

Sharing Our Stories: Psymposia at Psychedelic Science 2017

LEX PELGER



Lex Pelger



PSYCHEDELIC SCIENCE 2017
APRIL 19–24, 2017 • OAKLAND MARRIOTT CITY CENTER • CALIFORNIA

PSYMPOSIA IS EXCITED TO JOIN in making Psychedelic Science 2017 an even more in-depth learning experience for the community. Thanks to the generosity of MAPS and The Beckley Foundation, who are hosting the event, our stage will be located in the Marketplace (free and open to the public) from April 21–23, and provide a platform for people to explore psychedelics from a variety of angles, to share their personal transformative stories, and to engage in timely conversations on the big issues facing the psychedelic research community.

Political activist and poet Muriel Rukeyser once said, “The Universe is made of stories, not of atoms.” In the psychedelic research world, anecdotal evidence sometimes slips through the cracks, yet it also serves as some of our most powerful data. The Psymposia Stage at Psychedelic Science 2017 is a platform for attendees to share your story, so we’ll have opportunities for “open mic” storytelling the entire weekend.

We’ll also feature a wide range of familiar faces and fresh voices including young people from Latin America, Asia, and South America who’ve received scholarships to attend the Psychedelic Science 2017 conference; authors, artists, and academics sharing insights into their lives and work on the streets, behind a desk, or in the lab; conversation circles exploring issues like addiction, harm reduction, microdosing, mental health, regulation, and diversity; and short talks from a variety of ex-

perts on plant medicines, clinical applications, and the value of subjective experiences in science.

THE BLUE DOT TOUR

On the road to Psychedelic Science 2017, starting in early April, we began the Blue-Dot Tour. This cross-continent, zig-zagging storytelling adventure stopped in cities and towns that are hotbeds of activism: blue dots in red states. Of course, we also visited some blue dots in blue states, and we’re looking for hosts from Mexico to Canada who want to see a communal education night in their community.

The tour provided educational spaces—outside computers and classrooms—for the community to come together to share their experiences, good, bad, or ugly. Whether it was new insights from psychedelics, healing through opiates, spirituality through dissociative compounds, or any other experience with psychoactive substances, we captured people’s stories from across America.

Our group started by organizing conferences and lecture nights, and while we still treasure pulling those together too, it’s the storytelling nights that blossomed into the true communal magic. It’s amazing to see what our community brings when you simply put a naked microphone on the stage and ask for a share.

Along the way on the Blue Dot Tour, we screened the excellent and persuasive new film by MAPS Board member Robert Barnhart, *A New Understanding: The Science of Psilocybin*, which takes a powerful look at the healing enabled through this formerly suppressed and now re-emerging medicine.

In these turbulent and divisive political times, we feel that some of the best solutions emerge from community events, partnerships and platforms that bring people together to share honest insights, stories, and lessons learned the hard way. It's a vital part of activism: hearing from our elders, finding our peers, shifting conversations towards healing, liberty, and taking an honest look at both the benefits and the risks of psychoactive substances.

An important aspect of fulfilling this vision is seeking diversity in the community, including women, people of color, and other underrepresented voices. On the tour, I sat down with as many old-timers, autodidacts, and underground wisdom seekers as I could find to record out there on the road. So if you'd like to see a storytelling session or educational night for your community, student group, or conference, let Psymposia know and we'll be glad to facilitate however we can. On the Blue Dot Tour, we found many new stories to showcase—which leads me to our other recent exciting news.

THE PSYCHEDELIC SALON 2.0

Psymposia will be contributing new content to the venerable Psychedelic Salon podcast. We'll be infusing it with our own mix of talks, interviews, and conversations on psychedelics, drug war reform, harm reduction and overall "psychoactivism."

Send us news about your events, recommendations about who to interview, and anything else from the community you'd like to hear shared on the air. Reach out to Psymposia magazine if you want to submit your own experience, or come out of the closet by posting a video to the **#PsychedelicsBecause** campaign.

"I want to be involved in the psychedelic field in some way—what should I do?"

We're often asked this question and here's our answer: Follow your passion and do what you love! The beauty of psychedelics is that it's truly a multidisciplinary field: science, art, comedy, harm reduction, education, community building, and networking all form invaluable pieces of the puzzle.

You don't have to be a researcher, therapist, or neuroscientist to make a difference. We started out as students and activists who met at the *Horizons: Perspectives on Psychedelics* conference, and we decided to organize our own conference the following year at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, which

we livestreamed around the world. The conference had a big impact, and encouraged us to continue organizing events across the country. If you have an idea that you think will make a positive change, take action! Ideas without action are like seedlings without water.

So, we encourage you to look at what's out there. If there's a gap you think is missing, fill it in. For us, we saw a lack of honest drug education and critical conversations out there, so we started our own online magazine last year at **psymposia.com**. While still in its infancy, our team has grown organically to include writers and editors in Tel Aviv, Portland, London, Boston, Queens, Burlington, and Baltimore. Our projects combine science with stories to bring a positive change and encourage people to think about society, medicine, and law.

"Symposia" are defined as friendly, lively, and free flowing gatherings of conversation and music. In that spirit, Psymposia aims to create a platform—in person and online—to bring groups together for critical conversations and the free exchange of stories, perspectives, and ideas.

HAVE STORIES? WILL TRAVEL

If you'd like to see a storytelling stop in your hometown, university, or loft please reach out to us at hi@psymposia.com.

If you would like to support our work, consider making a pledge to our crowdfunding campaign at **patreon.com/psymposia**. For as little as \$2/month, you can help us continue growing and spreading the message far and wide. Thank you for your support!

We also send a very big thank you to our friend Lorenzo Hagerty for giving us such a wonderful opportunity to revive the Psychedelic Salon.

Finally, we want to end with our gratitude to MAPS and The Beckley Foundation for pulling together the Psychedelic Science 2017 conference, inviting us to contribute an entire stage all weekend, and for MAPS' 31 years of work threading MDMA and other psychoactive substance (through the eye of a needle) towards FDA-sanctioned medicines for healing. 🌱

*With a background in science, **Lex Pelger** writes about drugs & as the host of Psymposia, he organizes psychoactive education & storytelling events. In his lectures, he covers how drugs work in the brain, shares stories of their actual use in the field & teaches about the dark racist history of the War on Drugs. His main project is a large graphic novel about cannabis and the endocannabinoid system (based on Moby Dick) titled "Anandamide or: the Cannabinoid". See the first finished chapter about Queers, AIDS, Reagan & the birth of the modern medical marijuana movement at lexpelger.com.*