

# Breathwork Music Suggestions

## Production

1. Equipment
  - a. Speakers and amplifier
  - b. Mixing

### *Speakers and amplifier*

The equipment needed to get started on the simplest level is only a reasonably good computer and speakers. While speakers can plug directly into a computer, however, one probably needs to amplify the output from the computer to produce an effective level of sound.

The simplest amplifier is an AM/FM tuner with an auxiliary input port to receive the signal from the computer. The highest level of output from such an amplifier can be accommodated by inexpensive speakers, but the most important pieces of equipment to spend money on are speakers. Buy speakers that have more capacity than a simple amplifier can service. You can upgrade the amplifier when you have a little more money, and get a noticeable improvement in sound without upgrading your speakers. Understand speakers to be the most expensive part of your system.

Two speakers are OK to get started with. Get two more as soon as you can afford them. Add a subwoofer when you can afford it. A subwoofer produces sound at the lowest threshold of hearing, and even below. One may not hear a subwoofer's lowest frequencies, but they can have a subliminal effect.

### *Mixing*

Mixing is the process of blending or linking together separate pieces of music. The simplest way to start mixing is to download pieces from an online music store and put them together in a program, referred to as a mix tape in the days of tape recording. Today the 'tape' is digital, virtual. The software mixer is called a digital audio workstation.

There are a variety of software programs, ranging from simple to complex that allow a sequence of music pieces to be linked together. Largely, the programs use visual representations of a mechanical device called a mixing board. On a mechanical mixer there are channels, each of which has a separate input, but all of which can be combined into a single output that goes to the amplifier, etc.

With a mechanical mixer, channels can be connected to CD players, for instance. A cut from one CD can be brought up, played, then faded into a cut brought up on a second channel. Fading in and out is controlled by slide levers. Channels can also take input from computers.

The simplest kind of mechanical mixer is often called a "DJ Mixer."

2. Music Presentation
  - a. Sources
  - b. Technical considerations

### *Sources*

Music can be sourced in a variety of manners. Online MP3s are readily available from various sources. They can be downloaded and used directly in a software mixer.

CDs are arguably a source of higher quality music. They can be mixed mechanically and output directly to an amplifier in a live situation or to a digital audio recorder for prerecorded use.

Natural sources can be recorded.

### *Technical considerations*

Only when one has extensive familiarity with one's music library and adequate help with facilitation, can one use live mixing.

Some means of backup can be invaluable in case of failure of equipment.

Consider the transportability of equipment.

## **Session Guidelines**

The following are some main considerations regarding music in Breathwork sessions:

- General issues
- Patterns and types
- Technical issues

### General issues

Choose pieces that are intense, evocative, and musically first-rate. Of course, good music is primarily in the ear of the listener, but when choosing try to use your ear as a gourmet would use taste. Learn to appreciate different kinds of music, but always the best. Avoid the conventional.

Putting together a program, do not aim to evoke particular emotions or sequences of emotions. Do not try to direct participants' emotional experiences. Rather, create a program that provides opportunity for each participant to find a personal emotional trajectory.

Preferentially select instrumental pieces. Select vocal pieces in only in uncommon languages.

Participants associations to recognizable words can will hijack their emotional or ideational flow. Avoid well-known pieces of music, both popular and classical, because participants can have associations with them.

Indigenous or ethnic music is very useful, because it is generally unfamiliar to participants. Classical music tends to have significant dynamic variation, which requires compensation on the sound board or by editing. Jazz can be tricky to use, because it often elicits rhythmic dance too strongly. Movie scores may yield useful pieces, but current ones may be too familiar. Disco, elevator, and music generally used for background music usually lacks intensity.

Meter deserves considerable attention. The two and four beat pattern that is common in this country becomes tiresome when there is too much of it. Music from other parts of the world with different beat patterns can add variety and interest.

Most musical pieces tend to fall in the range of 3 ½ to 5 ½ minutes. Longer cuts are less common. Seven minute cuts are very desirable, but not to be used exclusively.

### Patterns and types

Think in terms of four phases in the overall pattern of music for a session:

1. Activation
2. Crisis
3. Conversion
4. Resolution

#### *Activation*

Music in this phase is intended to encourage more and more intensification of participants' breathing and their immersion in process. The pieces of music should be arranged in a sequence of increasing intensity. One of the ways to accomplish this is to use music with more and more pronounced beat and arrange pieces in sequence of increasing tempo. Increasing tempo, however, does not have to be the dominant characteristic of this phase, nor should it be the singular characteristic.

The central characteristic of this phase should be a developing sense of emotional crescendo. It is important to provide room for this dynamic to develop. If one begins this phase with too much intensity or too rapid tempo, there is little dynamic space left to develop a climax.

#### *Crisis*

The piece that begins this phase is very important for promoting a shift of attention from activation to emotional journeying and exploration of psychic complexity, which this phase seeks to promote. The chosen piece should promote the shift without dispelling the intensity built by the climax of the Activation phase. Appropriate pieces to effect this transition are some of the most difficult to find.

Where the Activation phase music is often in a musically major key, this phase may change into a minor key. This phase can also use music with a degree of strangeness, the unusual, or culturally unfamiliar. It may even use pieces that are more "sonic experience" than conventional music or challenge the ordinary aesthetic. On the other hand, one must be careful not to overdo the challenge, which could risk bringing so much focus to the "music" that participants lose focus on themselves.

#### *Conversion*

The goal of this phase is to convert the diffuse psychic feeling aroused in the Crisis phase to an energy directed toward Resolution, which is both the name and purpose of the subsequent phase.

This can be accomplished this by changing musically from minor key music used in the Crisis phase to major key music, although not the sort of aggressive major key music of the Activation phase. Think of turning to “music” as more ordinarily understood, and music that is heartwarming, uplifting, and positively energizing.

As with the Crisis phase, appropriate pieces to begin this transition are also difficult to find.

From the initial piece, one wants to shape a trajectory that moves without any abruptness to music that is progressively gentler and leads easily into the final Resolution phase of music that is relaxing and soothing. This phase should ease seamlessly into Resolution.

### *Resolution*

While this phase is not significantly distinct musically from the preceding one, it must be crafted with a particular ear. It should be designed to welcome participants back from their journey and help them resolve any difficult material that may have arisen during their session.

This phase wants to promote a sense of peace the participants can rest in. During this phase, some may still be involved in exertions of bodywork and not making particularly peaceful sounds. The peacefulness of the music can absorb those sounds so they do not disturb the mood of other participants. It can also provide a resting place for other participants during their intervals of bodywork and after they finish it.

### Technical issues

Selections in the first two phases and on into the early third phase should be particularly intense and evocative.

A sequence of short pieces can be choppy, but too long pieces can get boring in the earlier part of a session. Longer pieces can work very well in the later part, when even 10 or 15 minutes may be useful. A mix of cut lengths tends to work best in the earlier phases on into the Conversion phase.

The most desirable pieces provide a “wall of sound.” Sonic fullness creates a sort of envelope that can absorb participants’ vocalizations and other extraneous sounds. Cuts that are musically thin do not provide this function.

Sequence cuts so that there is some sense of continuity between them. The continuity may be in terms of tempo, instrumentation, ambience, musical type, etc. Most importantly, avoid abrupt or jarring transitions within a phase. At the outset of a phase, however, a calculated, noticeable change is useful to reorient audition to the character of the new phase. That new character should, of course, be maintained during the rest of the phase.

Except toward the end of a session, there should be no gaps between cuts. Always cross fade until very late in the session. Gaps interrupt emotional progress. They leave participants hanging and waiting. Silence between cuts late in a session, however, can gently promote awareness of ending.

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Cf. Grof & Grof, *Holotropic Breathwork*, pp. 32-7.