, our minds, and our bodies, we can easily see that there are many levels at which our lives are profoundly influenced by rhythmic entrainment.

Native American shamans, like other healer-drummers of indigenous cultures around the world, have understood this in an intuitive way for thousands of years. They know that if the pulse of the drum is strong, grounded, and close to the pulse of the heart, the heart will strive to entrain with it.