

# MINISTRY OF SOUND

THE ANCIENTS UNDERSTOOD THE POWER OF SOUND TO HEAL, CALM AND RESTORE, AND NOW WE'RE COTTONING ON, TOO. WELCOME TO THE HARMONIOUS WORLD OF GONGS, DRUMS AND OVERTONE CHANTING

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Anyone who has been rattled by a neighbour's power drill or soothed by bird song, will know that sound has the power to affect their mood. But did you know that it may have the power to also boost your wellbeing?

Tibetan singing bowls, drums and gongs have been used for thousands of years as part of different spiritual practices in India, Egypt and Greece. (Even some British prehistoric sites have sound chambers where healing was said to take place.) These instruments are now being used increasingly by sound therapists to 'rebalance' those of us who are out of whack. The theory is that the anxieties of daily life cause us to get out of tune, but by listening to particular sound frequencies that correspond to our body's, we can be brought back to a state of harmony and good health. Sound healer Elizabeth Dale-Rudwick, who holds gong baths in north London, says, "Sound healing works at the deepest level. When we are happy and healthy, we are in harmony. To be harmonious is to be in tune."

Here are three ways to retune your body, or

simply to enjoy the power of harmonics to lift your mood or create a pocket of calm.

## DRUM CIRCLES

You may be familiar with the pleasures of banging a drum or shaking a rattle from percussion lessons at school. Drum circles also major on the fun that comes from simply making a noise, but they have an extra wallop of spirituality thrown in.

Although sitting together and drumming has been practised by indigenous cultures for thousands of years, it has taken hold more recently as part of a renewed interest in shamanism. Shamans use drums to 'journey' to meet spirits and ancestors by harnessing the rhythmic patterns, which induce a trance-like state. But drums can also be used for healing. While it's unlikely you'll enter this state immediately, sitting around with others and simply banging a drum can be a relaxing and stress-busting way to spend an hour or so.

Most drum circles are freeform, ie, you hit your drum whenever it pleases you. Californian, Arthur Hull ([villagemusiccircles.com](http://villagemusiccircles.com)), who is credited with starting the drum

circle movement in the 1980s, says that it is important to listen to the other drums in the circle and then respond: to enter a conversation. This interaction is the secret to a satisfying drum circle, and builds up patterns that create what Hull calls 'rhythmic alchemy'.

Some drummers like to keep to a regular, steady drumbeat (57 per minute corresponds to a state of deep relaxation) which can lower the heartbeat and boost relaxation. This is a process called 'entrainment' where the body's rhythms are said to synchronise with external sounds. Others prefer to experiment with different volumes and rhythms, and enjoy the variety of sounds and images they help conjure up. Others simply bring along a rattle to shake. Anything goes in a drum circle, which is why each one is different and unpredictable.

## GONG BATHS

Gongs are said to have originated in China in 500 AD, but their power to propel listeners into a relaxed and blissful state has only been widely recognised in recent years. Once the preserve of hippy gatherings, gong baths now take place in gyms, at festivals and, most probably, a church hall near you. Celebrity enthusiasts include Miranda Kerr, Robert Downey Jr, and Russell Brand, who can be seen harmoniously banging a 38inch gong on YouTube.

The appeal of a gong bath is easy to see. All you do is lie on a yoga mat, wrap yourself up in a blanket, close your eyes and listen – you don't even have to get changed. It is the most passive and agreeable way to shed tension and relax. Some people even drift off to sleep, which is entirely acceptable. A gong has the broadest range of tones of any instrument and as it is played, at first slowly and quietly; then, in turns, louder and then softer, it produces all manner of sounds from a distant rumble to harmonious reverberations and sudden claps, like thunder. Other instruments including Tibetan singing bowls, chimes and drums can also be involved for added transportative effect.

Gong practitioners claim that bathing in the sounds reduces stress, breaks up emotional blockages and generally transforms you mentally and physically. Health benefits including improved circulatory and glandular systems are also touted. That is as maybe, but lying comfortably in the dark listening to the cocooning and sonorous boom of a gong

## TUNE IN, CHILL OUT

### Northern School of SoundSmiths

Martyn Cawthorne holds gong baths in and around Manchester and Cheshire; [northernschoolofsoundsmiths.co.uk](http://northernschoolofsoundsmiths.co.uk).

**London Gong** Gong Master Odette holds Friday gong baths in North London and will also bring her gong to your home or workplace; [londongong.co.uk](http://londongong.co.uk).

**Sound Camp 2018**, 6-8 July: three days of sound- and movement-related activities in Devon, including an all-night, 12-hour sound bath; [sound-gong-bath.co.uk](http://sound-gong-bath.co.uk).

### College of Sound Healing

Holds gong practitioner training and has a useful nationwide directory of sound-healing groups, including

drumming, gongs and voice; [collegeofsoundhealing.co.uk](http://collegeofsoundhealing.co.uk).

**Carly Grace** uses the voice and crystal singing bowls at retreats and sound-healing concerts; [carly-grace.com](http://carly-grace.com).

**Jill Purce** holds workshops in overtone chanting and sonorous dream work from her base in London, and one-day events in Somerset; [healingvoice.com](http://healingvoice.com)

### If you can't get to a workshop, listen to these...

*Mantras for Precarious Times* by Deva Premal; *The Lover and the Beloved* by Donna De Lory. *Overtone Chanting Meditations* by Jill Purce ([healingvoice.com](http://healingvoice.com)). *Gong Bath: Sunset Vol 1* by Swann; *Gong Bath (The Healing Sound)* by Laoura Gini.

certainly stills the mind and gives a harmonious break from the clamour of daily life.

## CHANTING

If you've attended yoga classes that end with three rounds of 'Oms', you may wonder what it is all about. Chanting – singing a repeated word (a mantra) – is common practice in many spiritual traditions because it calms the mind and helps create a meditative state. 'Om' is the most frequently used mantra in Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism but there are many others. It is believed that rhythmic repetition of certain words and sounds causes the heart rate to slow, blood pressure to dip and the mind to clear.

You don't have to follow a spiritual path to benefit from chanting, however. Jill Purce runs workshops in Mongolian overtone chanting, which are open to all, especially those "who have always wanted to use their voice but never dared: those of us 'mouthing' at the back." She learnt this method of single-note chanting in a Tibetan monastery and says that it has the power to cleanse and tune the chakras, and transforms voices "into rainbows of sound and light". Anyone who has experienced the otherworldly overtone that floats over the voices of the chanters as they repeat a single sound will agree. **S**