

LIQUID[®] SOUND

„Exploring Liquid Sound[®]“ – Relaxation through Bathing in Light and Music. By Marion Schneider, Bad Sulza

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International Society of Music in Medicine (ISMM)

Liquid Sound® / TTS Product & Service GmbH
Wunderwaldstr. 2 D-99518 Bad Sulza, Germany
ph: +49-36461-92886 fx: +49-36461-92096
e-mail: info@liquidsound.com

www.liquidsound.com www.liquidrom.com

LIQUID[®] SOUND

Exploring “Liquid Sound[®]” – Relaxation through Bathing in Light and Music By Marion Schneider, Bad Sulza

Background and Aim of Investigation

Bad Sulza, a small Spa and health resort in Thuringia, Germany, has become known over the past 10 years for introducing and exploring “Liquid Sound[®]”, a unique multimedia system. At the core of this concept lies floatation in body-temperature saline water combined with sensory stimulation through underwater music and coloured light. Developed by artist and writer Micky Remann, Liquid Sound[®] has provided thousands of people with music in healing waters and with a spectrum of experiences ranging from recreational entertainment to deep emotional, spiritual and transpersonal journeys. The initial inspiration was not aimed at creating a therapeutic tool. It originated in Micky Remann’s interest in the underwater sounds of whales. However, anecdotal evidence from Liquid Sound[®] users gathered over the years clearly point to the therapeutic value of "bathing in light and music", also termed Balneo-Sono-Colour-Relaxation. Fortunately for us these aspects became evident soon after the first permanent Liquid Sound[®] installation was opened in 1993 in the therapy pools of the Klinikzentrum Bad Sulza, and was closely watched by medical professionals. The Klinikzentrum Bad Sulza is a multidisciplinary rehabilitation clinic for the treatment of patients suffering from chronic illnesses, especially psoriasis/atopic eczema, respiratory problems and joint-related illnesses (rheumatism and chronic pain), allergic and psychosomatic illnesses. Many of these patients have multiple disorders which are treated simultaneously. It is of special importance for Klinikzentrum Bad Sulza that psychologists and social workers as well as music and art are included in the treatment concept. The therapy actively involves the patient who discovers that illness is shared by others and that there is no need to feel shameful of one’s ailment. Bearing this in mind it is not surprising that the directors of the Klinikzentrum Bad Sulza were open to see what contribution Liquid Sound[®] could make. Because it was untested “bathing in light and music” was initially offered as a recreational activity after therapy hours for patients and visitors. However, repeated reports from patients about the positive effect of time spent in the Liquid Sound[®] environment on their healing and well-being motivated the therapeutic professionals to include Liquid Sound[®] in the treatment plan. The idea was that floating in music and water could offer new ways to relaxation for patients who have difficulties responding to conventional relaxation techniques. Thanks to the commitment of Renate Maerten (Dipl. Psych), clinical psychologist at Klinikzentrum Bad Sulza at the time, a way was found to formalize Liquid Sound[®] relaxation sessions as part of the psychological counselling. The understanding was that Liquid Sound[®] is not a treatment for any specific disease or symptom, but instead can be seen as a way to initiate deep and effortless relaxation as a key factor in enhancing

LIQUID[®] SOUND

the healing process and a sense of well-being on many levels. Renate Maerten later continued her Liquid Sound[®] studies in an independent research project. In addition to reviewing data she had collected from her clinic patients, she used questionnaires with volunteers in order to learn more about the effects that Liquid Sound[®] has on people.

Imagine you enter a high vaulting space. Possibly you feel more like you are entering a fantasy realm than a public baths. The indirectly lit water shimmers turquoise blue, and spectral colour nuances play across the walls. Pleasant warmth soothes your body as you slide into the body-temperature salt water. Dipping into the water means immersing yourself in coloured light projected from a ring of underwater spots. Following the example of other bathers, lying back on the water's surface, nose and mouth above water, ears under water, you notice that the buoyancy of the salt-water makes you feel weightless like an astronaut. Floating freely, you have no need for any corrective bodily movements to prevent you from going under. As your body begins to get used to the situation, your ears focus on the music, underwater music of astonishing clarity and brilliance, which produces a pleasant soft aural quality for which we, as dry land dwellers, know no comparison. Like most people, you will probably prefer to enjoy the listening experience with closed eyes and embark on a journey into inner dimensions. The sound of whale and dolphin song, of choirs, the sounds of nature, birds, waves and bells enrich a carefully chosen selection of music. The installation may conjure up futuristic associations of high-tech and multimedia, your experience, however, is more akin to an emotional and archaic contact to the life-giving elixir of water, and to areas one might call transpersonal.

Methods

Trying to break down a multifaceted experience like Liquid Sound[®] into its components and to measure it objectively is not an easy task, since there are many "soft" components interacting with each other and with the individuals exposed to them. From the many possible research avenues, the direction taken by Renate Maerten reflects her many years of practice and training in hypnotherapy and transpersonal psychology. She was fascinated with people's reactions to bathing in the "Liquid-Sound Temple", whether suffering from ailments or in full health, and she wanted to find out exactly what happens when people, through their physical and emotional contact with music under water, open up to inner forces usually inaccessible in everyday life. The questionnaire she developed with the Bad Sulza team of Liquid Sound[®] practitioners can be used to describe and to quantify in degrees, how psychological, physical, emotional and spiritual states are effected before, during and after a 50-minute Liquid Sound[®] session. A total 98 individuals took part in this preliminary study which was conducted over most of the year 2001. Guided group sessions with 5 to 10 people were held, each using an identical music program. The music was a selection of calm and

LIQUID[®] SOUND

melodious, non-simplistic and mostly instrumental pieces by unfamiliar artists, so that personal memories of a recognizable tune would not interfere with the experience. The program was divided into three phases, each corresponding with different musical dynamics: 1. Introduction / Attunement (7min. 46 sec.); 2. Trance / Deep Relaxation (36min. 52sec); 3. Return / Gentle Movement (5min. 5 sec.). Before entering the pool, subjects were recommended to float passively as comfortable as possible in the warm saline water, ears submerged, eyes closed if possible, and to engage in listening to the music under water. At the end of the 50 minute session the main lights were switched on. The subjects were then asked to slowly come out of the pool, have a shower, and go to an adjacent room, where the questionnaires were to be filled out. This usually lasted another 40 minutes. In addition to the questionnaires, Renate Maerten also evaluated written reports by her patients gathered from 1995 till 1999, who were asked to describe freely their Liquid Sound[®] experience in their own words.

Results

Without detailing the quantitative analysis here, evaluation of the responses to the questionnaire and additional data from clinic patients generally support the hypothesis under which the preliminary study by Renate Maerten was undertaken:

1. Liquid Sound[®] reduces stress symptoms and facilitates deep relaxation of psyche and body.
2. Liquid Sound[®] supports a process of “inner lighting up” and can be used in the therapy of depression.
3. Liquid Sound[®] is a powerful tool to induce trance states.
4. Liquid Sound[®] leads to non-ordinary states of consciousness, and thus can be discussed in the realm of transpersonal psychology and therapy.
5. Liquid Sound[®] has positive effects on the treatment of sleep disorders, various forms of addiction, trauma and abuse.
6. Liquid Sound[®] can be effective in the reduction and treatment of chronic pain.

Reviewing statements about Liquid-Sound[®] by patients and volunteers, one notices recurring themes such as: feelings of essential trust, of unity with oneself and the world, of balance, of deep relaxation and internal clarity. Bathers report they are enveloped in comforting embryonic feelings, experiencing once again the sheltering waters, of being in touch with one's own existence, of happiness and youth. Other statements speak about how hardened feelings, inhibitions and bitterness dissolve, and how feelings of harmony and integration are re-activated or discovered for the first time. Some Liquid Sound[®] bathers even identify themselves with sea animals and plants, or "slip into the skin" of a dolphin. Such deep experiences of lively visions may occur spontaneously by being passively exposed to the Liquid Sound[®] setting, but they are more likely when actively facilitated by a psychologist and bodyworker, trained in “Aqua Wellness” or

LIQUID[®] SOUND

similar disciplines, who is holding and moving the person in the water along with the music. A systematic and carefully choreographed combination of Liquid Sound[®] and bodywork in water, which we see evolving in Bad Sulza and at other places, is described in Renate Maerten's study as a promising field for future research.

Conclusions

The majority of Liquid Sound[®] users enjoys "bathing in light and music" outside a therapeutic or research setting in public Spas like the Toskana Therme, Bad Sulza and the Liquidrom Therme, Berlin. However, those who experience Liquid Sound[®] as part of their therapy, or were interviewed as subjects of research, testify to a huge potential for holistic, "musical" healing processes. The sensitive symphony of perception and self-perception which constitutes the human psyche and the way it interacts with the body's physical well-being seems to change, and benefit, under the combined and balanced influence of music and light in warm saline water. With only a small database it is currently difficult to determine what, and how, Liquid Sound[®] works and where it is best applied. But what we have witnessed so far certainly deserves the attention of medical professionals, research institutions and innovative health practitioners. We hope to see a follow-up to Renate Maerten's preliminary study. At the same time, there are more areas around Liquid Sound[®] that are worth being investigated. To name just a few: identifying suitable styles of underwater music in conjunction with music therapy and balneotherapy; examining the interplay of psychoacoustics and hydroacoustics; examining sensory stimulation through sound, light and aroma in the zero gravity environment of natural salt water; examining water therapy and body work in water and their relation to music; examining Liquid Sound[®] as a tool in stress management and counselling, measuring Liquid Sound[®] effects in parameters of psychoneuroimmunology; examining the effect of whale and dolphin calls played under water, and any kind of combination of the above mentioned aspects. This rich choice of opportunities may illustrate, why at the Klinikzentrum Bad Sulza we have chosen as our motto a saying by Kästner: "It is questions, out of which arises, what is to remain".

Born in 1956, **Marion Schneider** studied history, German studies and ethnology in Marburg and Freiburg im Breisgau. From 1983 onwards she has worked in the health care branch and has since then focussed upon human health aspects and their improvement through therapy, in particular effective short-term therapies. In particular she has examined the effects of water, heat and light as well as architecture, music and art in healing and therapy. She played a leading role in the introduction of balneophototherapy, the simultaneous application of water and light on the human body, as well as of Liquid Sound[®], technology for bathing in light and music. Together with her husband Klaus Dieter Böhm she owns and operates the rehabilitation clinic Klinikzentrum Bad Sulza. Besides, she is General Manager of the neighbouring Toskana Therme and Hotel an der Therme in Bad Sulza, Thuringia/Germany as well as the Toskana Therme Bad Schandau (near Dresden).