

THE POWER OF SOUND OF HEALING IN PRACTICE



Important Qualities of Individualized Therapeutic Harp Music

An interview with Christina Tourin – Director,
International Harp Therapy Program

*Question: What are the qualities of Individualized
Therapeutic Harp Music?*

Individualized therapeutic harp music provides the listener or patient with five distinct qualities. In the International Harp Therapy Program (IHTP), the Certified Therapeutic Harp Practitioner (CTHP) learns to create a “cradle of sound” that uniquely matches:

- the mood of the listener
- the tempo based on the patient’s breathing and heart rates
- the client’s resonant tone
- the client’s need for soothing tonal qualities.
- the type of music preferred by the individual.

Harp Therapy



Question: *How do you create moods in music?*

In western musical culture, we generally recognize seven musical scales, or modes. Three of the modes in that group are major in sound: the Ionian, Mixolydian, and Lydian, while four are minor: Dorian, Phrygian, Aeolian, and Locrian. The Ionian mode, which listeners would recognize as a major scale, is especially useful when the harpist is playing for babies in Neonatal Intensive Care units. It is light and can sound sweet and gentle. The light, hopeful quality of this mode can help create environments that are especially useful when a patient is nearing death, reaching outward emotionally and 'looking beyond'. In the key of C, the Ionian mode begins with the tone C and proceeds up to the C above it.

The second mode in the key of C begins on the second tone of the scale, D, and is called the Dorian mode. This mode has a grounding, or "rooting" quality. Many old bagpipe tunes and fife music of fife and drum corps were written in the Dorian mode. By playing in this mode, musicians helped prepare soldiers to go off to war, creating an effect of being strongly rooted to the soil. In hospitals and hospices, we use this mode to help patients who are trying to get out of bed, those who are disoriented, children with ADHD and to ground ourselves when we begin to get fragmented.

The mode beginning on the third tone of the C scale is Phrygian. It begins on E and proceeds up to the E above. Music in the Phrygian mode can take listeners into deep emotional spaces, for it is a dark scale. When played in a medium to fast tempo, it is the scale of much passionate flamenco music. Because the cadences, or tonal resting places, are often approached by downward melodic motion, the Phrygian mode can elicit a sad emotional response when played slowly. It is often used to help people shed needed tears.

The Lydian mode begins on the fourth tone of the C scale. In the key of C it begins on F and ends on the F above. This mode can sound playful and whimsical, and I liken it to a kitten prancing on piano keys. When I'm playing for a patient who seems happy-go-lucky, or who wishes to express child-like qualities, the Lydian provides a light, melodic whimsical background as we converse.

The 5th degree mode in the Key of C is the Mixolydian, beginning and ending on G. It has a lowered 7th that seems to impart a forlorn quality, and can remind listeners of distant memories. Much Celtic music is in the Mixolydian mode.

The haunting Aeolian mode, known to us as the relative minor scale, doesn't take the listener as deep emotionally as the Phrygian mode, but its dreamy, soulful sound can evoke a sense of longing. It begins with A in the key of C and ends on the A above. I choose to play in this minor mode with closed chords if a patient is in a curled fetal position. If the patient is reaching outward, I will choose one of the major modes and play in open chords.

The last mode, the Locrian, may sound strange to our ears, for it seems to have neither a definite beginning nor end. It begins and ends on the note B in the key of C. I use this mode the most when the patient is taking his last breaths. The simple sound of the ringing B floats throughout the room with no place that it needs to land – it is truly suspended in air. The need is not to fill the room with lots of notes, but to let the spaces be as valuable as one note that is gently played.

We also incorporate the study of the Chinese Five Elements and how their system of only five modes are employed for balancing Wood, Fire, Earth, Water and Metal energies. Understanding the Chinese approach to health – that of balancing elements, we can begin to understand how the moods of the different modes influence us, be it the Chinese five or our Western seven. For example, if a person is lacking in passion and excitement, or if they are always controlled (or controlling), modes such as the Aeolian and Phrygian that can encourage emotional release are suitable to help bring about a balance. If the person is excitable and scattered, one might want to bring in the stability of the Dorian mode.

Question: *How do you work with a person's breathing patterns and heart rate?*

We look at the breathing patterns to determine the meter for our improvisations and songs. While simple 3/4, 4/4, and 6/8 meters are common, one may choose to go into a 5/4 rhythm

to match a heart rate, although this takes a bit more skill. We are careful to match the patient's output and try not to push them to match our playing rhythm. Occasionally doctors ask us to help patients who may be short of breath "entrain with", or match, our tempo or meter in their breathing patterns. This procedure is only done when a doctor suggests that it may help the patient relax and breathe more easily. The harpist first matches the patient's breathing rate and then slows the tempo just a fraction. Most often, however, Trained Therapeutic Harp Practitioners, leave such sophisticated techniques to music therapists.



In the IHTP, we advocate regarding each patient with curiosity and asking the question, "What is willing to meet me?" Training in Inclusive Attention allows us to gather detailed information from both the patient and her surroundings. If there is a heart monitor in the room, for example, the harp practitioner notes the tempo and tone of the beeping sound and incorporates it into improvisations. The trained practitioner learns to integrate information from disparate sources to customize the music delivered to the patient. If we ignore attending to this often subtle information, we risk playing music that is inappropriate and potentially harmful.

Question: *What is Resonant tone?*

To begin to understand the resonant frequency, or sympathetic vibration of your body, breathe aloud when you get up in the morning. Without singing but breathing a tone, and barely pushing a bit of sound into the breath, you can begin to hear your own tone. I hear these tones (and overtones) in the speaking voice. You can also experiment when you have a stiff neck. Try putting your fingers on the back of your neck and go through all the vowels at different pitches. You will feel a strong vibration through your fingers on certain tones, but not on others. It's

like giving your self a massage from the inside out. Resonance takes place when one frequency, or vibrational speed, causes another object of the same frequency to vibrate. A singer singing a high-pitched note can shatter a crystal glass when she matches the frequency of the crystal. Everything we experience is moving energy and all these vibrations are connected with one another. *See the example #1. This spiral shows the hierarchy of the energies by frequency. Aromas, flavors, colors, sounds – all are manifestations of vibrational speed, or frequency.

Question: You mentioned tone quality. How is that important?

The tone quality of your instrument is critically important. An instrument that is out of tune, too loud, abrasive, or muddy sounding is not appropriate. The instrument should be easily portable, and the practitioner should watch the patient for visual directions, rather than focus attention on the instrument itself. For that reason, we advocate improvisational techniques and a basic repertoire of tunes in twelve categories. With these skills mastered, the harpist's attention is not on reading music, but creating it in response to the patient's needs.

Trained practitioners also have a thorough understanding of the elements of music: harmony, melody, tempo, rhythm, and dynamics, to help them make good judgments about orchestration, chord voicing, intervallic relationships and other musical decisions in their improvisations. For example, an octave leap in an improvisation can have a strong emotional effect on the patient, as can playing a tune in the extreme upper or lower range of the instrument.



Question: How do practitioners select the right songs for patients?

Certified Therapeutic Harp Practitioners know the importance of memorizing at least three tunes in each in each of these categories: Patriotic, Children's, Classical, Opera, Ethnic, Country/Western, "Oldies", Popular, Broadway, Hymns, Celtic music, and Christmas songs. Songs that were popular during a person's courtship years are a valuable tool for communication. This is especially true for Alzheimer's patients.

Question: What are the benefits of harp therapy?

There is a large body of research regarding the effect of music on brain waves, oxygenation levels, heart rate, the immune system, and even close study of the changes in the structure of cancerous cells when sound vibrations are administered.

Research carried out at the San Diego Hospice and other leading hospitals around the country show that harp music helps to 71% of patients to breathe more easily, and reduces anxiety levels in 84% of patients. In addition, 63% of patients report reduction in pain when live harp music is present.

The music played by harp practitioners also provides a respite for family members and hospital staff. Seriously stressed hospital staff members report their stress levels are reduced. More and more, doctors, dentists and

those in surgical operating rooms are offering music as an alternative to anesthetics.

Harp Practitioners help mothers-to-be through the birthing process by supporting the mother's breathing with gentle rhythmic sounds. A beautiful bonus to this harp mid-wifery is the privilege of welcoming the newborn into the world with soft gentle sound. Many practitioners play harp for premature infants in NICU units throughout the country, and nurses report that the music quiets crying babies almost instantly.

Comments such as: "It was calming and helped to make the pain go away for a short while", and "What I noticed most was the way the sound caresses the air and makes you forget where you are" from patients and their families describe harp therapy on another level. They represent the verbal expression of a much larger experience – one that is filled with wonder for caregivers and clients alike: the joy of sharing healing harmony through music at the bedside.

For more information, please visit: <http://harprealm.com>

