

## Voice Cathedral

Alan Tower 09 - revised 8/2012



This piece was written about the benefits of singing over a drone in the Voice Chamber on left. The drone is produced by a Shruti Box invented in India, and reworked and adapted by England's Stefan Cartwright. I have created a reverb hood for reflecting back the voice more intimately. It is designed for one or two people. An adjustable stand for optimum accessibility completes what is essentially a small personal cathedral for singing. The second generation of this unit with significant improvements in resonance and aesthetic beauty will be available in the fall of 2012.

Once our physical bodies taste the nectar of natural resonance, a beginning crack may open for an experience of resonance with all life, and over time a feeling of boundaries dissolving between ourself and others.\* This resonance can be experienced by organizing a way for our body to entrain with another oscillating body or system – such that the oscillating bodies over time naturally fall in synchrony or harmony together.

One way this is done is by singing long tones over a drone. The ear was created as our glove for sound (billions of years in the making) and when, upon vocal trial and error, we drop in - unexpectedly, sliding onto one of the primordial resonances of nature actually embedded in the drone, we can experience a physical sensation of coming home. . . . We are hard wired for this, our body's neurology and the drone entraining as we drop in to a fundamental resonance. It's a beautiful, fun, and sometimes three dimensional feeling.

In this practice we are tapping into the vibrational way of life itself. In this moment of dropping in, our body reveals itself as a brilliant mathematician, naturally producing through our voice, without any musical training, the exact number of vibrations required (in relationship to the drone) to produce each of those tones that feel like home. We do not need to understand these words or descriptions to feel it fully. Upon stopping many notice their body is vibrating - a kind of cellular hum going on with the skin, muscles et al. It's a form of object meditation, with sound as the object. People often have a similar physical experience with the practice of devotional singing in community, which creates an entrainment of this kind with others.

In this experience of finding and locking into a tone of resonance, what may arise, over time, is a distinct quality for each specific tone, a feeling in the body that is different

## Voice Cathedral

depending on the tone being sung. Each one is its own “state of being” . . . . and sometimes along for the ride comes a color, an image, or a certain quality not easily expressed in words. These same qualities may surface again (on a different day) each time we drop in to that resonant “state of being”. With time spent in this vibrational water, experiencing the waves of sound directly, we begin to recognize each of these states and at times actually know where we are tonally. This means we know which pitch we are singing in relationship to our new friend, the drone. Over time we may even begin to experience singing one tone after another as moving from one state of feeling to another, becoming more confident of where we are (which pitch we are singing in relationship to the drone). This is a fulfilling experience. I have been creating sounds and musical compositions on a variety of instruments for many decades with only occasionally knowing where I was in relationship to the primary tonal ground of each composition (our drone here is called the “tonic” in our western music system). This is not unusual at all. The most sublime and compelling music can be (and is) created intuitively by musicians all over the world every day. However, “knowing where you are” turns out to be a defining characteristic that facilitates, among other things, a higher level of improvisational musicianship, distinguishing, as an example, world-renowned musicians like John Coltrane, John McLaughlin, Peter Gabriel and Keith Jarrett from the rest of us mostly intuitive musicians.

Now this is where it gets interesting . . . . . Imagine a person (lets just say it's you) who is an avid listener, but rarely engages in producing music yourself (a good portion of humanity). You, in having a direct experience of resonance (the practice described above) are accessing not just your given lineage as a vibrational human - bringing with it a new cellular feeling in the body - but also cracking open a window of possibility we have been calling “knowing where you are”. . . . . One instant a non-musician with the normal fears around producing sound . . . . the next instant a feeling of coming home - in the moment - beyond mind, AND as icing on the cake, a beginning access to this defining characteristic of advanced musicianship. This can be a confidence builder for anyone, resulting in a new sense of joy and freedom around music, sound and life.

Along with developing a method and tools to help facilitate this practice for individuals, it is possible to experience it together in groups in the right kind of sound environment, expanding it beyond the individual experience to a broader group entrainment. It's like a vibrational group meditation experience.

Back to where we started off . . . . . Once our physical bodies taste the nectar of natural resonance, a crack begins to open for an experience of resonance with all life.

\* Also reflected by Victor Zuckerkandl, musicologist, “ music is the most natural solvent for dissolving artificial boundaries between the self and others.”