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Human as a Multidimensional Harp
A Convergence between Therapeutic Music and Vibroacoustic Harp Therapy

Marianne Gubri

Abstract

Each human being is a complex structure of different layers of music and sound. With their proven impact on response mechanisms of the brain and the body, music and sound may contribute to harmonising different aspects of human existence such as physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual spheres.

Harp therapy provides a sonic cocoon; its positive effects have been widely described in scientific literature. Vibroacoustic Harp Therapy (VAHT) provides a deeper frequency massage throughout the entire body, which may reduce pain, anxiety, and stress.

Based on a private VAHT study, through this presentation the researcher will propose a convergence of these approaches. It will be possible to draw an indicative map of resonant frequencies in the body and to investigate how to create balance and harmony. Some tones may also touch specific blocks, which resonance may induce a release of emotions, potentially balanced with modal and rhythmic changes.

Keywords: Harp Therapy, Vibroacoustic, Frequencies; Entrainment, Modes

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Introduction

Therapeutic music and vibroacoustic therapies have been focused on the frequency resonances in the body. A specific technique, vibroacoustic-harp therapy (VAHT), has led practitioners to understand its positive effects on pain, muscular rigidity, and cardiac variability; clients respond to one or more sessions of VAHT with increased relaxation, new awareness of specific areas of the body, stimulation of the immune system, better sleep, and a sensation of being grounded and energized. This occurs especially with patients affected by multiple sclerosis, cancer, anxiety, pain, fibromyalgia, and/or dementia.

Based on an independent study on 40 clients between July 2022 and March 2023, this researcher will highlight new directions for further studies on frequencies and resonance, in particularly: how different parts of the body react with different frequencies and how they are organized. It will then be possible to draw a dynamic map of frequencies and to link these frequencies to other vibrational therapy models. Moreover, we will understand how these techniques are not only related to physical awareness, but also to emotional release and mental imagination; this research may lead to new considerations on therapeutic music and sound healing practices. The aim of these techniques might be to manage pain and stress, and to allow lateralisation between the right and left brain, homeostasis, and self-awareness.

Vibrational Therapies

Vibroacoustic therapies (VAT) focus mainly on the resonance of live or recorded frequencies with the tissues of the body, leading to physiological processes via a specific device (bed, chair, pillows, wristbands…). These methods have been studied in-depth by Skille (2017), who, among others, worked mainly on low frequencies (30-120 Hz) with autistic children. VAT is now globally used as a valid technique to manage pain, stress, insomnia, and anxiety, as well as in improving circulation, brain-heart coherence and sleep in spas, schools, hospitals, and clinical settings.

Vibroacoustic Harp Therapy (VAHT®), developed by Williams (2005, 2013), an American harpist and psychologist, not only uses low frequencies but additionally all the range of the harp, which, for a concert harp, extends from Cb0 (30.9 Hz) to Gb7 (2960 Hz). The instrument is connected via a microphone through an amplifier to a device (a massage bed or a chair) implemented with specific transducers. The principle of vibroacoustic is that we not only feel sound with our ears but also with our entire body, which becomes a sounding board (Dallas-

Fenney, 2004). Vibrotactile perception has been described by Melzack as the Gate Control Theory (Williams, 2005) which explains how non-painful sensations can reduce painful sensations. Pacinian corpuscles, the mechanoreceptors located in subcutaneous and connective tissue, are declared responsible in detecting mechanical stimuli of a vibratory nature, whose transmission would be able to interfere with the transmission of painful signals (Mezlack, 1975; Patrick,(1999). Moreover, a proposed mechanism of action of vibroacoustic therapies is brainwave entrainment that would synchronize with rhythmic inputs on a sensory level. A typical VAHT session lasts from 30 to 60 minutes, with a first part dedicated to the body frequencies scan, and a second part filled with musical improvisations and relaxing music (Gubri, 2022).

On a sample of 40 clients, all of them were able to feel the vibrations of the concert harp frequencies (47 strings) in their bodies through a massage bed device. All of them had the perception of a decrease in tension/pain by at least two points on a scale from 1 to 9. Ten people had emotional release and twenty experienced an oneiric process (visualization of landscapes, fractals, images…)

Resonance

VAT and VAHT are described as vibrational therapies since their focus is mainly sound and sound vibration in the body. It also engages another interesting phenomenon which is called resonance. According to Beaulieu (2010), “Resonance comes from the Latin verb *resonare,* meaning to “return to sound. It means to sound and resound as in an echo.” (p.152). Sympathetic resonance is an event in which a frequency emitted by a sonic source meets an object or a body’s resonance frequency creating an increased amplitude compared to another body with a non-resonant frequency (McMakin, 2017).

In a VAHT session, sympathetic resonances is easily understood since each frequency resonates in a specific part of the body, which may lead to understanding that each part of each body has a specific resonance frequency. The first part of the session is dedicated to “scanning” the body with all frequencies, string per string. The majority of the frequencies are physically felt within a range between 30 to 500 Hz. Few people feel the resonance in the body over 500 Hz, although the acoustic sound of the instrument through normal auditory mechanism can still be heard.

Each frequency “hits” a specific place in the body, an organ, a bone, an area, sometimes more than one area (for instance an A1 will resonate in the feet and in the lower back of a client).

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Some frequencies do not seem to have a physical response from the client. All frequencies are delivered one by one, while the client is invited to verbalize his sensations, giving feedback to the practitioner who records the results on a form. This kind of feedback relies on the fact that the client has a minimum of body self-awareness (proprioception) and the capacity to express themselves verbally. We can also have more refined feedback, looking at the breath rhythm or at micro-modifications of their posture and /or their face.

The first interesting observations are that all clients feel surprised by a new awareness of their body: sound is vibrating from the inside, in a real sonic massage. Vibration is described by the clients as inner movement, warmth, chills, waves that move inside the body, light, caress, bubbles, energy…Most clients express their curiosity on how sound can touch the tissues so profoundly, and how they might become conscious of a pellicular organ (for instance the weight, space, warmth of the heart). Five out of 40 clients felt the sound outside their body; this new sensation may open research on the perception of the electromagnetic field by the client him/herself through sound. Some frequencies might be felt at a very specific and pleasurable point (on the coccyx for instance) while for others it might be felt more widespread. Some other frequencies are expressed as not so pleasurable, and they may lead to emotional release, fear, or rejection. Generally, after the session, the clients describe their body as heavier, more relaxed, and more grounded, while self-consciousness is lighter, freer movement, and their mood is generally improved (Miller, 2011).

Another observation is that tension, trauma, and emotional blocks might be released through sound without any additional pain. The activation of parasympathetic system may induce a deeper relaxation, eventually leading to sleep, and the neuro-flow is activated, while a new flow of information is carried to the thalamus cortex (Valone, 2003). During a VAHT session, Client P, a young man who had undergone several leg operations due to a preterm birth, was positively surprised to feel the same relaxation of tissue adhesions in his right leg that he had had during kinesiotherapy sessions, but without pain.

Absence of vibration response of a frequency in a part of the body is often connected to a specific pain or illness in the same place. With more than one session (on a weekly basis), we can observe how clients become more and more sensitive. They are more aware of several places in the body. They may find that the same frequencies give them more resonances in the body. They may also feel that the frequencies present in part of the body where they were in pain or in

tension are now slightly relaxing. Client D. was not able to feel the resonance of the frequencies in his right arm that was hurting, however, he was able to feel the frequencies in the left arm. After some sessions, he could feel in his right arm the same frequencies he felt in his left arm. VAHT may open doors to resonance, body awareness, and balance.

It is not rare, without any specific pain, to also see unbalances between the left and right part of the body. We will discuss possible causes and consequences of such perception on a vertically divided body awareness later. The most interesting observation is that there is not one common frequency for everybody. Every frequency might resonate in a different place for every client, which means that there is not a single identical resonant frequency for every organ, bone, body etc, but every single frequency is useful for a single person. Resonance depends on weight, liquid/material composition, and heat tension, which may vary considerably from one person to another.

On the contrary, we can measure how, during different sessions, the same resonance pattern will show up for a specific client which may lead to understanding their sonic individual map. Goldman (2008) created the formula "We are all unique vibratory beings" in his book *The 7 Secrets of Sound Healing* (p. 47). This sonic signature reveals some consistent data: pleasurable frequencies, absence of vibrational response, same resonances with identical frequencies. We all have typical resonant frequency tendencies.

Frequency Mapping

Frequencies and frequency mapping is one of the most intriguing questions in this historical period of great interest in sound healing and therapeutic music. The wide curiosity in oriental spirituality and self-awareness practices may open new perspectives to these questions, even if we might avoid a quick and superficial association between frequencies and parts of the body. Today, several informative volumes are being published (Beaulieu, 2010; Maman, 1997; McKusick, 2014, Pierce, 2009). These researchers help answer questions such as: What are the connections between the organs? Is our body subject to a sonic somatotopy? Is there a connection between sonic physiologic resonances and psychological aspects?

While mapping the different frequencies, some consistent data emerged. Low frequencies (32-130 Hz) resonate in the lower part of the body (feet to abdomen), while higher frequencies (130-523 Hz) resonate in the higher part of the body (thorax to head). As referred by Gibson (2022, p. 56), we can observe a "hierarchy of frequencies," even if regularity and

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homogeneity are not on a constant progression. The different frequency perceptions are widespread and fluid like the differences from red to orange on a natural optical rainbow. Furthermore, the data take-over highlights an organisation of the frequencies. A further observation indicates a division in 4 different octaves from approximatively 32 Hz to 523 Hz. The perception of vibrations of the fifth octave (above C5 – 523 Hz) is rather rare in the clients of this study. These division in four octaves may be read as follows, (frequency charts are based on an instrument tuned at A = 440 Hz):

- From C1-C2 (32,703-65,406 Hz) resonances are mainly felt in legs and feet.
- From C2-C3 (65,406-130, 81 Hz), resonances are mainly felt in hips, belly, and abdomen.
- From C3-C4 (130,81– 261,63 Hz), resonances are mainly felt in heart, lungs, back, arms.
- From C4- C5 (261,63- 523,25 Hz), resonances are mainly felt in throat, head, ears, and eyes.

While highlighting the more pleasurable notes on the frequency map, it has emerged that these notes are often in an octave succession. For instance, a sequence of A's on three different octaves has been discovered on client L., a patient who really enjoyed this note, physically and acoustically. In our modern conception of music, we are used to starting an octave from the C note. As a matter of fact, it could be from any other note on the musical scale, as in traditional Indian music where notes are not linked to a specific frequency but to a position of the scale. This observation is linked to the detection of the individual tone of resonance, the tone we mainly use in our natural spoken voice (Dietzel, 2004). With this division, we have different octaves which start from the tone that pleases us more and resonates more in our bodies and voices. Each client might then have their own frequency progression in octaves based on their natural resonant tone.

This organised hierarchy has been described as a sonic somatotopy by Aucher (1977), a French singer and inventor of the *psychophonie*, a method of vocalization along the spinal cord to detect blocks and holes with the natural resonances of the voice. In the researcher's own body scan, called *cliché des sons*, Aucher has highlighted four octaves of resonance in the vertebrae on the spinal cord, a model which Aucher linked to acupuncture before registering it at the *Académie des Sciences* in Paris, now widely spread all over Europe through her students and academies. This division on the vertebral column is very similar to the Governor Vessel, a vessel of subtle energy studied in acupuncture, as Aucher discovered thanks to discussions with traditional Chinese doctors in the last decades of Aucher's life.

Psychosomatic Resonances

The emergence of emotional release and specific imaginative material during VAHT session may allude to a specific connection between somatotopic and psychological activities. While psychosomatic medicine, thanks to the works of Shelton (1952), is now finally well accepted in the field, it would be interesting to understand how vibrational response in the physical body might be linked to emotional content, as a method of diagnosis or interpretation of discontinuity in vibrational somatotopic response. For instance, in several cases, I observed clients having several differences in perception between left and right part of the body, which might be linked to the right and left brain. An absence of resonance of a certain point of the body may explain physical tension and pain, but also a psychic disharmony to a part linked to this area.

De Souzenelle wrote an essay (1998) on the meaning of illnesses and how the symbolical understanding of a specific pain might give further awareness to the client with the objective to recover and gain harmonic health and wellness. Illness becomes a cure to encourage psychological and spiritual awareness. The more an organ is stressed, the more it is at risk of carrying somatization:

> The organism is not able to disguise between what is fear and reality, between the physical and the psychic; it somatises in the same way. Faced with a difficulty, the organism reacts by mobilizing its means of defence: it is the stress, in its most positive aspect. Physical illness might be a response to psychic traumas; mute frequencies on the body could then be linked to a symbolic response to a traumatic event or an emotional disease, event before the existence of a specific, possibly chronic physical illness. (De Souzenelle, 1998, p.72).

VAHT and resonance therapies might then be understood as a tool for illness prevention and balance and wellness maintenance.

Aucher (1977, 1983) has linked sympathetic resonances outside of the body to a psychological activity. As a researcher, Aucher finally described one's full-resonating sonic-human being with a seven octaves model, from the lowest octaves corresponding to the lowest parts of the body to the highest octaves corresponding to the highest parts of the body:

- four octaves for the "physical body" subdivided in one octave for motor and rhythmic activity, one octave for vegetative and sexual activity, one octave for affective and pulmonary activity, one octave for nerve and sensorial activity. These divisions can similarly be observed and matched through VAHT frequency mapping.

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- One octave for other “ethereal material” - which, in VAHT studies, might be linked to the sensation of feeling the sound out of the body, often described as the biofield (McKusick, 2014) or electromagnetic field (Milroy, 2013).
- One octave for the “astral body”, connected to the expression of feelings.
- One octave for the “glorious body,” which might be linked to oneiric materials and purpose of life.

Such a division in layers of existence is not new and can easily be linked to the yogic tradition (Dale, 2009) which calls them the *koshas* or *sheaths* ordered from the denser matter (the physical body) to the more ethereal or spiritual state (the etheric, astral, mental, and causal bodies). These different bodies seem organised according to their vibratory level and state of consciousness. To cite Gerber (2001),

> The difference between the physical matter and etheric matter is only a difference of frequency. It is an acknowledged principle within physics that energy of different frequencies can coexist within the same space without destructive interaction […] The energetic matrix of the etheric body, or holographic energy-field template, is superimposed upon the structure of the physical framework. […] Bodies of higher energetic frequencies are interconnected and in a dynamic equilibrium with the physical body. (p.120)

This human multidimensional anatomy might be seen as a harp and its several strings can combine resonance and synchronicity through chords and consonant intervals to maintain or regain harmony.

Metamerism

Auriol, a French psychiatrist and father of *Psychosonique* science (1991), has discovered that some bodies are segmented in several horizontal zones, called metameres, as clearly represented in the worm family. Regarding the human body, the yogic tradition has described the human energetic system as a superposition of seven chakras, or energetic centres (they may differ in number in other cultures, as we can find five chakras in Tibetan culture, sometimes 12 or even more in other traditions). According to ancient schools like Nada Yoga (the Yoga of Sound) and Mantra Yoga, these chakras are linked to a specific resonant point in the physical body (the endocrine system with its hormones), they represent a specific psychic awareness (seat of consciousness), and they may be linked to a colour frequency (from the rainbow optical spectrum) and an audible frequency (from the natural C major scale). The most represented and well-known model (Goldman, 2008) is the one which connects the seven chakras to the seven

notes of the scale (C D E F G A B – we just need to remember that the notes in the Indian tradition are mobile and not fixed frequencies).

We can now give another interpretation to this model, in which each tone of each chakra may represent an octave in the physical body: C for the first octave, D for the second octave, and so on. The Armenian philosopher Gurdjieff (Ouspensky, 2001) described this phenomenon as the lateral octaves, the seat of inner evolution and consciousness. Moreover, he emphasized the comprehension of the change of an octave as a double frequency and double speed, which correspond to a higher state of being. From the motor plane to the vegetative plane, there is a difference of doubled vibrations; from the emotional to the mental plane, another difference of doubled frequencies. We can now understand our human body as a multidimensional harp, which connects body awareness, emotions, thoughts subtle energy through invisible strings that sound healing and vibroacoustic can reveal.

In several traditions, the birth of the harp was linked to an extraordinary mythical vision. Mythology often records of ancient lyres made of seven strings (Williams, 2005): Hermes, the messenger of the gods in ancient Greek tradition, was often known as the inventor of the lyre, made of seven strings from a tortoiseshell and gut found in a cave. In other traditions, the seven strings of the lyre were linked to the Seven Sisters, the seven stars of the Pleiades, thought as divine singers and dancers, according to a tradition that linked audible sounds to the doctrine of the cosmic harmony called the music of the spheres. Hermes gave his lyre to his brother Apollo, God of light, music, medicine, and protector of the Muses; he was also the holder of the caduceus, which is still a symbol of many healthcare organizations today and which several authors (Chaudhary, 2020, Goldman, 2008) have linked to the yogic tradition of the three *nadis* (energetic channel or sympathetic, parasympathetic, central nervous systems). Several ancient poets describe the lyre as a symbolic representation of the cosmos (Molina Moreno, 2008). In India, a yogic tradition links the *veena*, a sort of lute (formerly an ancient harp) to the physical body: each string corresponds to a chakra and the frets on the neck of the instrument match the vertebrae of the back while the resonator is associated to the head. In such a tradition, playing the *veena* is synonymous of harmonizing the physical and energetic body, according to the therapeutic knowledge of *ragas* (modes), *svaras* (tones), and *tala* (rhythm). Lying on a massage bed, a VAHT client is harmonising their seven endocrine systems, their different points of energy and body awareness; as therapeutic musicians and sound healers we can relate to an ancient

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tradition of healing music to continue, through modern science and concrete practice, a millennial knowledge.

Musical and Sonic Considerations

As therapeutic musicians, we can investigate on how, after a sonic body scan, we can improve our sessions with specific sequences, harmonies, intervals, rhythms, frequencies, touch, which are among the different variability of sound parameters. I will share some of the experiences I have met during the time-lapse of a nine-month VAHT practice and some complementary considerations given by other authors.

- All frequencies influence our body.
- Low frequencies (30-65 Hz) can be exceptionally grounding and relaxing to the physical body. A large documentation of this effect is available through VAT studies.
- Medium frequencies (65 – 260 Hz) might be useful in connecting with the emotional part of our clients.
- Higher frequencies (260-523 Hz) might be useful to connect with their mental (brain) and energetic dimension (electromagnetic biofield).
- Frequencies that do not resonate on the physical body may be played anyway to open this part of the body which might be tense, in pain or not often used. It is a good way to balance the resonant body.
- Frequencies that are hitting a painful point could be played with a very delicate touch and with low intensity. Avoiding a direct and intense touch might help to relax the client and, at the same time, it might be interesting to approach those frequencies from other nearby frequencies which will surround the “painful frequency,” and then gradually approach it, creating a forced resonance.
- Some frequencies really hit or please the clients at a very precise point: I often play these frequencies at the beginning of the relaxing session and create a harmonisation based on chords sequences, like the natural harmonic series.
- Harmonic sequences can lead to inner harmony: beautiful series of arpeggios, intervals, and chords can be done following the natural harmonic series; it has without doubt a connection with the harmonisation of the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual parts (Gardner, 1990, pp. 102-117). In the lower octave, I would play larger and more open intervals, like octaves and fifths. For the central octave, thirds and sevenths intervals suit better while melodies and scales are perfect on the higher octaves, in a progression that reflects the constant and progressive restriction of intervals in the harmonic series.
- Modes have specific emotions and energetic dimensions: from ancient Greek scales to Gregorian modes, from Indian *ragas* to Middle Eastern *Maqam*, all musical traditions have given emotional and therapeutic attributes to every type of musical scale.

- Each mode can be determined with its emotional level in an ascending spiral from the minor and more introspective Locrian, then Phrygian, Aeolian, and Dorian, to the more outreaching and major modes like the Mixolydian, Ionian and finally Lydian mode.
- While giving a vibroacoustic harp therapy session, I often switch from a deep introspective mode to a more joyful and light mode at the end of the session, for instance Aeolian or Dorian to Mixolydian or Ionian.
- As for the rhythmic delivery of the single notes, I will ask the client if they prefer to relax (mostly) or to dynamize themselves during the session. Typically, I will follow a flow conduction of the session, with a more relaxing part at the beginning and more dynamizing at the end. During the beginning of the improvisation, I will follow the biorhythms of the client, especially the rhythm of their breath and I will try to retrace the same tempo with the notes. Thanks to entrainment and natural synchronization of the body, the heart, and the brain waves with the breathing rhythm, it is possible to slow down the biorhythms of the client and to convey a more relaxing pace. Deep relaxation through sound has a proven positive effect on the activation of the vagus nerve, in control of the rest response, digestive function, stress, and pain management.

Conclusions

The observations realized during this study can lead to different hypothesis. The visualization of the frequencies response on the physical body helps us to understand blocks, tensions, and traumas and eventually to promote a further investigation and a diagnosis from a medical professional. Physical and psychological awareness are deeply increased during VAHT sessions and can indicate a better stress and pain management from the patient's point of view. Differences in resonances from the left and right part of the body can give interesting suggestions to balance body functions and brain lateralization, which, as a result, may open doors to personal creativity, intuition, and productivity. A deeper observation of different points where sound resonances are present or absent may open a discussion on psychological identification, thanks to a deeper focus on morphopsychology and symbolism of the different parts of the body on the subtle plane (emotional, energetic, and spiritual planes).

VAHT has been confirmed as a technique to improve stress management, tension, lateralization on the left and right brain and left and right part of the body, coherence between brain and heart, regulation of heart variability, motor and space training, body and emotional awareness, and homeostasis in order to regulate harmony between different biological systems. We can also imagine a near future where vibrational and vibroacoustic therapies will be recognized as a useful tool for prevention and maintenance of health and wellness. A quote from

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Maman (1997), *The Body as a Harp*: "…observing and harmonizing the different frequencies of the body is the beginning of understanding the multidimensional human being layered with different qualities of vibrations, awareness, and manifestations" (p.33).

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