

# Spirit in Sound

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(message begins following a musical improvisation)

I love making music, especially the kind of music that arrives unexpectedly during such an improvisation. Of course, I didn't always love it. In fact I HATED it. Those who've known me for many years...and probably some who've only known me a short time...know that I like to be in charge and in control – I like it alot! When I first started this journey into music improvisation, I was horrified. I went to these weekend workshops where you sat in quartets, knee to knee with musicians of all stripes. And then, you waited for music to happen. I mean, come on! No score, no plan, no one in charge. I was just supposed to breathe, trust, let go, and smile. R-i-i-g-g-h-h-t. The first few weekends I did this were terrifying. I, uh,...well, let's just say I went through a lot of Imodium, fully understanding the physiology behind that expression about being scared.

But with practice, I did learn to breathe, to trust, to let go of my expectations, and to smile at both the beauty and the chaos inherent in the process. And I learned that there is creation on the edge of every breath.

This lesson has expanded well beyond my musical life. Because my breath is what my sound is carried upon, I must take great care and be mindful of what I'm creating. Each sound and word, whether musical or conversational, has the power to create or destroy. I am creating my world with my sound. And there is spirit in my sound, and your sound too. In fact, there is spirit in all sound.

Ok, now, I know we're gonna get tripped up on this word spirit so let me clarify. I believe that sound—from the wind in the trees to the cry of a baby, from the mood of a conversation to the chants of a choir, from the sizzle of water on hot stones to the sizzle of steak—are all much more than simply that surface sound. They are, in fact, pregnant with our history, culture, biology, emotions, and more. And I believe that Spirit, with a capital “S,” or the Singer of Life as our hymn said, is also within, behind, beyond, and around that sound.

There's *always* spirit in my sound--whether I am singing or speaking. My sound contains the voice of my deepest wounds and greatest joys...the voice of my

ancestors ringing through from the past ...the voice my highest hopes and darkest fears...all this is inside the spirit of my sound...and in the spirit of your sound. This means we must listen harder to the deeper tones and the sounds of lives tempered in the fire of experience. And it means that what we make with our sound—whether alone or together—is always, always a sacred task.

Last weekend, I was on retreat with the Indianapolis Women's Chorus. We spent the whole weekend doing two things: improvising and developing a covenant...both important experiences in relationship and community building. On Sunday morning, some of the women worked up the courage to improvise in duets. Without exception, each duet was stunning and had that transcending ring of truth. It was fascinating to watch them...they would release their fear and activate their breath with a tai chi release (do it, Pam), then join hands in silence and wait, in trust, for an unknown outcome.

Beautiful music was manifest when each woman sang courageously despite publicly acknowledged fear; when each was willing not just to give and take, but to listen and watch for cues in that exchange. And beautiful music was manifest when each woman accepted each musical idea, each sound, as a sacred gift. Good guidelines for any conversation, I'm thinking. I'm considering making an improvised duet a formal part of our conflict resolution policy so that we must first create something together and thereby underline our inescapable mutuality.

Does it sound like I'm trying to turn life into a musical? I have a friend who hates musicals. He says, "They're ridiculous. People don't just burst out into song!" Well, I beg to differ. We are breaking out into song all the time. You can argue later with me about when it is that sound becomes music, but my point this morning is that it's all on the sound continuum. And we must take care of what we are creating with sound.

There's plenty to worry about on the sound front. The cacophony created by polarizing public discourse is deafening and it's poisoning the public square. Music itself is now too often a soulless commodity, sold to us in numerous forms, mostly for our entertainment and amusement. Televisions blare in shopping malls, people have TVs in multiple rooms in their houses, and kids watch videos in their cars. There is no relationship, nothing sacred, in much of these sounds.

I can't help but think of the Grinch Who Stole Christmas, when he says, "If there's one thing I hate, all the noise, noise, noise, noise!" I'm with ya Grinchie, babie. Many is the day I'd like to live with you up on Mount Crumpet.

But what happened to the Grinch at the end? He hears the Whos singing ...and not just the SOUND of their singing...but the intention in the sound---the love and the blessed community. And his heart grows as he drinks in the spirit of this sound. What can we do to reclaim the spirit in sound?

Find time for silence. We need silence to quiet our mind and to hear our own voice and the voice of the Mystery. It is in silence that we can hear most clearly.

Let natural sounds heal you and teach you. Remember that we are but one sound in Earth's great symphony, and the human contribution has become too clamorous. What does the wind have to say to you today?

Remember that there is creation at the edge of every breath. Find your breath, connect to it before you make a sound. And then consider: What is the spirit in your sound? What is the spirit in other sounds? In the sounds we make together? What do you want to create with our sound today?