

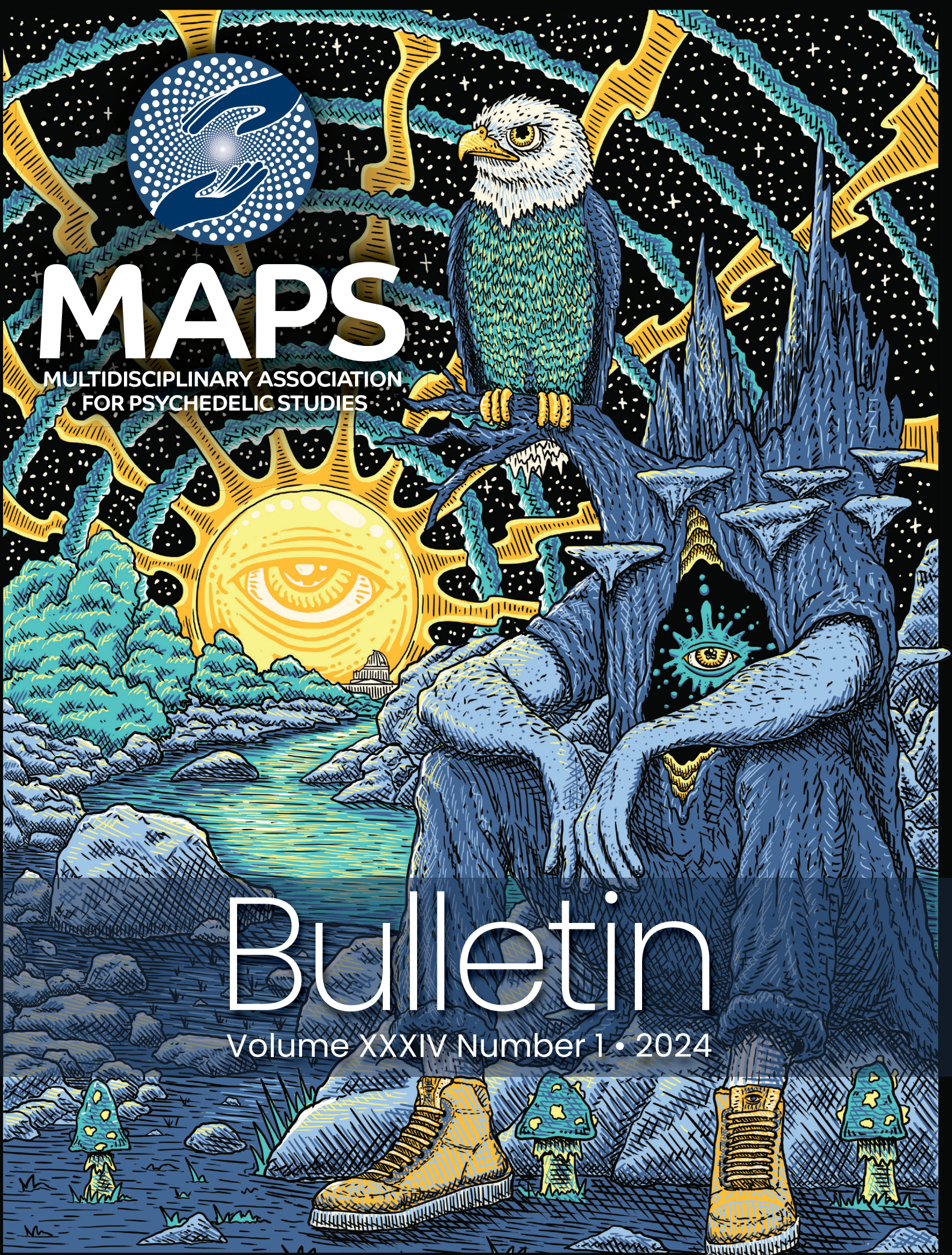


MAPS

MULTIDISCIPLINARY ASSOCIATION
FOR PSYCHEDELIC STUDIES

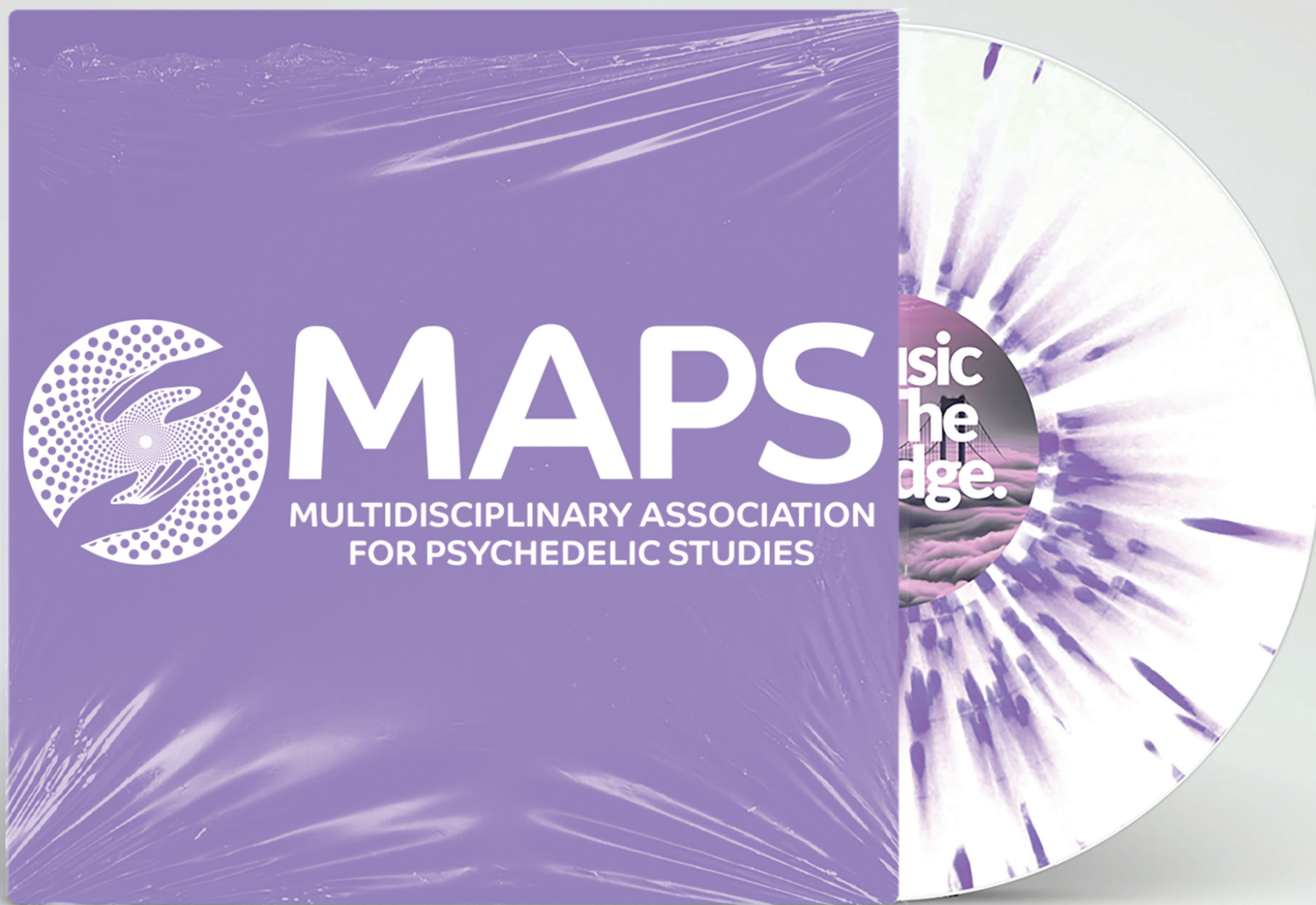
Bulletin

Volume XXXIV Number 1 • 2024



Music Is The Bridge.

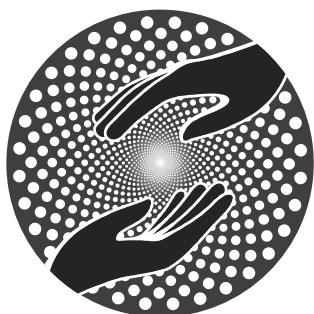
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ARTISTS & COMMUNITY
PLAYLIST FOR MAPS



maps.org/music-is-the-bridge



MAPS

MULTIDISCIPLINARY ASSOCIATION FOR PSYCHEDELIC STUDIES

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Mission • Changing Minds for Good

Founded in 1986, the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit research and educational organization that develops medical, legal, and cultural contexts for people to benefit from the careful uses of psychedelics and marijuana.

Vision • A Post-Prohibition Society

MAPS envisions a world where psychedelics and marijuana are safely and legally available for beneficial uses, and where research is governed by rigorous scientific evaluation of their risks and benefits.

Values • Our Compass

From the beginning, MAPS has understood that the way forward is a long road we must travel safely by following our compass—these four values:

Integrity

Information is shared transparently.
Communications are respectful,
honest, and forthright, and
our decisions are informed by
compassion and research.

Curiosity

We mindfully
persist in the face of
challenges, and we
build with a balanced,
long-term vision.

Perseverance

We are always open
to new possibilities:
we try new things,
take risks, and learn
from our mistakes.

Equity

We work for
ethical and
equitable
access for all.

Principles • Our Roadmap

While our four core values orient us, our seven principles point the way forward.



**Healing
for All**



**Prioritize
Public
Benefit**



**Open
Science,
Open Books**



**Set the
Setting**



**Consciousness
without
Criminalization**



**Be the
Bridge**



**See
Past the
Paradox**

Read more at maps.org/about-maps/principles/

Programs • How We Move Forward

Advancing Research

Sponsoring and funding
cutting-edge research of
psychedelics and cannabis

Changing Policy

Advocating for policies rooted
in evidence-based, equitable,
and compassionate frameworks
that support the dignity and
rights of people who use drugs

Shaping Culture

Convening and educating
the public, professionals,
and communities about
psychedelics, responsible
use, and how to get involved

Cover Art

FRONT: Astral Drift

BACK: Stoned Ape Trio

by Owen Murphy

One Drop Design Studio
Baltimore, Maryland

Owen Murphy is a versatile and dynamic artist known for his vibrant, eclectic style that blends elements of pop culture, surrealism, and psychedelia. His works often feature bold colors, intricate details, and imaginative borders that invite viewers into his mind.

From a young age he drew inspiration from a wide range of sources, including comic books, street art, and contemporary pop culture. This unique fusion of influences has garnered him a growing and diverse audience, from art enthusiasts to collectors who appreciate his ability to transform everyday subjects into compelling illustrations.

Murphy has collaborated with various bands and brands, highlighting his versatility and appeal. He is constantly experimenting with new techniques and themes to keep his art fresh and engaging. His commitment to his own growth and innovation makes him a standout figure in the contemporary art scene.

<https://onedropdesignstudio.com/>

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Letter from the Chief Editor

Dear readers,

It's been 36 years since MAPS launched its first edition of the *Bulletin* in 1988. There have been 34 editions and around 1400 published articles. Thank you for being with us on this journey!

If you have been following the news at MAPS closely, you may have noticed that 2024 has been a year of many significant shifts, surprises, and navigating new territories. Over the last year, we have made some changes to the MAPS *Bulletin*, including moving to a digital-first approach to meet the needs of our contemporary era. So, if you are subscribed to the MAPS newsletter or follow us on social media, you have seen us post a new article online weekly.

We have decided to make another major shift in our continued evolution: We're moving from printing a triannual magazine to an annual magazine. With this shift, we aim to use our limited, valuable resources to improve the magazine's quality and make the *Bulletin* an even more special perk for our long-time (and new) readers. We hope this transition to an annual edition can become a timeless piece for your coffee tables.

Thank you for following along with us through the evolution of psychedelic education!

Sincerely,

Bia Labate
Bia Labate, Ph.D.

MAPS *Bulletin*, Chief Editor



From the Desk of Rick Doblin, Ph.D.

Our Collective Commitment to MDMA-Assisted Therapy Remains Unwavering

Dear MAPS community and supporters,

These have been very challenging times at MAPS, at Lykos, in the entire psychedelic ecosystem, and in the world at large. Personally, I've been working at MAPS for more than 38 years towards FDA approval of MDMA-assisted therapy, including focusing on this topic in my 2001 Ph.D. dissertation. Lykos, MAPS, and the entire movement have just experienced a setback with FDA's rejection of Lykos' New Drug Application for MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD and the unrelated retraction of

three scientific papers. Sadly, the FDA's decision also resulted in the last day of work for several friends and colleagues whose talent and dedication have been a gift to the mission over the years. We miss them greatly. Lykos went through a 70% reduction in force. Furthermore, the Massachusetts Natural Plant Medicine Initiative, the one psychedelic drug policy reform initiative on the ballot in 2024, failed to pass after receiving just 43% of the vote.

Though the outcomes for FDA approval of MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD are uncertain, Lykos is in discussions with FDA about the path forward, with FDA

calling for a third Phase 3 study. If Lykos is unsuccessful in persuading FDA that the third trial isn't necessary, potential FDA approval is now about three years away. I believe Lykos will eventually succeed in obtaining FDA approval. We must sustain resilience and passionate persistence in the face of adversity.

Tragically, people suffering from PTSD do not have the luxury of time. I am most devastated for those who could benefit from these treatments and deserve access to effective healing. I pledge to continue to fight for them. This moment is sobering, yet it anchors me and MAPS more strongly than ever in our commitment to creating safe and legal access to psychedelics for beneficial use: healing, creativity, spirituality, celebration, connection, couples therapy, and beyond.

I've encountered many difficult moments in this four-decade-long journey. As we say in the Zendo principles, "difficult is not the same as bad." Difficult experiences, with acceptance rather than resistance, can lead to growth, creativity, new directions, community, and unexpected allies. We acknowledge how hard these outcomes are for so many people who have been relying on our success, and we share this disappointment with each of you. Now is a time for a clear-headed analysis of where we fell short and how we can do better moving forward. It is a time for us to recalibrate our strategy, rebuild trust with our stakeholders, and draw strength from our spiritual audacity to continue to build the future we know is possible.

As FDA's rejection makes MAPS' work all the more urgent, I've resigned from the Board of Lykos so that MAPS' communications team and I can advocate and speak freely, out from under Lykos control over our communications. I'm refocusing on public education, policy reform, and global research into MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD in places with high burdens of trauma and inadequate access to resources, along with initiating couples therapy research, and more.

We must sustain
resilience and
passionate persistence
in the face of adversity.

We have made tremendous progress over 38 years in combating drug war stigma, generating data showing the potential of psychedelic-assisted therapies to treat mental health conditions, and educating the public on how psychedelics can be safely integrated into society. MAPS' four decades of work—pioneering research, bold policy reform, and evidence-based public education—have paved the way for the emerging field

of legal psychedelic medicine. Now, hundreds of for-profit psychedelic companies, a handful of public benefit for-profit companies, dozens of nonprofits, and countless community circles form a broad and diverse community.

Because of support from people like you, now, more than half of Americans support legal access to psychedelic-assisted therapies. To our supporters, researchers, participants, and the entire MAPS family: thank you for your dedication. Together, we've helped shift culture and created an entire field around psychedelics. MAPS' psychedelic work continues, and I am more committed than ever to seeing our vision through.

If you are struggling to find hope right now, I encourage you to find community with your local psychedelic society or reach out to the Fireside Project, a free psychedelic support line. I look forward to being in community with you all at Psychedelic Science 2025 in Denver, if not sooner.

As we move forward, let's keep our eyes on the horizon—a world where psychedelics are safely accessible to all who need them, where stigma is replaced by understanding, and where we continue to make strides toward mass mental health and a world without drug prohibition.

To Healing for All and Seeing Past the Paradox,

Rick Doblin

Rick Doblin, Ph.D.
MAPS Founder and Executive Director



Encapsulating MAPS News in 2024

Read full announcements at [MAPS.org/news](https://maps.org/news)

MDMA Research Updates

MAPS Statement on FDA Complete Response Letter on MDMA-Assisted Therapy for PTSD New Drug Application

August 9, 2024

- MAPS remains confident in its goal of making access to MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD safe and legal

The Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (**MAPS**) is evaluating the path forward for safe, legal access to MDMA-assisted therapy following the announcement from Lykos Therapeutics that the potential approval of midomafetamine (MDMA) capsules used in combination with therapy for PTSD will be delayed by FDA.

MAPS and our supporters have been advocating for the development and supporting the FDA-approved research of MDMA-assisted therapy for more than 38 years; MAPS will continue working towards safe, legal access to this therapy for the more than 350 million people living with PTSD worldwide.

Our collective commitment to MDMA-assisted therapy remains unwavering. MAPS remains fully focused on supporting culturally appropriate research, rigorous science, and drug policy reform that empowers citizen advocacy in all areas of the world including those with high incidences of trauma and limited resources.

Rick Doblin, PhD

Founder and President of MAPS

MAPS' strategic agenda, adopted by the Board of Directors, is to shepherd a post-prohibition world where people have legal and equitable access to psychedelics for healing and personal growth. We do that by:

- **Advancing Research** by incubating, informing, and inspiring research that enables new investigative directions, improves patient access and experience, and informs data-driven drug policy and education.
- **Changing Policy** toward a harmonious drug policy ecosystem that balanc-

es public health, individual liberty, and equitable access across a variety of regulatory approaches.

- **Evolving Education** with accurate, evidence-based, and balanced education for professionals and the public and convening experts at events such as Psychedelic Science 2025.

Since our founding in 1986, MAPS has been a leading organization building the movement to foster evidence-based approaches to psychedelics and the people who use them. Learn more and sign up for email updates at maps.org.

Expert Insights on FDA's Recent PTSD Treatment Meeting

September 12, 2024

- The U.S. FDA hybrid public meeting, *Advancing Treatments for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)* brought together federal agencies to discuss the urgent need for advancing innovative PTSD therapies
- Following the meeting, MAPS hosted a press briefing with Bessel van der Kolk, M.D., Darron Smith, Ph.D., PA-C, DFAAPA, Dave Rabin M.D., Ph.D., and Michael Mithoefer, M.D.
- MAPS submitted a comment to the Reagan-Udall Foundation outlining recommended actions to implement strategies to accelerate research and FDA approval of psychedelic-assisted therapies which can be read at maps.org/reagan-udall-comment

The FDA and Reagan-Udall Foundation meeting on PTSD highlights the urgency of finding, testing, and accelerating approval of novel drug-therapy combinations for this debilitating health condition. More than that, it illustrated the growing public interest in psychedelic-assisted therapies, with nearly every speaker discussing their potential in a meeting that wasn't specifically about psychedelics. Eighty members of Congress, the Veterans Affairs Administration, trauma experts, patient advocates, and 14 of 23 stakeholders who gave oral testimony agree that the existing evidence base for psychedelic-assisted therapies merits widespread, and growing, support. It's time to close the 25-year gap on new pharmacotherapies for the treatment of PTSD by approving this most promising treatment for PTSD and bringing psychedelic-assisted therapies into the healthcare system.

Betty Aldworth

MAPS Director of Communications & Post-Prohibition Strategy

MAPS Awards Grant for Pilot MDMA-assisted Massed Exposure Therapy Trial

August 27, 2024

- MAPS, which has incubated and funded cutting-edge psychedelic research for decades, is continuing to advance our understanding of psychedelic-assisted therapies

Volunteer with MAPS!

If you would like to be a part of our volunteer team, fill out our form at maps.org/participate/volunteer

- This study is one of the first trials exploring whether psychedelic-assisted therapy can enhance an existing evidence-based PTSD therapeutic treatment
- MAPS awarded Emory University researchers a \$200,000 grant for a pilot study examining MDMA-assisted Massed Exposure Therapy for PTSD

It is hypothesized that MDMA will allow participants to approach these memories with less distress. Our goal is to explore if these two therapies will be synergistic in helping participants emotionally process the traumatic memories.

Barbara Rothbaum, Ph.D.

Director of Emory Healthcare Veterans Program and Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Emory University School of Medicine

MAPS News

MAPS Successfully Clears Path for Cannabis Research through FDA Formal Dispute

November 20, 2024

- After three years of negotiation with the FDA, MAPS has successfully secured FDA clearance to conduct a clinical trial, MJP2, to examine the use of smoked cannabis for the treatment of PTSD symptoms among ~320 Veterans in Michigan and two other states
- MJP2's purpose is to generate safety data about cannabis use that mirrors real-world consumption, developing an evidence base to inform medical professionals
- MAPS' successful negotiations with the FDA will benefit future clinical researchers investigating cannabis as a potential medical treatment for serious health conditions

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Division of Psychiatry Products has cleared the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS)' Phase 2 study of smoked cannabis in Veterans for the treatment of PTSD (MJP2) to proceed. Initially placed on partial clinical hold by the FDA in 2021, MJP2 is a randomized, placebo-controlled study of 320 Veterans suffering from moderate to severe PTSD who have previously used cannabis. Funded by the Michigan Veteran Marijuana

Research Grant Program, the study is designed to investigate the inhalation of high THC dried cannabis flower, versus placebo cannabis, with the daily dose being self-titrated by participants.

"Despite the increasingly widespread use and acceptance of cannabis in patients with PTSD, labeled as "medical use" in many states, there is still a lack of high-quality, controlled data on the safety and effectiveness of cannabis use that reflects real-world consumption patterns. MAPS designed MJP2 to bridge this evidence gap by studying "real-world" use of inhaled cannabis to understand its potential benefits and risks in treating PTSD.

These data are critical to inform patients, medical providers, and adult-use consumers when considering cannabis in treatment plans for the management of PTSD, pain, and other serious health conditions, yet regulatory obstacles have historically made it difficult or impossible to conduct meaningful research on the safety and effectiveness of cannabis products typically consumed in regulated markets.

The updated opinions expressed by the FDA in response to the FDRR demonstrate a willingness to recognize the value of high-quality data on the risks and potential benefits of the already-occurring widespread use of cannabis for managing PTSD. Removing barriers to research is a key part of MAPS' mission, and we are glad to have negotiated a resolution to these long-standing obstacles in cannabis research to support all future cannabis researchers."

Allison Coker, Ph.D.

Director of Cannabis Research, MAPS

MAPS Provides Psychedelic Crisis Assessment and Intervention Training to Denver's First Responders

March 11, 2024

- This is a first-of-its-kind training for any major American municipality.
- MAPS uses its over 30 years of experience in the psychedelic space to offer a gold-standard training program.
- MAPS looks to share this training with other interested jurisdictions.

"We are honored and excited to collaborate with the City and County of Denver to provide this groundbreaking training program on psychedelic crisis assessment and intervention. We believe that this program will equip

first responders with the necessary knowledge and skills to handle psilocybin and psychedelic-related crises in a safe and compassionate manner and ultimately improve the health and well-being of the community. This program is also a testament to the progressive and visionary leadership of Denver, which has taken a bold step to decriminalize psilocybin and create a model for other cities to follow.”

Sara Gael, MA, LPC
Former MAPS Harm Reduction Officer

MAPS Congratulates Lykos Therapeutics on Acceptance of New Drug Application for MDMA-Assisted Therapy for PTSD

February 9, 2024

- The FDA has accepted a New Drug Application filed by Lykos Therapeutics for MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD
- The application was supported by clinical trial data collected over two decades of research incubated by MAPS
- The FDA granted the application Priority Review and is expected to announce its determination in August 2024

“Thirty-eight years ago, one of my primary motivations for founding MAPS was to carve a path for psychedelic-assisted therapies to become FDA-approved treatments. Today, with the notification that the FDA will evaluate MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD for potential approval as early as August 2024, and backed by decades of research incubated by MAPS, we are celebrating the therapists and subjects who participated in the Phase 2 and Phase 3 studies and the team at Lykos Therapeutics on the historic accomplishment they have achieved. We hope that potential FDA approval of MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD is only the first of many psychedelic-assisted therapies that become available by prescription.”

Rick Doblin, Ph.D.
MAPS Founder and President

MAPS Unveils Improved Fiscal Sponsorship Program, Empowering Innovators in the Psychedelic Movement

January 16, 2024

- To date, MAPS has supported nearly 70 organiza-

tions worldwide to advance charitable projects in the psychedelic movement

- Currently, MAPS serves as a fiscal sponsor for 10 organizations in the newly reformed program
- The sponsored projects come from various backgrounds including education, scientific research, and community-based projects

“The MAPS Fiscal Sponsorship Program has hosted and supported the launching of dozens of projects across the psychedelic field over the years. It is an honor to act as a launchpad for educational, advocacy, and community-building projects that bring novel and nuanced issues to the forefront and ensure that the emerging ecosystem is as diverse and dynamic as we all know it can be. We love hosting cutting-edge projects and look forward to continuing and expanding this service to the community.”

Ismail Ali, J.D.
MAPS Director of Policy & Advocacy

MAPS Welcomes New Investors, Name Change for MAPS Public Benefit Corporation

January 5, 2024

- Lykos Therapeutics, formerly known as MAPS PBC, announced the close of Series A financing to support regulatory and pre-launch activities for MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD
- MAPS now shares ownership of Lykos Therapeutics with mission-aligned investors, including philanthropic foundations and donor-advised funds that must dedicate potential future returns to their philanthropic purpose, impact investors, family offices, and institutional firms
- MAPS retains notable oversight of select activities through ten-to-one voting power and appointing six of the eight members of the Lykos Board of Directors
- MAPS will continue to advance other psychedelic research, change drug policy, and shape culture

A decade after it was founded as a wholly owned subsidiary of MAPS, MAPS Public Benefit Corporation (MAPS PBC) has announced the successful close of an oversubscribed Series A financing of more than \$100 million, led by Helena, alongside a name change to Lykos Therapeutics and new visual identity.

Being the Bridge with Community Allies

MAPS knows that collective action is needed to achieve the vision of a post-prohibition future. This work is a movement that transcends individual people or organizations. By uplifting others, we can Be the Bridge to Prioritize Public Benefit and work towards our shared goal together.

By scanning the QR code, you can learn more about how we foster collaboration with other organizations through fiscal sponsorship, grant-making, and affiliation.



maps.org/community-allies

MAPS' Fiscal Sponsorships

Over 10 years, nearly 70 mission-aligned groups around the world have advanced the movements for psychedelic harm reduction, drug policy reform, and education with support from MAPS.

A fiscal sponsorship is an empowering collaboration between MAPS and the operators of independent projects aligned with our mission. Our program is structured as a grantor-grantee relationship, meaning that donors are able to make tax-deductible contributions to MAPS in support of pre-approved charitable projects, and MAPS then re-grants these funds to the sponsored project operators. This model can be thought of as a partnership for progress, catalyzing innovative community initiatives and expanding MAPS' overall impact.



“The MAPS Fiscal Sponsorship Program has hosted and incubated dozens of projects across the psychedelic field over more than a decade. It is an honor to act as a launchpad for educational, advocacy, and community-building projects that bring novel and nuanced issues to the forefront, and ensure that the emerging ecosystem is as diverse and dynamic as we all know it can be. We love hosting cutting-edge projects and look forward to continuing this service to the community.”

Ismail L. Ali, J.D.
Director, Policy & Advocacy

70+	\$8M+	30+
Sponsored Projects	Funds Raised	Locations Supported

Grantmaking

Grants are a driving force in the psychedelic ecosystem, fostering significant impact across research, policy and advocacy, and education. MAPS is proud to support researchers and leaders worldwide who are championing new innovations and research. In addition to MAPS’ in-house programming and research, MAPS has provided millions of dollars in grants to fulfill our multidisciplinary mission and expand our impact.

Research Grantmaking

We have sought to support academic, independent, early-career, and international investigators who conduct innovative pre-clinical and clinical research projects that expand the body of research and knowledge of psychedelic-assisted therapies.

In the past year, MAPS has administered and awarded \$826,000 in clinical research grants for projects that aim to provide valuable insights into the efficacy of alternative types of therapy combined with MDMA, evaluate MDMA-assisted therapy in new patient populations, and evaluate a treatment for understudied conditions of mental health. The studies these grants are supporting include:

- Ayahuasca-assisted therapy for prolonged grief disorder, with Fundación Beckley Med in Spain;
- MDMA-assisted cognitive-behavioral conjoint therapy for the treatment of PTSD, with Remedy Institute in Canada;
- MDMA-assisted massed exposure therapy for the treatment of PTSD, with Emory University in Atlanta, GA;
- Safety and efficacy of MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD in military veterans and first responders, with Monash University in Australia; and
- MDMA-assisted therapy for the treatment of PTSD in resettled refugees, with Oasis in Denmark

Ecosystem Grantmaking

In the past year, MAPS has administered and awarded close to \$2m in grants to psychedelic ecosystem allies who further MAPS’ mission, delivering high-quality education programs and more that contribute to a thriving psychedelic ecosystem. Grantees include:

- Healing Balkans (A fiscally sponsored project of Atelier for Community Transformation) - Therapist Education Event in Sarajevo, Bosnia
- MAPS Israel - Operations and Program Support
- Zendo Project - Operations and Program Support
- Chacruna Institute - Education Program Support
- North Star Project (A fiscally sponsored project of Inquiring Systems, Inc.) - Education Program Support

Music-Centered Psychedelic Integration

An Introduction

Matt Baldwin, LMFT • Dr. Mark Shortt



This article is a published excerpt from the authors' forthcoming book, ***Music-Centered Psychedelic Integration***

The idea for *Music-Centered Psychedelic Integration* (MCPI) came about through the slow accumulation of insights and practical ideas based on our clinical training and practice from 2017 up to the present. We found that in our psychedelic psychotherapy training, music was at times emphasized as a supremely important aspect of this modality, while at others, it was also referenced as somehow secondary; a kind of adjunct to the power of the psychedelic medicine itself. This notion of music being secondary ran counter to an instinct that we both held from the very beginning of our acquaintance with the process of psychedelic therapy. Conversely, we had always suspected that music was just as important to the process of psychedelic healing as the medicine itself: that the music and medicine amplify one another, leading to a synergistic potential for personal transformation beyond which either could achieve alone.

Our work providing ketamine assisted psychotherapy has confirmed this. This came via the recognition of the importance of effective music selection and song sequencing for psychedelic experiences. We found that if we did this well for our patients, they reported deeper experiences and better outcomes for symptom reduction after their psychedelic sessions. Of course, psychedelic medicine offers so much more than symptom management but these effects were dramatic and measurable evidence of the power of correctly facilitated musical psychedelic experiences.

This led to having our patients begin to re-listen to certain tracks from a playlist that had been used in one of their prior psychedelic sessions. We were familiar with discussions within the psychedelic psychotherapy community about how it can be useful to listen back to certain songs that had been used in previous active drug sessions. We found that doing this with consistency—a process that we dubbed *Integrative Relistening*—was an incredibly powerful and immediate way to reconnect the journeyer’s awareness back to the deeper insights and meaning of the psychedelic experience. This aligned with our own history of personal experiences, in which we noticed the distinct tendency for a song to become imbued with an uncanny power or emotive significance when it had been encountered in a deep psychedelic state. All subsequent experiences of that song seemed to immediately provide a vivid evocation of the moments of expanded consciousness associated with that song.

This mirrors our understanding of the notion of psychedelic integration, which is the ability to stay connected to the state-specific shifts in consciousness in the weeks and months after the active psychedelic session. We found that repeated listening achieved this outcome with remarkable impact. Additionally, we began to explore the possibilities of deep listening sessions conducted before the active psychedelic session—what we call *Preparatory Prelistening*—and found that these pre-drug sessions have the power to help familiarize the journeyer with the experiential process of a musically facilitated inner journey while, at the same time, helping to provide a kind of check-in or perspective on what is occurring at deeper levels of the journeyer’s psyche. What arises in these sessions often acts as a helpful form of preparation for approaching psychedelic sessions and can help clarify the process of formulating intentions for growth and healing.

From there we began to formalize the MCPI protocol into a series of steps—what we call the *Integrative Listening Protocols*—that are meant to support and deepen all phases of psychedelic treatment. These protocols,

described in detail in subsequent chapters, are based on our work with ketamine, to which MCPI is particularly well suited, due to the manageable duration of ketamine sessions. We also provide effective protocols for the use of MCPI with other longer acting psychedelic medicines, group and individual therapy models and how to run remote telehealth MCPI sessions, with considerations for safety and construction of strong therapeutic containers.

Essentially, our process is one of deeper engagement with music by going back to it again and again. We have become fond of saying: *When in doubt, return to the music.*

The listening sessions that occur before and after the active psychedelic experience are not considered as merely pleasant or interesting things to do. In MCPI these activities are viewed as foundational practices.

Perhaps certain people—the more musically preoccupied among us—will be better suited to treatment with MCPI, or at least they may be the ones who are most enthusiastic about initially exploring it. In our experience, all those who work with the MCPI protocol have been able to use it as a system that provides an uncommonly strong framework for psychedelic integration. We have consistently found that when music is thoughtfully combined with the correct psychedelic medicine, it is able to turn just about anybody into what is known as a *deep listener*,

that rare kind of person who has powerful visionary and transformative emotional experiences simply from listening closely to a piece of music.

While the listening protocols stand on their own as a systematic and comprehensive clinical approach, they are also supported by a set of values that arise from our backgrounds as musicians and obsessive music explorers—to the extent that our shared musical histories, at times, seem to us to be the most important part of our training. To this end, we try to ensure that our perspective contains reasonable guidelines for working with audio technology and maintaining sound quality as important setting factors for psychedelic practice. Additionally, we honor and support the existence of musical cultures that give rise to

We have consistently found that when music is thoughtfully combined with the correct psychedelic medicine, it is able to turn just about anybody into what is known as a *deep listener*, that rare kind of person who has powerful visionary and transformative emotional experiences simply from listening closely to a piece of music.

the musics used in psychedelic sessions, thinking of this as the ground from which our practice emerges. In general we are interested in the potential of what happens when music cultural events bring people together in vivo to share profound experiences with one another. This is something that we, as a society whose social experiences are increasingly digitally mediated, cannot afford to lose touch with.

Finally, we are interested in the cultivation of personal musical knowledge and taste as vitally important aspects of psychedelic practice, our ideal of which involves something similar to the cultures of musical sharing that have existed

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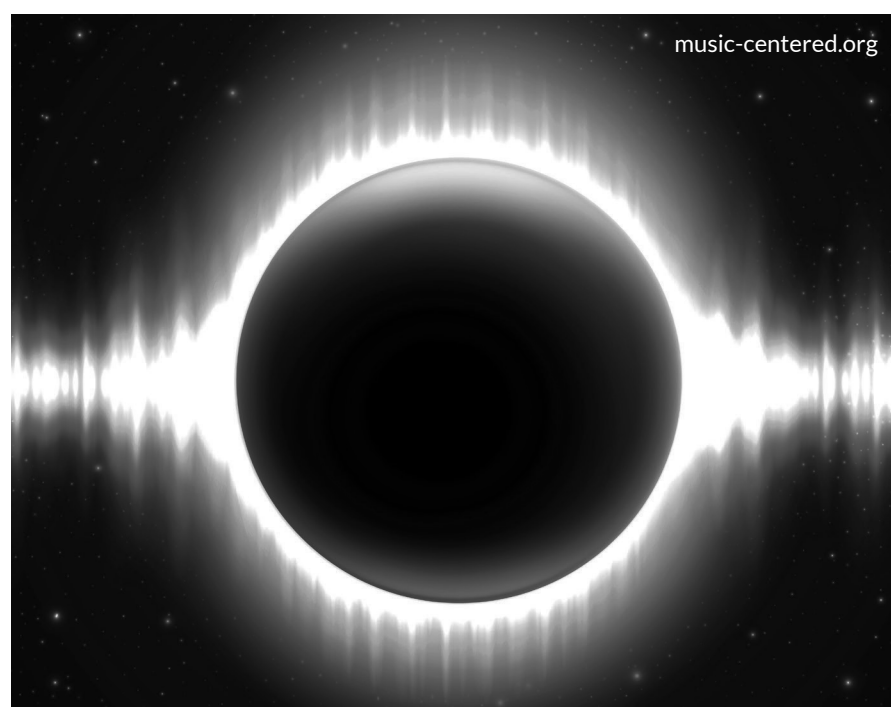
Dr. Mark Shortt is a musician and integrative physician who has been in the psychedelic medicine space since 2010 and practicing clinically with ketamine since 2018. He is a 2019 graduate of the Certificate in Psychedelic Assisted Psychotherapy and Research program at The California Institute of Integral Studies and has received additional training from The Ketamine Training Center and The Integrative Psychiatry Institute. Along with Matt Baldwin, LMFT, he is the creator of *Music-Centered Psychedelic Integration*.

amongst underground practitioners during the many decades of prohibition. Psychedelic clinical practice has become specialized to the extent that, at this point, there are certain clients who seek us out not just because of our approach to listening but, just as importantly, for our musical taste and the experiences that we can facilitate thereby. A proliferation of taste options in the psychedelic world will better serve the needs of the various peoples seeking treatment and will probably end up confirming a suspicion that we have long held: specifically that there is no single music that is most appropriate for psychedelic work. As with all things psychedelic, the deeply structured message seems to have to do with infinite diversity.

The ideas presented here represent our endeavor to create something closer to a total approach to music within the context of psychedelic psychotherapy. It is our hope that this approach to methodology leads to many strong clinical out-

comes as a result of its being more broadly used to facilitate deep musical psychedelic experiences. It will also almost certainly lead everyone involved—both clients and facilitators—down the starry pathway to becoming the kind of people who spend more of their life within a transformative flow of music.

Fundamentally, our approach is based on a simple idea: listen to more music throughout the entire process of psychedelic assisted psychotherapy. But simple ideas, in their rigorous application, can reveal their potential for great depth. We have found this to be the case with MCPI and believe that it is an extraordinarily powerful way to integrate psychedelic experiences. Ultimately, we think of our work as a kind of correction, a re-centering and reconnection with a flow of deeply healing musical psychedelic experience that has been waiting for us all along. We simply needed to recognize what had been in front of us the entire time.





Psychedelics and Music

Listening for Liberation

Stephen Lett

I first encountered psychedelic therapy in 2014 while I was developing a dissertation project in the field of music theory. I wanted to explore theories of music based on musical experiences that fell outside of the representationally oriented and recognition-based kinds of listening often assumed in that field. Music therapy seemed like a promising starting point, so I asked a music therapist if there was a form of therapy where folks just listened to music. She said to check out the work of Helen Bonny and her therapeutic method called Guided Imagery and Music (GIM). When I did, I learned that GIM grew out of Bonny's work in clinical psychedelic therapy in the late 60s and early 70s. Listening to music while tripping seemed like a perfect counterpoint to the staid music-theoretical image of listening, so my project came to center both GIM and psychedelic therapy. In 2019 I defended the resulting project called "The Psychedelic Listener."

Since then my thinking and everyday life have significantly changed. Indeed, I'm no longer working in the academy, so my plans to publish work from the dissertation have ground to a halt. But upon being approached to contribute to this bulletin, I thought it would be a nice opportunity to catch up with some recent work in psychedelic therapy and reflect on my previous research in light of my current thinking.

One of the allures of studying psychedelics for me was their association with the counterculture and revolutionary potential of the 60s. Indeed, I actually chose to study music, in part, because I loved anti-capitalist punk and post-rock. In my mind, being a musician and a leftist went hand-in-hand, and I kind of assumed this was the case for most people. Much too slowly, I realized that this was not the case and that university music departments, like universities

themselves, do not exist to foster radical thought and praxis. So already somewhat jaded about the academy, I resonated with the restlessness I sensed in the writing of the first wave of psychedelic studies in the Global North. They seemed to be struggling against their enclosure in modern, secular (if not yet in their analysis also colonial, capitalist, patriarchal, and white) institutions that I too felt. Through their research, they seemed to stumble upon a line of flight from their enclosure in modern life through what they came to call psychedelics. And central to this line of flight was a simple recognition: that the world in which we collectively dwell—as well as how we orchestrate our relations and ritualize our lives—deeply matters. This revelation soon came to be reflected back into their clinical practice as they quickly recognized that these substances demanded that practitioners attend not only to dose but also to “set and setting.” And this is where my topic of study entered the story.

As psychedelic therapy manuals past and present state, music is incredibly useful for facilitating and guiding the psychedelic experience. Indeed, by 1960 music therapists had started working with research teams to study music’s role and develop practices with music in psychedelic therapy (Lett, 2020). The most influential researcher on the topic was Helen Bonny, who was hired at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center (MPRC) in 1968. Writing of already common practices with music, Bonny and her colleague Walter Pahnke recommended preparing for listening by “limiting external vision through the use of eyeshades” and reducing “kinesthetic stimuli ... by providing a relaxed posture on a couch” (1972, p. 66). In this way, “The subject can then focus on auditory stimuli through the use of stereophonic earphones which bring musical sound into internal experiencing in a powerful and persuasive manner” (1972, p. 66). As seen in the photos, these practices are still widespread today.

While eyeshades, headphones, and repose on a couch attenuated “external” stimuli, Bonny’s recommendations for music during the session also reflect practices to strategically disconnect the listener from worldly concerns. In an unpublished manuscript written during her time at MPRC, she recommended avoiding music familiar to the participant except at the very beginning and end of the session. Additionally, for music with obvious associations that might prove unhelpful (such as “religious music”), she recommended waiting until the



Still from “LSD: The Spring Grove Experiment” (Mack, 1966).



Reenactment of MDMA-assisted therapy session in 2018.

Time (hrs)	Phase	Type		
		P.E. occurs	no P.E.	
0	pre-onset	S + F		
1	onset	S		
2	building toward peak intensity	D⇌S		
3				
4	peak intensity	P	P/D⇌S	
5	re-entry	S	re(P/D) + S	
6				
7	return to normal consciousness	S + F		
...				
12				

Key:

P.E. = psychedelic peak experience	F = familiar music (patient's choice)
S = soothing, supportive music	⇌ = alternating
D = driving, discordant music	re(P/D) = replaying particular P or D
P = peak music	pieces that had significant effect earlier

Timeline of LSD session and corresponding music selections (Lett 2019, p. 141). This diagram is based on Helen Bonny’s unpublished “Notes and guidelines for the use of music in psychotherapy sessions” (n.d.). See Lett (2019, pp. 139–147) for further discussion of this document.

participant is deep enough in the experience that the “name or type of music will not matter” (n.d., p. 4). By minimizing both personal and worldly associations the music might have, she sought to better harness music’s emotional power: “What we would like to do is to get the emotional effect of this music without [the participant] being burdened by intellectualizations and intellectual reactions” (n.d., p. 4). So instead of choosing music to play according to genre or style (though she was deeply invested in the value of Western orchestral music), the guidelines she developed for selecting music over the course of a session approached music according to its emotional content. She found three types useful in particular: soothing, supportive music; driving, discordant music; and powerful, peak music. The diagram below outlines her recommendations from that unpublished document. Importantly, and in contrast to set playlists often used in contemporary practice, researchers at that time regularly chose music on the fly in response to how the participant reacted. Indeed, there are two experiential tracks in the diagram below, one in which a peak experience occurs and one in which it does not.

Recently, I have been thinking about a contradiction at the heart of clinical psychedelic therapy. As Tehseen Noorani (2021) argues, for all the psychedelic rhetoric around opening and connecting, practices in clinical psychedelic therapy often involve, as we saw with music, disconnection and containment. Indeed, while the need to attend to set and setting arose from the psychedelic insight that everything is deeply connected, once incorporated into modern psychiatric practice, attention to “setting” quickly involved developing practices to control the therapeutic space so that the powerful psychedelic experience could be contained and harnessed towards individual healing. Rather than leading to a radical rethinking of clinical psychiatric practice, that is, “setting” turned into another exper-

imental variable to control, tweak, and tailor to best foster individual outcomes.

Pushing against such practices at the foundation of clinical psychedelic therapy, Indigenous stewards of plant medicines continue to remind us of collective, land-centered, and socio-politically attuned practices otherwise. Tyson Yunkaporta insists, for instance, “You must have plant medicines that you’re in relationship with, within totemic and biological kinship. You do that for a purpose and you go over to another place while you’re still strongly tethered in this world” (2023). And as Assis et al. (2023) write, “Indigenous contexts offer awareness beyond the psychotherapeutic, where

illness and healing are social processes oriented within a collective experience. We also cannot ignore geopolitical, neocolonial, and industrial dimensions; wars for resource extraction, exploitation of the working poor, patriarchy, and social inequality and alienation all inform the setting in which psychedelic science operates.” Whereas clinical psychedelic therapy is premised on creating an artificial clinical setting to harness a dose’s effects, Indigenous practices with plant medicines are collective and premised on deep relationships with the land and with the plant medicines themselves as teachers.

In listening to how we might stand in solidarity with Indigenous peoples and plant medicines (Assis et al. 2023), I hear not simply a call to reform clinical psychedelic therapy, but to political action alongside movements for the return of land to

Indigenous stewardship (Land Back!) and the building of infrastructures premised on caring for rather than caging people (Care Not Cops!). Indeed, in hearing these voices I have come to recognize how the concept of the “psychedelic” and practices developed around psychedelic therapy ended up in many ways reinscribing the structures researchers in the first wave of psychedelics sought to break out of. So here I am, once again, resonating as I

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read practitioners of clinical psychedelic therapy grapple with such realizations that unsettle the still-pervasive “white-dominant medical framework” (George et al. 2020).

Since finishing up my dissertation and struggling for a few years on the academic job market, I have all but given up on winning an academic gig. It’s been a good change so far. Indeed, my commitments had already been shifting away from the academy and towards various forms of abolitionist and decolonial struggle. So now I spend most of my time building an abolitionist mutual aid organization with unhoused folks in Norman, Oklahoma. “Mutual aid,” as Dean Spade writes, “is the radical act of caring for each other while working to change the world” (2020). Rather than strategically disconnecting from the world for therapeutic purposes, mutual aid operates in the messy reality of our shared horrifying capitalist, colonial, white supremacist setting to build a caring world otherwise. Though it might seem disconnected from my previous research efforts, I understand this work as doing the best I can to respond to the calls of Indigenous stewards of plant medicines. And following my music-theoretical interest in forms of listening, I hope that we do not listen to their calls in a way that simply recognizes what they say. Rather, I hope we listen together in such a way that lets their words transform us and our worlds. In particular, through such close and deep listening, I hope we might take action together in solidarity with movements for abolition and decolonization.

Stephen Lett is a writer and organizer based in Norman, Oklahoma. He is a founding member of Norman Care-A-Vans, which is building a community of support and care with unhoused folks in Norman, one ride at a time. He co-edits *The Dispatch*, a journal of community expression for unhoused friends and housed allies of Norman Care-A-Vans. Previously he has published on music and psychedelics in *Chacruna Chronicles* and *Social History of Medicine*. His abolitionist intervention in the field of music theory, “Making a Home of the Society for Music Theory, Inc.” was published and became the basis of a colloquy in *Music Theory Spectrum*. In his free time, he assembles harm reduction kits with SHRED the Stigma in Oklahoma City and plans for abolitionist futures with his two cats, Minerva and Phoebe.

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A Psychedelic Researcher's Approach to Creating a Psilocybin Session Playlist

Kelan Thomas, PharmD, MS



Psychedelic music session playlists have been utilized consistently for modern psychedelic-assisted therapy clinical trials, and more recently researchers at Johns Hopkins University and Imperial College of London have specifically studied the effect of these music playlists on participants in trials. In the previous era of psychedelic-assisted therapy trials, researchers Gaston and Eagle (1970) also conducted research on response to music in LSD-assisted therapy under various experimental conditions (including no music). I have collected and listened to playlists from the more recent psilocybin-assisted therapy trials, to summarize the similarities and differences among them, especially in the context of their temporal relationship to the psilocybin session's subjective experience.

The minimum duration of a psilocybin playlist is roughly 6 hours, which coincides with the time that subjective effects for psilocybin typically wear off as reported by a return to baseline on drug effect rating scales. Musical playlists have been reported in the LSD therapy literature, with Eisner and Cohen (1958) using participant selections or semi-classical music in the early phase and more piano concertos during the peak phase. Later publications with LSD and psilocybin have parsed the playlist selections into more discrete phases (Kaelen, 2017). Bonny and Pahnke (1972) were the first to suggest the following six overlapping temporal phases of the LSD therapy experience:

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Pre-onset | 0 – 1.5 hours |
| 2 | Onset | 0.5 – 1.5 hours |
| 3 | Building toward peak intensity | 1.5 – 3.5 hours |
| 4 | Peak intensity of drug action | 3 – 4.5 hours |
| 5 | Re-entry | 4.5 – 7 hours |
| 6 | Return to normal consciousness | 7 – 12 hours |

Other researchers have created additional playlist phase frameworks compressing these temporal phases and subdividing a couple of phases to fit within the 6-hour psilocybin session, but the most consistent temporal phase is around the 2-hour peak, which coincides with the timing of maximum drug concentration and intensity of subjective effects. Kaelen et al (2017) found that participants appreciated “calming music” during the Onset, Ascent, and Return phases, but more “sentimental” or “cinematic” emotive music for the late Ascent and Peak phases. There appear to be distinct differences in the style of musical selections for the most consistent temporal blocks encompassing all of the various phase designations, so this is the more simplified four-phase framework that I have used when developing a psilocybin playlist:

1	Onset	0 – 1 hour
2	Ascent	1 – 2 hours
3	Peak	2 – 4 hours
4	Return	4 – 6 hours

Onset (0 – 1 hour)

In the first hour after psilocybin ingestion, it is important to provide a sense of calm since people may often experience some anticipatory anxiety regarding the session. During the first hour of all the playlists, there seems to be a greater emphasis on very calming music, with slower tempos and gentler instrumentation, such as classical guitar quartets or small chamber orchestral works often by composers like Bach or Vivaldi. Bonny and Pahnke (1972) suggested that during the LSD pre-onset music should be “pleasant and neutral, of a nonspecific quieting type.” In the early part of this phase I particularly like to use music with simple instrumentation from the first wave of ambient musicians like Brian Eno and Harold Budd, along with more contemporary classical composers like Mary Lattimore and Sarah Davachi. In the second wave of the phase, when people may start to have somatic sensations, I use music with drones or overtones that can make one feel like time perception is slipping away from them with artists like Windy & Carl and Ashley Bellouin.

Ascent (1 – 2 hours)

In the second hour, the participant is likely to start having visual effects and physical sensations more dramatically starting to shift. The playlists have been most divergent with musical selections during this second hour. One

group of playlists used more minor and brooding classical symphonies with vocals (ex. Gorecki’s “Symphony No. 3”), while others have opted for more Eastern-influenced music with syncopated driving rhythms and more complex melodic structures (ex. Dead Can Dance’s “Cantara”). During this phase, there seems to be more emphasis on musical movement with more drastic tempo changes, which may resonate more with the participant’s internal experienced state. Bonny and Pahnke (1972) suggest that alternating instrumental and vocal music is useful to help provide “underlying support and structure,” and “encourage feelings of closeness and humanness,” respectively. They also recommend vocal music with “insistent rhythms, long flowing phrases, and dynamic crescendos,” such as Bach’s “St. Matthew Passion” or Brahms’s “German Requiem,” intermittently relieved by instrumental music of “a reassuring and supportive nature,” such as Elgar’s “Enigma Variation” or Mozart’s “Laudate Dominum.” Visual effects often appear during this phase and Gaston and Eagle (1970) reported that higher pitches or musical registers promoted visuals with brighter colors and smaller geometric designs. In this phase, I use a mixture of minimalism from composers like Steve Reich or Laraaji, along with instrumental post-rock from ensembles like Tortoise or Do Make Say Think that propel people through their unfolding cinematic visual imagery.

Peak (2 – 4 hours)

During the peak phase, most playlists have used even more effusive and angelic vocal symphonic works (ex. Pärt’s “Da Pacem Domine”). These pieces are suggested to resonate with intense emotions of a unitive mystical experience. Some playlists have instead opted for more calming music like the Onset section of these playlists (ex. Stars of the Lid’s “Articulate Silences Pt. 1 and 2”). Moving into the third hour, several playlists use more simple solo instrumentation minimalism, such as piano (ex. Philip Glass’s “Metamorphosis”) or stringed instruments, with more music coming from film scores. Bonny and Pahnke (1972) suggest selections that “evoke powerful emotions” and warn against “extremely discordant” music that may frighten participants and induce confusion or panic. They recommend “strongly structured music with insistent rhythms and a wide frequency range” such as Strauss’s “Death and Transfiguration,” and Barber’s “Adagio for Strings.” They also suggest the music for later sections of this phase should be determined by whether participants

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have achieved peak mystical experience or not. If they have peaked, then music “should reflect the quiet, peaceful feelings” during this plateau of stabilized emotion. However, if participants have not peaked then they suggest “replaying of music which accompanied abreaction in the earlier hours” to encourage better integration and working through insights for a more complete release. In this peak phase, I use an ebb and flow between ebullient and mournful structured sound waves to promote people’s tension and release with alternating songs between contemporary classical artists like Ólafur Arnalds and Caterina Barbieri or electroacoustic ambient artists like Julianna Barwick and Robin Guthrie.

Return (4 – 6 hours)

The final phase often has shorter songs and more diverse world music from global subcultures. The songs more often have foreign language vocals with a homecoming quality that could be performed solo around a campfire. During the final hour, several of the playlists also start using popular music with more folk-based instrumentation and English lyrics, which were routinely avoided in earlier sections, so participants don’t engage their rational minds and get pulled out of their unfolding psychedelic process. Bonny and Pahnke (1972) would often allow people to listen to their own chosen music and family members were allowed to visit during the end of this phase. This is also the phase where I use the most diverse range of musical styles across history, such as 1960-70s era Argentine folk by Mercedes Sosa or Ethiopian jazz from Mulatu Astatke. In the modern era, I used music like cosmic Americana by Chuck Johnson or ambient jazz by Primitive Motion, and then to complete the candy-colored technicolor psychedelic experience I like to sprinkle in a few languid Italian film score tracks from composers like Piero Piccione or Piero Umliani. This phase of music is intended to be grounding and a relaxing sonic balm to alleviate the mental exhaustion from completing a 6-hour psilocybin session.

I grew up listening to music as much as possible and would often select music that resonated with my current mood state to express those emotions more fully. In college, I became a radio DJ and completed some musicology coursework, while also attending many live music events. This is also when I first started playing music selections for my friends to engage in deep listening as breaks from studying. When I decided to focus my psychiatric pharmacy scholarship on psychedelic medicine, it seemed like a natural extension of these interests to develop session playlists. In clinical trials creating a standardized playlist is necessary, but in the future, I hope facilitators will also consider a more individualized approach to psychedelic playlists based on each person’s musical history. For some examples of my playlists in various media formats, please visit the bottom of this webpage: <https://linktr.ee/kelanthomas>.

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Too Much Light

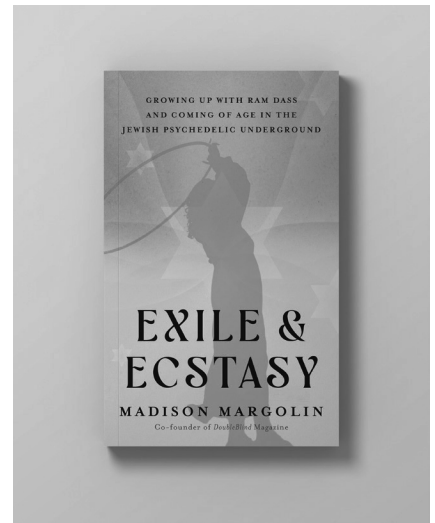
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Exile & Ecstasy

Growing Up with Ram Dass and Coming of Age in the Jewish Psychedelic Underground

Madison Margolin

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My early experiences at the Hasidic psytrance festivals upstate got me into the musical genre that's beloved by some, hated by many—heard as noise to those who can't get into it. The psytrance scene has something of a gnome-like and elfin flair, and is a bit nerdier than the techno or house scenes popular in the electronic music world. Psytrance can be rapacious and complex, an invitation to dance off angst, and crash into joy. It's a bit like punk rock, a bit like jam band psychedelic rock; more hippie than hardcore.

It felt like psytrance in particular had dark undertones beneath the glowing, neon patterns of projector lights that often accompanied the DJ sets; and those with a lot of trauma—OTD Hasidim and Israeli veterans—seemed to feed off it the most.

There was something about getting swept up by its sinuous psychedelic beats that, at least in my experience, arrested the monkey mind and let the body shake out the rest. If trauma really does live in the body, then it makes sense that music that inspires dancers to bop up and down in some sort of ecstatic stupor might be unconsciously attractive to those needing that kind of release.

Still, there was a fine line and menacing allure to the whole thing: all at once you could get high from the music, the drugs, or both, and access a sort of lightness of being, a light in general that could massage out the weight of life upon your shoulders—and yet, like a massage with too much pressure, it could also crack your vessel, so to speak, and like a bulb that's burst, it could crack you out.

Observing the interplay of light and dark is really what got me interested in psytrance. And having noticed the obsession with artists like Goa Gil, I



Madison, her mother, and Ram Dass



Madison, her father, and Timothy Leary



wanted to go straight to the source. My curiosity led me to the beachy hippie town of Arambol, on the northside of Goa, India—the psytrance capital of the world—where I met an Israeli traveler named Tomer. He was one of those tripped-out guys who talks exclusively about lofty spiritual topics, as if he’s peaking on acid at all times.

But, he told me, he’d seen “too much light” and hadn’t tripped in a decade. So what could explain his demeanor—was he still “there” in that trippy zone, integrating it all?

This concept of “too much light” in religious terms, or “spiritual emergence/emergency” in psychological terms, is something both seasoned mystics and psychedelic therapists have cautioned about.

Psychiatrist Stanislav Grof and his wife, Christina Grof, first coined the term “spiritual emergence” in the late 1980s to describe “the movement of an individual to a more expanded way of being that involves enhanced emotional and psychosomatic health, greater freedom of personal choices, and a sense of deeper connection with other people, nature, and the cosmos.” However, when this emergence becomes chaotic, confusing, overwhelming, or detached from reality, it becomes known as a “spiritual emergency” to describe this state

of crisis. For those suffering from a spiritual emergency, their day-to-day functioning may be impaired or they may experience psychosis. “Occasionally, the amount of unconscious material that emerges from deep levels of the psyche can be so enormous that the person involved can have difficulty functioning in everyday reality,” the Grofs write in *The Stormy Search for the Self*. Spiritual emergency could involve “one’s entire being” cycling through non-ordinary states of consciousness, intense emotions, visions, sensory shifts, and unusual thoughts, which may revolve around spiritual themes like death and rebirth, oneness with the universe, and encounters with mythological beings.

Stan Grof also coined the term “holotropic” (which literally means “moving toward wholeness”) to describe a state in which the ego dissolves and leaves room for the meta cognitive “inner healer” to shine through and do its work. “...many of the conditions, which are currently diagnosed as psychotic and indiscriminately treated by suppressive medication, are actually difficult states of a radical personality transformation and of spiritual opening,” he writes. “If they are correctly understood and supported, these psycho-spiritual crises can result in

emotional and psychosomatic healing, remarkable psychological transformation, and consciousness evolution.”

Breathwork, meditation, fasting, sleep deprivation, self-flagellation, ecstatic dance, chanting, and psychedelics are all ways to enter into so-called holotropic states, which I’d say might fall under the umbrella of “psychedelic experience.” In fact, you don’t need a psychedelic substance in order to occasion a psychedelic experience, or to get into a holotropic state; but at the same time, these states (occasioned by a substance or not) can heal on physical, as well as psychological and spiritual levels.

What are we actually talking about when we say “psychedelic” anyway? The term was originally coined by English psychiatrist Humphry Osmond in 1956 in a letter to Aldous Huxley to mean, etymologically speaking, “mind manifesting” or “soul made visible.” Albert Hofmann, the Swiss chemist who first synthesized LSD, called it “medicine for the soul.” And so, in my definition, a “psychedelic” experience brings out our true essence, connecting us back to our core nature—the soul or spirit—while enabling us to really feel what it’s like to be in the body. When there’s less ego, our neshama—that individual piece of collective divinity inside each of us—is more prominent. It’s the experience of the soul, embodied.

“Ego death” plays a central role, referring to a temporary shift in cognition, from a self-centered to completely unbiased perspective. Scientifically speaking, it’s defined by established brain networks losing localized integrity and increasing global functional connectivity with the rest of the brain. By the brain being in this state of entropy, previously established neuronal connections can rewire in the brain and establish new pathways that can redefine a person’s sense of self. This is in part why some people, for instance, have been able to transcend their fixed patterns of thought in efforts to treat depression, anxiety, eating disorders, or addictions through psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy clinical trials with substances like psilocybin. If the ego is about boundaries between self and the outer world, ego death enables one to feel a sense of oneness or unity with other people, nature, or the cosmos. It’s less about “you” and more about the collective. A feeling of safety, of being “held by the universe,” as author and psychiatrist Julie Holland once put it to me, enables the nervous system to relax and allows healing to occur. The point being, “ego death” can

be central to that feeling of oneness associated with the “mystical experience.”

In religious terms, “ego death” might be called *bitul*, or self-nullification. It’s a spiritual state associated with *chochmah*, or inner wisdom, and the experience of ayin, nothingness, in relation to G-d’s infinite light and ultimate, singular unity. It’s a form of spontaneous, ecstatic experience—a communion with HaShem. Scary as “ego death” may sound, *bitul* is a modality and meditation that conjoins with ultimate, deep-seated joy.

Too much light... could shatter one’s vessel, while sober, daily practices, like prayer, yoga, or meditation might trump the psychedelic shortcut to illumination. A steady discipline in the end offers more light than receiving it all in a heavy dose that could be too much to handle. This theme of the dangers of spiritual experience without proper preparation or “vessels” to contain the light pops up throughout Jewish literature, from the Torah to later mystical writings.

A classic case is the story of Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron, who were inspired to bring a fire offering to G-d, even though it was not the allotted time. For this spontaneous expression of inner devotion, they were zapped out of existence. From a psychedelic perspective, one might say that their “set” was right on; they yearned to connect with the Divine, but their “setting” was off—right place at the wrong time. Similarly, there is the story of the four Mishnaic sages who entered Pardes—through a method of spiritual elevation consisting of intense meditation on G-d’s name—one died, one went mad, one became a heretic, and only Rabbi Akiva left in peace. Each of these rabbis was a massive Torah genius in his own right, and yet, the direct experience of the Divine unhinged them, all except Rabbi Akiva. The basic message according to rabbinic tradition is that direct spiritual experience is serious, sometimes even dangerous, and should be approached with respect and proper preparation. In seeing the light of heaven, only one of the four was able to grasp its unity; those who continued to grapple with duality—who couldn’t integrate—had their minds blown open.

Grounding practices are thus a vessel can harness that light, and guide psychedelic experience. It’s like this quote by Ram Dass: “The game isn’t to get high; the game is to get free.”



Music and Body in the Brazilian Santo Daime Tradition

Beatriz Labate, Ph.D. • Henrique Antunes, Ph.D.



Santo Daime ceremony. The confession ritual sang a capela. Photo by Robson Teixeira de Souza



Music is a vital element in most groups and traditions that are centered around the ritual use of ayahuasca (Labate & Pacheco, 2010; Luna, 2011). When it comes to the Brazilian Santo Daime tradition, the central role of music is well-known. Several works have highlighted the role of music in this tradition. They have addressed important issues, such as the relationship between music and silence in rituals (Abramovitz, 2002), the connections between music, language, and translation in the Santo Daime diaspora (Labate et al., 2017), the role of music in shaping notions of self (Rehen, 2016) and in identity processes (Rabelo, 2013), among other subjects. However, we want to focus on an aspect that has not yet been fully explored by the literature: the importance of the relationship between music and body in Santo Daime. By this relationship, we mean the multiple ways that music contributes to instilling embodied dispositions and the importance of learning techniques that shape the body of a *daimista*.

The notion that Santo Daime is a musical doctrine is not a novelty; but what does that mean? The Santo Daime ceremony, which is called a *trabalho* (work, as in “to labor”), is conducted mainly through the performing of live music, or more specifically, hymns, to put it in daimista terms. One might wonder, however, what is the difference between “music” and “hymns”? It is well known by daimistas that Santo Daime hymns are not “composed,” but instead “received.” As Rehen (2007) points out, receiving a hymn is different from composing a piece of music. Although musical compositions may be influenced by intangible factors such as “inspiration” or even “intuition,” the composer is the subject of the authorship process. She can experiment, alter, and influence the music in all its dimensions, be it rhythmic, harmonic, melodic, and poetic, “creating” or “inventing” it. Hymns are instead received through a process often described as a sort of musical psychography, in which the “receiver” listens, memorizes, and later reproduces the melody and lyrics.

In the Santo Daime tradition, there are the official hymnals, such as *O Cruzeiro* from Santo Daime's founder, Mestre Raimundo Irineu Serra, that are sung in every Santo Daime church on certain Catholic feast and saints dates of the year, such as Three Kings' Day, St. John's, the Virgin of Immaculate Conception, and Christmas. However, every daimista can potentially receive hymns and develop their own hymnal collection.

In the beginning, it was Mestre himself who had the authority to define the authenticity of a hymn received by a particular member (Rabelo, 2012). Over time, he appointed a helper, D. Percília, who was allowed to correct, adapt, or cut hymns. However, the expansion of the different branches of Santo Daime throughout Brazil and internationally, coupled with the absence of an official form of validation, gave rise to an exponential increase in the number of hymns received by Brazilians and foreigners in the most diverse parts of the world. Since there is no precondition for receiving hymns, a person does not need to have a lot of experience and years of practice. No musical talent or prior musical ability is required.

So, if it is not composed, what defines the experience of receiving a hymn? Where does it come from? Who is the author of the lyrics and the composer of the music? Callicot (2013) associates the acquisition of shamanic *icaros*, a type of ayahuasca shamanic music found in Indigenous and mestizo communities of the western Amazon, as a form of interspecies communication. That is, music is seen as a form of conversation between plants and people. As a product of two-way communication between the shaman and psychedelic plants, the notion of interspecies communication introduces the possibility of the agency of non-human beings. Moreover, as in Santo Daime, this communication process necessarily involves the improvement of the apprentice's sensory capacities and learning abilities.

Beyond the similarities between the shaman who acquires an *icaro* and the daimista who receives a hymn, however, there is a major difference that should be noted. The Santo Daime works are marked by a collective musical performance by all the participants in the ritual. Therefore, there is no clear distinction between musicians and the audience, as almost everyone present participates in the musical performance (Abramovitz, 2002). During the rituals, the hymns are sung in unison and accompanied by acoustic guitars and other available

musical instruments, such as accordions, flutes, bass guitars, etc., sharing a musical experience while drinking daime. One cannot forget to mention one core musical element of Santo Daime's musicality: the *maracá*, a percussive instrument that is considered by some as part of the uniform, and that keeps the tempo of the work and dictates its musical rhythm.

Hence, the musical performance of hymns is essential for the execution of the work and, since it is done live by all the participants, there can be changes in keys and tempo depending on how the work is conducted, the number of people, and if they are predominately males, who usually prefer lower registers, or females, who often choose higher keys. Moreover, everyone present, not only church members, takes part in the musical performance, singing and sometimes dancing (Abramovitz, 2002).

The centrality of the musical component in Santo Daime rituals demands that every daimista learn how to play the *maraca*. Moreover, they must master the bodily skill to play it while dancing and singing in particular musical genres, such as waltz, march, and mazurka. They must train their bodies to sing in tune and to follow the rhythm of the music that is being played. And, if you are a non-Brazilian member of Santo Daime, you have to learn how to do that in a foreign language that is surely not easy to learn. As Flecha's (2023) work points out, the corporeal knowledge of the *bailado* (Santo Daime's dance work) is revealed through its kinesthetic simplicity. It involves several aesthetic stimulants that engage the senses, including taste, smell, visual effects, and sound. These stimulants, as Flecha states, emphasize the role of corporeality in Santo Daime. At this point, one can see that embodiment processes are an integral part of the Santo Daime experience, and the musical element plays a central role in shaping the daimista body.

In turn, if a daimista is out of rhythm or is singing out of tune, that has a direct effect on the musical performance and, consequently, on the dynamic of the work. That has nothing to do with believing or not in the Daime and following a certain moral code, but with how the body is molded in a specific setting, within a tradition whose ritual instills several body techniques and modes of perception. Santo Daime is an interesting case that showcases, in Hirschkind's (2006) terms, how bodily techniques and modes of perception underlie specific forms of historical experience. The focus of the aya-

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ahuasca experience shifts, thus, from a cognitivist approach to the perceptual capacities and how the sensory abilities are culturally shaped through disciplinary practices of self-cultivation.

On focusing on the embodied dispositions, we do not want to downplay the role of inner subjective experiences, nor to deny the importance of the symbolic and cognitive dimensions. However, the singular emphasis on interior experience when examining the religious use of psychedelics, such as in the ritual use of Daime, does not take into account the modes of perception and the embodied learning that sustain traditions and paths to communal transcendence. Given that embodied knowledge is a central element of collective life, the experience of drinking Santo Daime in a ritual setting cannot be reduced to the learning of forms of subjectivity that are shared by a cultural tradition. In sum, we want to put forward the idea that Santo Daime is not primarily a religion of consciousness, but a tradition of the body in its entirety.

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Harmonic Insights

Unveiling Psychedelic Mechanisms through Music

Rebecca Harding • Leor Roseman



Music, a universal language with a profound capacity to evoke a variety of emotions, allows us to connect with the very essence of what it means to be human. For millennia, humans have used music to bring us together, to dance, to feel pleasure, to feel pain, to heal. As eloquently articulated by the legend Stevie Wonder: “Music is a world within itself; With a language we all understand; With an equal opportunity; For all to sing, dance and clap their hands.” These timeless sentiments resonate just as deeply in the discos of the 1970s as they do in bygone eras and those yet to come.

Music extends its influence far beyond the dance floors and concert halls, permeating even the scientific laboratories. In our clinical research, we use music as an essential tool, a vital ally, to help guide participants through their psychedelic journeys. Our curated music playlists serve as a ‘hidden therapist’ and serve as a crucial aspect of the therapeutic setting (Kaelen et al., 2018). Reflecting on their experiences, one participant observed “Normally when I hear a piece of sad music, or happy music, I respond through choice, but under psilocybin I felt almost that I had no choice but to go with the music.” These words underscore the profound impact of music, which is amplified exponentially in psychedelic experiences as it helps us to tap into our deepest emotions.

The benefits of psychedelic therapy for mental health are undeniable. Clinical trials have revealed that their effectiveness expands across the spectrum of DSM-V classifications, from addiction to OCD. Although our grasp of how psychedelics alter the brain is yet nascent, we possess valuable insights into the neurobiology of these disorders. By leveraging our understanding of brain function and the alterations induced by psychedelics, we can decipher the intricate ways these substances modulate brain activity and the connectivity between different brain regions.

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To enhance our understanding of psychedelic therapy, we can consider the core cognitive systems impacted by the disorders it can treat. At the heart of these systems is emotional processing, which plays a fundamental role in how we interpret and respond to the world. It equips us to react to joy and sorrow, and to manage our emotional climate. Inextricably interlinked with emotional processing is the concept of reward processing, which governs how we perceive pleasure. These processes share common neural pathways in the brain. The significance of these processes in psychiatric disorders is clear, with disturbances in these areas often being a hallmark of such conditions.

We also use music in the scientific method as an instrument to access and activate our emotion and pleasure centres; providing us with a means to explore how psychedelics may change our outlook on the world and reshape our understanding of psychiatry. In cognitive neuroscience, music serves as a unique lens through which we can explore the underlying mechanisms of mental health disorders and how effective treatments work. It offers us a dynamic insight into our emotional and reward systems—how we feel and what brings us pleasure. By examining how we experience music, we can gain deeper insights into the complex interaction

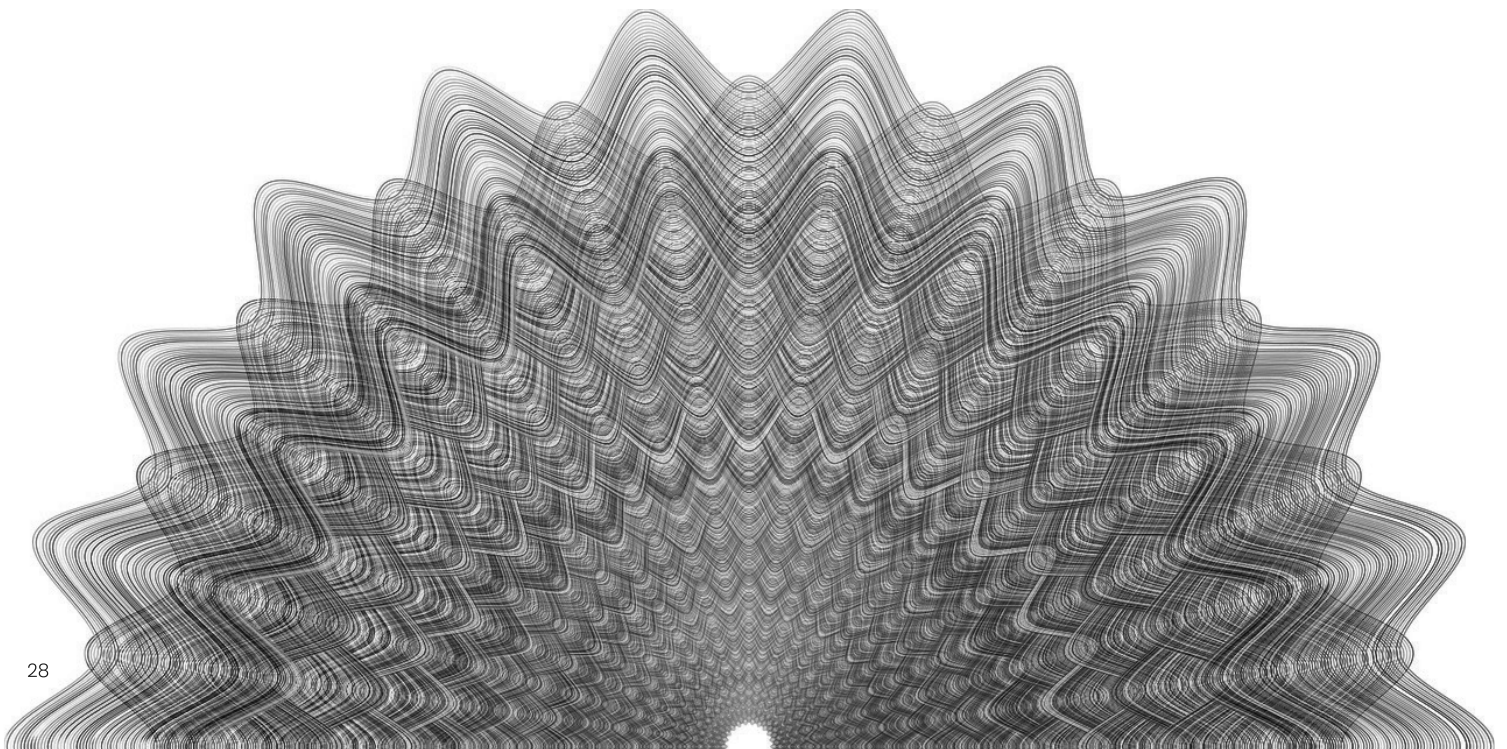
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between this universal harmonic language and the psychopharmacological symphony induced by psychedelics.

At Imperial College London, we have conducted some of the most pioneering psychedelic clinical trials to date. One of our latest studies on major depressive disorder involved brain scans of participants before and 3 weeks after treatment with escitalopram, the most commonly prescribed SSRI (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor) – a type of antidepressant, or psilocybin therapy (Carhart-Harris et al., 2021). During the scans, participants were asked to listen to the same contemplative, introspective piece of music, selected for its great emotional depth, to explore changes in emotional and neural responses to the music before and after treatment. By incorporating music into our scientific investigation, we can

examine the profound impact of psychedelic therapy and gain insights into the emotional minds of our patients.

Observing the brain through a psychological lens, we found stark differences between the two treatment conditions in the way music evoked emotion within patients. We measured the wide range of feelings elicited by music, which were broadly categorised into 9 emotions. Remarkably, after psilocybin therapy patients experienced trend increases in vitality during music listening, which



is linked with feelings of joy and power. On the other hand, antidepressants caused decreases in these specific emotions, a finding that was statistically significant. This aligns with our initial hypothesis that the two treatments alter emotional processing in markedly different ways, underscoring the unique impact of psychedelic therapy on the emotional wellbeing of patients.

SSRIs have been widely used in psychiatry since the late '80s and, like psychedelic therapy during the current renaissance, offered a disruptive addition to the psychopharmacological arsenal for addressing the mental health crisis. While SSRIs have saved countless lives globally, the reported side effects often present a barrier to effectively treating depression—not to mention their limited efficacy in only 40-60% of patients. One of the most commonly reported side effects is "emotional blunting," where patients report a limited range of emotions they can experience, dampening the lows but also diminishing the highs, leaving them in a state of apathetic limbo. Conversely, psilocybin therapy, as our results indicate, may widen the emotional spectrum of the patient and rebalance their inner world toward a healthier landscape.

Beyond the emotional experiences of patients, differences in brain activity were observed between the two treatments. We examined how the brain processes 'musical surprises' during the song, which are linked to feelings of reward and pleasure—the ubiquitous 'chills' experienced when listening to music. Those who had received psilocybin therapy showed decreases in the activity of the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, whereas there was no change in those who had received escitalopram. This area, one of the higher-order processing areas in the brain, is linked to the executive control of emotion and is part of the default mode network. This network is shown to be active when the mind is focussed on the internal world and has been shown to be pathologically increased in depression. Therefore, a reduction in this area may indicate that psilocybin therapy causes a decrease in top-down control in emotional processing, thereby expanding the bandwidth of emotions experienced. Coupled with the finding that psilocybin therapy increases activation in sensory processing areas, this may be interpreted as a shift from excessively internal processing and rumination to a more external, sensory-driven mode which is characteristic of recovery from depression.

Perhaps this might explain the results we have observed out of the lab, beyond the clinical findings, which

resonate with the human experience as a whole. As we know, music has the potential to cross linguistic and cultural barriers, but with the help of psychedelics, this capacity is heightened (Roseman et al., 2021). For instance, in our exploration of the relational dynamics of Israeli-Palestinian ayahuasca groups, participants reported experiencing a profound sense of recognition and connection with 'the Other' culture when listening to their music under the influence of ayahuasca. This connection induced feelings of awe in individuals, which is associated with the breaking down of mental barriers and the inclusion of what was previously excluded from mental structures. When these rigid frameworks dissolve, individuals are able to forge connections in surprising and rewarding ways. Therefore, perhaps this experience that we have captured during the surprising element of music harks to this component of human nature, and the feelings of connectedness through which we might be relieved of our unhealthy emotional processing.

Also, our results echo the findings of previous studies that have revealed persisting changes in music-evoked emotion, outlasting the effects of the drug and providing a testament to the powerful implications of psychedelic therapy in improving our emotional processing. Previous studies in our lab revealed decreased music-evoked 'sadness' and increased music-evoked 'peacefulness' one day following psilocybin therapy (Shukuroglou et al., 2023). Likewise, that study observed changes in brain activity from before to after psilocybin therapy, with reductions in the connectivity of the nucleus accumbens, a region crucial to reward processing, with areas in the default mode network. This indicates a reduction in the activity of regions with a more top-down influence on how we understand the world around us and instead allows us to be more present with the incoming sensory information from the world around us.

Indeed, as with all scientific research, our research was not without its limitations. The emotion and reward one experiences during music listening is incredibly idiosyncratic; a reminder of the complexity and subjectivity inherent in the emotional lives of humans. The feelings that may arise when listening to music may be affected by a miscellany of factors, such as musical taste, cultural background, and personality traits. What might resonate as a chorus of angels to one person could be perceived as a nightmarish cacophony by others. As Humphrey Os-

mond articulately put it, ‘To fathom hell or soar angelic...’ –check out our playlist.

Given that we only used one song for all participants, our ability to fully capture the nuances of music-evoked emotion and pleasure across the different treatments may be constrained. However, following rigorous scientific procedure, this afforded us control over the variables experienced by participants in the confines of the scanner. If only neuroimaging were cheaper and more convenient, and our capacity for inquiry boundless, our explorations into the mind would go deeper, and our playlists more extensive. Perhaps future research could explore more individualised playlists or a more diverse selection of musical genres to better accommodate for individual preferences and emotional responses. Nonetheless, despite these obstacles, we continue with gratitude to use music in our research, providing insights into the psychopharmacological and emotional changes spurred by these treatments and revealing where the harmony of healing resides.

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Echoes of the Past, Rhythms of the Future



The Dance of Music and Psychedelics

Alexandre Lehmann, Ph.D.

Music and mind-altering substances have danced in harmony for centuries, yet we still know surprisingly little about how they work together. Here we explore the intertwined paths of sound and psychedelics through history, culture, and science. Our focus narrows on MDMA, from its hopeful beginnings as the therapeutic 'Adam' to its tumultuous fame as "Ecstasy." Moving forward, we explore the latest research to understand the combined effects of music and psychedelics, and we peer into a hopeful future where this duo could offer benefits beyond mental health.

From Tribal Beats to Psychedelic Science

The union of music and psychoactive substances spans cultures and time. Music has served as a guide within altered states of consciousness in ancient rituals, from Amazonian Icaro songs to Mazatec chants to the Native American Church's water drum and the Bwiti rhythms of Gabon. In Europe, Celtic rituals integrated music with potions at sacred sites like Stonehenge (later found to have unique acoustic properties), while the Greek Eleusinian Mysteries skillfully combined entrancing music and visual effects with the Kykeon brew, believed to have contained ergot fungi. While ancient traditions laid the groundwork for the intricate dance between sound and psychedelic states, the scientific discoveries of the 20th century brought this relationship into a renewed light.



From Sandoz to Woodstock

On April 19th, 1943, Albert Hofmann took a bicycle 'trip' that propelled LSD onto the medical stage. Music was recognized early on as a critical element of "set and setting" (the non-drug factors influencing the experience). Helen Bonny and Walter Pahnke (1972) observed that music helps individuals let go, facilitating emotional release and peak experiences. Additionally, music provided a sense of continuity, offering direction and structure through the psychedelic session. Their musical selection avoided lyrics and consisted of classical and religious music arranged to resonate with the distinct phases of the ten-hour-long LSD experience, from the onset to the peak, the plateau, and finally, the return.



The intertwining of music and psychedelics was not only shaping the therapeutic landscape but also leaving an indelible mark on culture. The 1960s saw a new genre, "psychedelic rock" or "acid rock," led by bands like Pink Floyd and The Grateful Dead. Stanley Owsley, the sound engineer for the Grateful Dead and a clandestine chemist, used psychedelic drug proceeds to fund the creation of the Dead's "Wall of Sound," forever changing sound recording and monitoring technology at live concerts. Conversely, Myron Stolaroff, designer of the pioneering Ampex recorder adopted by major music studios, used his profits to fund psychedelic research on creativity and problem-solving.

The rapid psychedelic crescendo hit a sour note in 1970 as LSD and psilocybin were abruptly banned. Psychedelic therapy went underground, and hippies went East, spreading acid rock to communities in Ibiza, Kathmandu, and Goa. In Goa, another musical journey would later unfold that saw New Wave, Goth, and Synth Pop tapes cut and pasted with scissors and tape to remove "distracting lyrics" for all-night ecstatic dancing, later birthing the Goa Trance genre as the first synthesizers appeared.

From Merck to the RAVE Act

Synthesized by Merck in 1912, MDMA lingered in obscurity until it caught the attention of Sasha Shulgin in 1976. He called it "Window" and introduced it to therapist Leo Zeff, who quickly renamed it "Adam." Zeff integrated it into therapy, training others, including Ann, who later married Sasha. At the Shulgin farm, whether listening to records or KDFC classical radio, Ann and Sasha found profound meaning in the works of Rachmaninov, Tchaikovsky, Bach, and Beethoven, remarking that "there is a story in every piece of music."

The effects of MDMA, an "entactogen," differ from classic psychedelics, warranting a nuanced approach to music, including extended talk therapy intervals. Greer and Tolbert (1998) share learnings from treating patients in the early 1980s in the first published treatment guidelines. They curated selections of instrumental music, starting with peaceful and relaxing (Brian Eno, Allan Stivel), into more activating (Mahler, Vangelis), and back to more ambient and gentler - matching the five-hour pharmacological arc. Music played softly in the background for group sessions, as most of the time was spent talking.

Therapists—and even Timothy Leary—were advocating for a low-profile strategy to avoid repeating LSD's journey from therapeutic wonder to public enemy. Yet in the early 1980s, rebranded as "Ecstasy," MDMA exploded in the Texas club scene before spreading to New York, Chicago - where it would inspire "acid house" - and to Paris and London, seeding the "free party" movement (Collin, 2010). Musicians crafted music with features that enhanced the MDMA high, establishing a natural feedback loop where DJs popularized tracks that resonated most with the "ecstatic audience".

Although its potential neurotoxic dose is still debated, MDMA is not without risk, particularly when its strength and purity are unknown and when used in settings that can lead to overheating and dehydration. As MDMA grew popular, reports of health issues, including fatalities, led to its ban in 1985.

Some viewed harsh prohibition as imperative to protect the youth, while others argued it would increase harm and impede research. By targeting event promoters, the 2003 RAVE Act (Reducing Americans' Vulnerability to Ecstasy) has driven events into underground venues that may lack crucial safety measures. The legislation also discourages event producers from implementing harm reduction measures, such as drug testing, free water stations to prevent dehydration, and quiet 'chill out' areas where attendees can rest and cool down.

Therapists lamented the loss of a valuable tool, while rave culture advocates defended their all-night dance marathons as contemporary renditions of ancient communal rites. Although not every festival features the healing attributes of ancient ceremonies, Nascimento and McAteer argue that some celebrations can be seen as modern rituals (2002; 2006). Despite their digital façade, they aspire to the same goals: building communal bonds, providing a haven from the mundane, and cultivating a shared sense of joy. More than escapism, they provide a sense of belonging and meaning for a young generation seeking connection in a disenchanted world. These spaces provide a sanctuary for expressing cultural and gender identities marginalized by mainstream society. Participants share a collective, almost tribal identity (St. John, 2004).

Modern Harmony

The Psychedelics Comeback on the Therapeutic Stage

The modern resurgence of clinical studies on psychedelics underscores the need for a rapid catch-up with the past forty years of scientific progress. We now understand how music has served critical roles in human societies and our knowledge of music's effect and therapeutic properties has deepened significantly. Music's capacity to foster social bonding was critical in its development and spread throughout humanity. It promoted social cohesion as human groups grew by providing a rhythmic reference facilitating group activities. Moving in unison with others during

harvesting or religious ceremonies can lead to "self-other merging"—a blending of the sense of self and others (Tarr et al., 2014) and can increase group affiliation (Hove and Risen, 2009). Activation of brain networks involved in emotions, memory, and movement underlies music therapy's effectiveness in improving mood, social interaction, and cognition. Music can induce pleasurable chills by influencing the brain's reward system (Zatorre and Salimpoor, 2013). Music can induce a sense of groove, urging the listener to move, which aligns well with dance and movement therapy's effectiveness in rehabilitating movement. Neuroplasticity, a capability music shares with psychedelics, allows the brain to reorganize itself by forming new connections and regenerating neural tissue.

Marlene Dobkin de Rios (1975) suggests that music acts like a "jungle gym" for consciousness, giving it a structure to explore during psychedelic journeys. The past decade saw the emergence of a new field of music and psychedelic research, suggesting that music can facilitate deeply therapeutic psychedelic experiences. Lisa Summer and Bill Richards, heavily influenced by Bonny, have been designing musical programs for modern clinical trials at Harvard and Johns Hopkins. A study by Strickland (2020) suggests the type of music might not matter as much as we thought; both classical and non-Western sounds appeared to work equally well. At Imperial College, Ros Watts and Mendel Kaelen have incorporated more contemporary music for the playlists used in depression trials. Patients' relationship to music predicted their therapeutic outcomes, leading to the concept of music as a "hidden therapist" (Kaelen et al., 2018). Perhaps unsurprisingly, but an important milestone, the only human study of the impact of psychedelics on music appreciation found that LSD enhances the emotional response to music (Kaelen et al., 2015).

The only data on music and MDMA comes from a study in rats, suggesting music and MDMA synergistically interact to facilitate movement and increase reward-related neurotransmitters (Feduccia and Duvauchelle, 2008).

Regarding music, MAPS' treatment manual (Mithoefer, 2015) acknowledges Zeff, Greer, and Tolbert. It calls for a culturally sensitive mu-



sic selection to support the emotional arc, allow participant autonomy in music choices, and adapt music to the session's flow. The four playlists used in the MDMA clinical trials begin with calming tracks like Peter Kater's "Migration," transition to more lively and emotional pieces from Afro Celt Sound System or Vangelis, peak with intense scores by Hans Zimmer, and gently conclude with tranquil compositions.

Besides PTSD, MDMA is emerging as a promising treatment for a range of conditions, from social anxiety to enhancing couples' therapy. In the last decade, studies have demonstrated psychedelics' remarkable ability to promote brain plasticity. Even more astonishing, it was shown that MDMA can reopen critical windows of social plasticity in octopuses and mice, once-in-a-lifetime golden hours when the brain can learn specific skills, like speaking or walking (Nardou et al., 2019). These "windows"—echoing Sasha's short-lived nickname—represent the master key of plasticity. Because they close after childhood, re-opening them has been the "Holy Grail" for neuro-therapeutics. A recent patent by Gul Dölen (2024) suggests psychedelics could reopen the critical windows for learning motor skills, offering innovative treatments for stroke, Parkinson's and dementia.

Orchestrating the Future Dance of MDMA and Music

An exciting research roadmap awaits. It starts with the need to fund research on how MDMA affects perception, music cognition, and emotional processing in humans. It's also critical to explore music modalities attuned to individual differences and preferences, as initiated by Williams (2020). There's also interest in expanding beyond music playlists to include live music, singing and DJ-style continuous mixes. Examining music (and other setting elements) from ancient ceremonies and modern celebrations could uncover shared characteristics supporting therapeutic outcomes. An analysis of expert psilocybin facilitators' recommendations revealed common traits in music chosen for peak experiences (Barrett et al., 2017). Group sessions offer valuable support and healing and are worth exploring more, especially with music therapy. Hofmann lamented the fate of his "problem child," believing that its potential as a "wunderkind" could be realized under a suitable societal set and setting. Looking

ahead, we might see LSD and MDMA-augmented dance and movement therapy becoming a breakthrough intervention for neurodegenerative diseases and preventing aging-related disorders.

On the cultural scene, acid rock and acid house have pollinated countless music genres over the past decades. We are currently seeing new trends, such as the rise of the "Music for Psychedelic Therapy" genre (highlighted by Jon Hopkins' eponymous album, East Forest's "Music for Mushrooms," and Kaelen's generative Wavepath). The merging of the neo-shamanic genre with electronic dance music is giving birth to a new techno-ceremonial soundtrack resonating through modern gatherings, illustrated by artists like Liquid Bloom. We've come full circle, as new therapeutic options and global dance culture echo the ancient healing rhythms, inviting us to "come together" and cultivate connection in a time characterized by division and isolation.

"We are free to understand the world as our own dance together."

- Francisco Varela



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The Grateful Dead is the Heart of Psychedelic Music

Lindsay Robinson



In the popular imagination, the Grateful Dead is synonymous with psychedelic culture. The Dead provides a soundtrack to the 60s and 70s counterculture, a sound and a vibe that snaked into the mainstream. Can the band even be separated from the psychedelia they invented? As the chords intertwine with the lyrics, a portal is opened in the ears and the mind of the listener.

For generations, many people's first trip included the Grateful Dead. I am lucky enough to be part of the last generation to see the Dead (with Jerry Garcia) play live. I was 16 years old in the summer of 1994. It was a warm, sunny day in Highgate, Vermont, and it was my fourth time seeing the band. My friends and I took a dose of acid while entering the venue. Turns out, like thousands around me, I was entering another world.

Looking back on it now, I was probably too young to be experimenting with psychedelics. But being part of the collective experience was and is an extraordinary thing. A unique joy, a shared journey. Something sacred, even. One of the best things in life in my humble opinion.

In one of the greatest ironies of all time, we now know that the CIA was conducting tests using LSD. Among their unconnected subjects? Robert Hunter who would go on to become a lyricist for the Dead and would write the sacred lyrics to the iconic "Dark Star." Poet Allen Ginsberg who would go on to serve as a sort of bridge between the counterculture of the 1950s and 1960s. And Ken Kesey, who would go on to write *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and form the Merry Pranksters, the host of the legendary Acid Tests.

Kesey was fascinated by LSD and was interested in spreading its gospel to the masses. This was the catalyst for the Acid Tests, which were legendary

parties known for psychedelic light shows, LSD, music, and elaborate costumes. The soundtrack for these iconic parties was the Grateful Dead, arguably changing the trajectory of their music—and culture—forever.

While playing, The Grateful Dead often did not think of themselves as separate from the music, the audience, or the drugs. They often performed on LSD. The energy exchange with the band was palpable. Having performed over 2300 live shows throughout their history 1965-1995 (with Jerry Garcia) and hundreds of shows since his untimely passing under a multitude of other names (Further, Other Ones, The Dead, Dead & Co), the band knew how to create an experience unlike any other. Each show was unique, with thousands of variations and thousands of opportunities. The show itself is not unlike an acid trip: unpredictable, intriguing, sometimes challenging, and yet, you often come out the other side a changed being.

As the band experimented more with LSD, their music became more untamed. It got louder, looser, wilder, and infused with long wandering riffs where the band led the listeners on an unknown journey. The lyrics of many of the songs are also infused with psychedelic, other-worldly imagery. Take these stunning lyrics from the aforementioned “Dark Star:”

*Dark star crashes, pouring its light into ashes
Reason tatters, the forces tear loose from the axis
Searchlight casting for faults in the clouds of
delusion
Shall we go, you and I while we can
Through the transitive nightfall of diamonds?*

or “The Eleven:”

*Seven faced marble eyed transitory dream doll
Six proud walkers on the jingle bell rainbow
Five men writing with fingers of gold
Four men tracking down the great white sperm
whale
Three girls waiting in a foreign dominion
Riding in the whalebelly, fade away in moonlight
Sink beneath the waters to the coral sands below*

or “China Cat Sunflower:”

*Look for a while at the china cat sunflower
Proud walking jingle in the midnight sun
Copperdome bodhi drip a silver kimono*

*Like a crazy quilt star gown through a dream
night wind*

For an utterly stunning 30-minute version of “Dark Star,” look no further than Dick’s Pick Volume 4, Fillmore East, February 13-14, 1970. This is arguably one of the most psychedelic renditions of this incredible song. The entire two days of shows should definitely be explored.

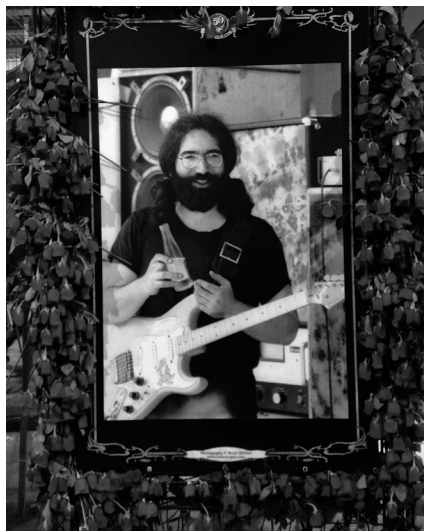
Painting pictures with words of revelation and mystic wonder, The Grateful Dead took listeners on a stunning journey, sometimes through space and time, and sometimes just peering at the faces of the happy beings all around you. Many fans at the shows would drop acid and spin in the meadow, in the coliseum, or on the pavement for hours. Wearing tie dye and long dresses, the music took hold of the listener and launched them into another dimension. And with so many people taking psychedelics at the same time, it was a truly unique experience, except it happened at almost every live show. They created a reliable “scene” where people could tune in and drop out.

Years before the Summer of Love drew thousands of hippies to the Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco, Augustus Owsley Stanley was already an underground folk hero. He was revered throughout the counterculture for making some of the purest LSD known to the scene. During this time, he became fascinated with The Grateful Dead.

In the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “Owsley” is listed as a noun describing a particularly pure form of LSD*. But manufacturing acid was not the only accomplishment on Owsley’s résumé. While he supplied the band and many of their fans with LSD, he was also The Grateful Dead’s original soundman. The Dead and Owsley were intrinsically linked as he helped shape their sound with his technological innovations. Owsley created what would become known as the ‘Wall of Sound,’ a massive speaker system specifically designed to reduce distortion in live music and custom-built for The Dead. The Wall of Sound led to an even bigger and bolder sound.

As the band continued to tour, it gained massive popularity across the country and the world. Thousands would follow The Dead on tour and create a caravan culture that endured for decades. When I was first able to see the band live, I met people who had been on tour on and off for 30 years. Old and young bonded together over their love of the band and their love of psychedelics.

Having touched hundreds of thousands of fans over the decades, one could argue that the Grateful Dead is the most influential rock band in American history. At



Lindsay Robinson has dedicated the last 20 years to fighting against the failed war on drugs and working to transform the world through thoughtful policy change. As the Director of Development for MAPS, she combines her love of building community and passion for social justice with groundbreaking policy reform to help bring healing through psychedelics. Before joining MAPS, Lindsay served as the Executive Director of the California Cannabis Industry Association (CCIA), the largest and most influential statewide trade association representing the cannabis industry. While working closely with cannabis businesses, state regulators, legislative allies, Attorney General Bonta, and the Newsom Administration, Lindsay achieved historic wins for the cannabis industry and helped transform CCIA during her six year tenure. campaigns in the election cycle.

the center of the band and the fan culture was an unparalleled desire to experience altered states of consciousness and self-exploration. This was not a movement that would inspire people to follow the normal or mundane. In fact, it was the exact opposite. The band certainly marched to the beat of its own drum and led its followers to do the same. The mantra (and lyrics) “*sometimes we live in no particular way but our own*” rang true for so many of us.

I can say without a doubt psychedelics opened my mind and my soul to a new way of perceiving the world. These journeys have accelerated my critical thinking and made me a more compassionate and kind person. They have shaped my life in so many profound ways and ultimately brought me to my current position with MAPS. I have spent most of the last 25 years working to end the drug war, from helping to legalize both medical and adult-use cannabis in over a dozen states to fundraising for the advancement of psychedelic healing. This is my calling. I humbly thank The Grateful Dead and psychedelics for helping me find my path so I can be in service to others.

So much more can be said about this amazing band and their connection to psychedelics. If you want to read more, check out *Heads: A Biography of Psychedelic America* by Jesse Jarnow and *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* by Tom Wolfe. Or, perhaps you’ll choose some sunny afternoon to go out to a meadow with a couple of good friends, a few downloaded live shows, and explore for yourself. Nothing beats the late 60s or early 70s for a psychedelic adventure. Start low, go slow, and enjoy the ride!

*Greenfield, Robert, (2011) Owsley Stanley: *The King of LSD*. Rolling Stone

Psychedelic Playgrounds

How Music Festivals Support Transformative Psychedelic Experiences

Gabrielle R. Lehigh, Ph.D.



It's starting to get dark. There are lights flashing all over the place. I can feel the bass from the music and people start dancing. People are cheering, and it's starting to freak me out. I can't find my friends. I don't know what's going on. I just stopped, and I lay down on the grass. And I'm praying for it to stop for a moment.

Now, I'm a kid curled up in a ball in the middle of a concert ground in the Everglades. This couple came up to me and asked me if I was okay. I replied, "Not really." I told them what I did (mushrooms and acid). They were like, "Oh, shit." They sat down with me and talked to me, just holding me and helping me out. Then they got me up and told me, "Let's get it out. Just go with it. Dance all right." And that's exactly what I did. It was wild. Like it was the craziest thing I've ever experienced. I realized that I couldn't fight it. The more I fought it, the more it freaked me out, and the more I wasn't letting it happen. My subconscious was stepping in.

I just started listening to the music. Next, I could see the music. I could feel everything that was going on. Looking at the sky, it was this entire city pattern of geometrical and electrical rainbows, squares and hexagons, and things turning into small cities. As the music was playing, the whole environment changed. I thought, "Wow, this is really, really, really cool."

I've never felt this way in my entire life. I had a really hard time in school. I would fight all the time and lash out for no reason. I had a hard time coping with my own issues, which was one of the things I never admitted to myself. I resorted to these types of things because my father died when I was young. Now I'm 15, and I think it was the mushrooms doing it to me, but I yawned really, really hard. I could feel stress leaving my body. I felt my muscles had more agility. I felt like I didn't have knots in my back. I wasn't tense anymore. And it was like I just wasn't angry. I wasn't thinking about anything other than just how it felt and how good it felt. Once I started appreciating it, I sat down on the grass and



took my shoes off. And it was like, I could feel the energy going through me.

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Sebastian was 15 years old at his first music festival having this experience while watching Phish. Over 15 years later, he conveyed the details of this story to me, emphasizing the importance of tapping into unexplored emotions around his father's death when he was a child, connecting them to his anger-driven behavior, and finally relinquishing them. This story is one of several from my dissertation research on transformative psychedelic experiences at music festivals, highlighting the complex entanglements between psychedelics, live music, community, and transformation.

I embarked on my dissertation journey in 2019, intrigued to understand how people take psychedelics at music festivals and how they derive meaning from them. I was driven by my psychedelic explorations along with my understanding of the limitations in current therapeutic psychedelic studies. The renewed examination of psychedelics in biomedical research is essential. Still, it limits the context of psychedelic experiences to controllable therapy-set standards. My research explores the potential benefits of non-medical contexts, specifically music festivals.

Music Festivals

Escaping the Everyday

Music festivals are interdimensional portals through space and time, carrying travelers beyond the boundaries of consciousness and reality. These carefully crafted spaces entangle features of music, performance, art, and community. While pre-recorded music is one experience, live music production is central to creating meaningful experiences in this context. One participant, Floyd, describes how musicians are not making music to get to the end of a song but to relish in producing every note, beat, and sound throughout the performance. The power of live music comes from the process of musicians making music simultaneously with the audience and the ability to transport the audience into a feeling of timelessness where “nothing before exists and nothing after exists.” It's the essence of living in the moment. The connection between the audience and performers manifests in specific moments, evidenced by how artists interact with the audience in sharing messages, such as sampling Alan Watt's “What is

Reality?” in Inzo's “Overthinker” or sharing messages like “Everything you need is inside you. It's up to you.”

These relationships between artists and the audience become enveloped in the otherworldly features of festivals. These unique spaces away from our everyday constructs of reality are filled with interactive art featuring geodomes encasing geometric designs and planets with spectators laying on air mattresses, wishing trees for people to write messages, like “your story matters and your feelings are valid so be kind to yourself,” extensive stage productions with lasers, visualizers with fractal imagery, disco balls, pyrotechnics, strobe lights, and inflatable dinosaurs, and flow artists wielding fire poi and hula hoops. Interweaving these elements is a deeply embedded culture of compassion and empathy. In the rave community, the fundamental principle of PLUR (peace, love, unity, and respect) connects strangers, builds community, and establishes everlasting friendships through compliments, social support, and a culture of gift-giving.

Festival Structures Promote Transformation

Each element of music, art, stage production, and community exists in an intricate flow of dance and movement, coming together in a dynamic and ever-changing melody that is a powerful force in creating meaningful psychedelic experiences within the music festival context. These crafted psychedelic playgrounds are filled with galaxies, lasers, visualizers, art, psychedelic mushrooms, and music conveying conscious ideas and messages of compassion, wrapped in a supportive community outside our everyday reality. They offer a liminal space that breaks down social and cultural frameworks, allowing festival-goers' minds and bodies to explore new ways of being and doing through pleasurable play, resulting in transformation. Transformation ranges from processing grief, making a career change, overcoming addiction, addressing mental health, processing trauma, and gaining self-confidence.

This contextual melody challenges festivals as unstructured spaces. As Kyriakopoulou (2021) discusses, festivals function as timestamps, dictating what people do, what substances they take, and how they move through their environment during a psychedelic experience. Through my research-based self-exploration, I discovered this flowing structure of the festival. I realized

how it mirrors the clinical protocols developed for psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy. When people stand in front of the stage, engulfed in the music, entuned to their altered senses, it resonates with the introspective phases where clinical patients wear blindfolds and headphones with a curated music playlist encouraging inner self-exploration. One festival-goer explained, “When I was internalizing it, I was thinking a lot. I feel like those are the better parts for me to learn about what's really going on. I could pinpoint where the hurt originated.”

Similarly, at festivals, people remove themselves from periods of introspection when walking between sets, sitting around their campsite with friends, or looking at art. During these periods, participants talked about reintegrating into their social group to process their introspective exploration, not unlike when a patient takes off their blindfold and headphones to discuss their experience with a therapist. As unstructured as festivals may appear, these oscillating periods of introspection and integration are driven by the timestamps meticulously and purposefully created within the psychedelic playgrounds of festivals. These patterns of activities help create a structure that supports meaningful experiences.

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My research dives beyond the traditional examination of the drug, set, and setting (Zinberg, 1984) to understand how these elements entangle in dynamic dances and create the potential for structured and meaningful experiences. It presents a unique set of con-

textual factors that go beyond the pharmacological effects of drugs to encompass relationships and processes with elements of the environment, such as Sebastian's experience presented earlier with psychedelics, Phish, and community. None of the aspects of the drug, set, and setting alone create a psychedelic experience. As one participant describes, these carefully crafted psychedelic playgrounds lend way to a specific recipe, a chemistry between these assemblages that work together to create such experiences. Drug effects entangle with artistic playgrounds and supportive communities to create something clinical settings are missing. The organization of these events creates rhythmic structures guiding festival-goers to transformative experiences while containing unique elements that festival-goers find most impactful in their experiences: live music, engaging art, and a deep connection with a like-minded and loving community. At the same time, the recipe or chemical reaction is never repeatable. There is no set dose, recreated sunset, or replayed live performance. It is a spontaneous intra-action occurring when all the elements align. While music festivals are not the desired setting for everyone, they show infinite possibilities for context to merge into transformative experiences. Clinical practices can learn from music festivals by integrating essential elements to enhance the therapeutic nature of psychedelic experiences.

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Rhythms of Resistance

Celebrating Identity through
Community, Dance, and
Psychedelics

Dr. Matthew Brinkley • Dr. Mia Sarno



As many psychedelic enthusiasts know, dance music culture is a significant presence within the psychedelic ecosystem. People often have their first experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness within the dance community. Dance events provide spaces for somatic release, collective celebration, and close community that promote well-being and even trauma healing for many. Additionally, both psychedelics and dance communities give space to release limiting beliefs about expression and identity, and instead promote positive exploration and expression of the Self.

There is a long history of rave and underground dance music spaces as refuges for marginalized groups, who founded many of the dance styles, sounds, and spaces we still groove to today. In the tapestry of underground culture, a vibrant thread was woven by the house music community—a movement birthed by queer people of color that emerged as a beacon of resistance and resilience. In the pulse of warehouse parties and underground clubs, euphoric beats and infectious melodies reverberated through bodies like a shared heartbeat. A new kind of family formed—one bound not by blood but by experiences of oppression and liberation. Here, amidst the flickering lights and pounding basslines, individuals found sanctuary and solidarity, forging connections that celebrated intersecting identities.

Underground dance spaces of all kinds served as places to cope with the discriminatory, outside world, allowing the shed of societal constraints to be oneself in full color. The creation of disco music was a form of resistance—a bold expression of Black and queer joy in the face of oppression, racism, and homophobia (ICON Collective Music Production School, 2023). House music was pioneered by legendary DJs such as DJ Ron Hardy, Frankie Knuckles, Larry Levan, Stacey “Hotwaxx” and DJ Sharon White; they understood the assignment

of creating community spaces that were safe, where bigotry was not tolerated and where identity was celebrated (Riley et al., 2023). Similarly, the ballroom scene arose as a safe haven for Black and Brown queer folks, offering glimpses of a world where authenticity reigns supreme.

In some of these spaces, dance and psychedelics have also intersected to promote further identity affirmation and healing. Within this intersection, a longer history of resistance and resilience is honored—a lineage that traces back through generations of Indigenous wisdom. Drawing from these ancestral roots, modern gatherings have intertwined movement, sound, and mind-altering substances to induce altered states of consciousness. The fusion of dance and psychedelics becomes a conduit for personal transformation and communal unity, echoing the sacred practices of Indigenous cultures where rhythm and ritual were pathways to the divine. Further, psychedelics and dance work to dissolve the boundaries of the ego, opening pathways to self-discovery and authentic self-expression. This process of inner exploration continues to be conducive to identity development today.

The fusion of dance and psychedelics becomes a conduit for personal transformation and communal unity, echoing the sacred practices of Indigenous cultures where rhythm and ritual were pathways to the divine. Further, psychedelics and dance work to dissolve the boundaries of the ego, opening pathways to self-discovery and authentic self-expression.

This past April, The Chacruna Institute for Psychedelic Plant Medicines hosted a conference called Psychedelic Culture which brought diverse voices together to explore important and cutting-edge dialogue that gets sidelined in the mainstream conversation of psychedelics. Combining intellectual rigor with heart and community, topics explored included Indigenous reciprocity, policy reform, racial equity and access, and honoring the various histories of psychedelic culture.

In order to honor this history, we curated an interactive experience at Psychedelic Culture to celebrate the intersection of psychedelics, music, dance, identity-based healing, and self-expression. Resembling the vibrance of the disco era, we lit up

the room wearing gender-bending garments dripping in rhinestones. Various disco and underground house music tracks decorated the soundscape, including “I Can’t Kick This Feeling When It Hits” by Moodymann and “Work” by Honey Dijon. Attendees were invited to move, groove and mingle to the beat, as if on the dance floor of an intimate underground club.

Somatic awareness and movement were utilized to help embody inner processes of self-exploration (Pass Erickson, 2020). With faint thumping basslines in the background, the crowd was invited to visualize parts of their identity they would like to celebrate, and through their senses, imagine celebrating those parts.

Now, tune into your body. How does it feel to inhabit this space, intentionally celebrating your identity? Notice the sensations coursing through you—the warmth of acceptance enveloping you like a comforting embrace. As you explore these sensations, consider how you might express them through movement. Is it pumping your hands in the air, a joyful leap into the unknown, headbanging, shaking your ass, or a gentle sway that mirrors the rhythm of your heartbeat? Whatever it is, allow your body to express that movement right now.

To represent the unique impact of psychedelics, the crowd was then given the prompt:



Dr. Matthew Brinkley (he/they) is a passionate and dedicated genderqueer LMFT, weaving threads of compassion through the fabric of mental health. Dr. Brinkley currently holds the title of Clinical Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Southern California (USC) and is a licensed psychotherapist in private practice.

Dr. Brinkley received his Psy.D from the California School of Professional Psychology in Marital and Family Therapy, with an advanced certificate in LGBT Human Services and Mental Health. His dissertation, "Black Love Matters: Relationship satisfaction among Black gay men and Black men who have sex with men," is a testament to his unwavering commitment to nurturing Black Queer love.

Dr. Brinkley has completed the MAPS MDMA-Therapy training program and is undergoing training at the SoundMind Institute to ethically integrate psychedelic medicine into mental health treatment. His vision is to bring healing and support to Black, Brown, and Queer communities.

Instagram: @Dr.Brinkley

Dr. Mia Sarno (she/they) is a gender fluid Licensed Clinical Psychologist. She also goes by Dr. Mimi. She completed her Psy.D. in Clinical Psychology from California School of Professional Psychology, where she returned to teach as an Adjunct Professor.

Dr. Mimi completed the MAPS MDMA Therapy Training and has experience as a study therapist for FDA research with LSD, psilocybin and 5-MeO-DMT. In addition to working in private practice, she works with Kadima Neuropsychiatry Institute serving clients with Ketamine-Assisted Psychotherapy. She also provides training and consultation in the psychedelic ecosystem.

Being a survivor herself, Mia is passionate about integrative trauma work. Her greatest healings and transformations have occurred through intentional work with psychedelics and through the dance community.

Instagram: @dr.mimi.psyd

Lastly, envision the barriers that psychedelics can dissolve, the masks they can lift. Imagine what it would feel like for that veil to be lifted, celebrating the raw, unfiltered truth of your being. Now pretend to remove that mask or veil with a movement, right now.

Participants expressed the significant impact of this curated movement experience. One person explored and challenged their insecurities about dancing itself; historically, they tended to play small and withhold from participating on various dance floors. By framing dance as a liberatory form of expression, they were inspired to move their body without embarrassment. They voiced progress in this regard both at the conference and at a community gathering the next night. A couple, who hadn't danced together for two years, verbalized gratitude for an unexpected moment of connection. With visible excitement, smiling ear to ear, one partner shared that dancing care-free helped their relationship and inspired them to make time for joy moving forward. David Bronner, Cosmic Engagement Officer of Dr Bronners, was also grooving to the disco beats during the experience. They reflected, "Matthew and Mia's experiential workshop was a fun way to get loose, feel into our bodies, and interact with each other in a sweet relaxed flow."

At this moment in time, we are collectively moving forward into uncharted territories of human consciousness. As psychedelics become popularized—unfortunately decontextualized—and the ecosystem expands, it is crucial to be thoughtful and intentional about how we desire the "psychedelic renaissance" to unfold. Currently, many psychedelic spaces are rooted in whiteness and capitalist extraction, while Indigenous communities who originally stewarded these medicines are wrongfully decentered or ignored completely. If we're not careful, the psychedelic field could easily reinforce oppressive colonial dynamics, leading to further inequity and cultural erasure.

Additionally, as electronic dance music (EDM) becomes more mainstream, it strays further from its original roots. Music artists with more privilege and resources have easier and quicker access to expensive equipment, other privileged people in power, and the resource of time to work on their pursuits. This means that artists with marginalized identities experience more barriers to the spaces that were created to celebrate and liberate them in the first place. Even through the commercialization and cis-hetero whitewashing of EDM (Riley et al., 2023), underground spaces that center queer folks of color continue to thrive. This intentional act of liberation is the rhythm of resistance.

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The Cultural Importance of Setting in Psychedelic Therapy

Monnica T. Williams, Ph.D.
Zoe Jahn, BA



Introduction

It has been observed that *set and setting* are integral components of the psychedelic experience. *Set* refers to an individual's mindset, encompassing their psychological state, intentions, and expectations. *Setting*, on the other hand, pertains to the physical and social environment in which the psychedelic experience occurs. With roots in diverse cultural practices, the importance of these factors is increasingly recognized in contemporary therapeutic contexts. Both *set* and *setting* significantly shape the nature and outcomes of psychedelic therapy sessions, which are in turn shaped by culture (Fogg et al., 2021).

Setting includes, but is not limited to:

- The physical therapeutic environment (e.g. treatment space)
- Music that is played during the psychedelic therapy
- The clinicians facilitating the psychedelic journey

Here we review the significance of the setting, with a specific focus on cultural considerations.

Cultural Considerations in the Therapeutic Environment

Careful attention should be given to the setting in which psychedelic therapy and research are conducted. Recognizing the diversity of participants, clinicians must be mindful of cultural nuances in décor, artwork, and overall ambiance. Consider that decor can communicate inclusion or threat. Deliberate efforts to promote diversity within the setting communicate a sense of safety and belonging among all involved.



The treatment room will ideally be adorned with culturally diverse artwork and other items, reflecting the team's commitment to inclusivity. Williams, Reed, and Aggarwal (2020) describe their work to create a multicultural space in a study of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy for PTSD at the University of Connecticut Health Center. The study room featured framed artwork such as an image of a Latina mother and an impressionist world map. Other cultural decorations included jade beads, a Tibetan sound bowl, and colorful textiles from India. Beyond décor, the setting also encompassed cultural authenticity as these items reflected the actual cultures of the practitioners involved, highlighting the importance of a well-rounded team.

Conversely, when MAPS conducted a training for therapists of color at the historic Brown Hotel, in Louisville, Kentucky, there were decorations in the hotel that felt threatening to several Black participants. For example, the artwork depicted colonial-era White people in elegant clothing without people of color included. There was one painting of a hunting expedition that included many White men on horseback, with guns and dogs, that participants asked to have removed from the venue as it was reminiscent of hunting for runaway Black slaves. These sorts of depictions can be described as environmental microaggressions, symbols in the environment that reinforce racial hierarchies (Williams et al., 2021).

The Role of Music in Psychedelic Therapy

Music has long been intertwined with psychedelic therapy, serving as a supportive tool to guide and enhance the therapeutic process. Research indicates that music can evoke a wide range of emotions and experiences, from transcendence to nostalgia. However, the choice of music must be culturally relevant and sensitive to the diverse backgrounds of participants.

There has been a misperception that if music is wordless that means it is culture-free. As such, classical music is a common choice for psychedelic-assisted therapy sessions. Classical music, rooted in European tradition, is not culture-free, and it may not effectively support psychedelic healing for individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Instead, playlists must be thoughtfully catered to the individual preferences and cultural backgrounds of each participant, ensuring a personalized and enriching

experience. It's important to explore alternatives beyond the typical fare like new age, ambient, folk, or post-rock music (Williams, Reed, & Aggarwal, 2020). Instead, consider jazz, nature sounds, Latin tunes, drumming, and Indian music.

The Therapists

The treatment team must also be considered as an important part of the setting. Including staff members from a variety of ethnic backgrounds is essential for effectively recruiting and retaining people of color in mental health research and treatment. Participants of color feel more secure and understood when engaging with therapists of color, thereby enhancing treatment effectiveness and the relevance of the study. At UConn, a deliberately diverse team, embracing various ethnicities, sexual identities, and other dimensions, facilitated successful client engagement and therapeutic outcomes across intersecting identities (Williams, Reed, & Aggarwal, 2020).

Cultural sensitivity is essential for creating a therapeutic setting conducive to healing. The psychedelic field is experiencing increased diversity in both participant demographics and the cultural traditions being studied, emphasizing the need for researchers and clinicians to increase their level of cultural awareness and knowledge. Clinicians must be able to acknowledge and respect the unique cultural contexts of all ethnic and racial groups, particularly indigenous communities with longstanding traditions involving psychedelic medicines. (Williams, Cabral, & Faber, in press).

Neitzke-Spruill (2020) posits that the very nature of race relations in the United States provides a distinct cultural setting for racialized psychedelic users. Most people of color who have lived in Western contexts have experienced racism, which can be a cause of psychopathology as well as mistrust of clinicians who are of a different racial group. Despite encountering many clients affected by race-related stress and trauma, clinicians often lack adequate training to address these issues, inadvertently perpetuating harm by conforming to White-dominant cultural norms. For example, a clinician may be dismissive or misunderstand the role of racism as a contributor to the client's stress, thus invalidating the client's experience, minimizing the racial experience they have faced, and causing more harm (Williams, Reed, & George, 2020). Embracing an anti-racist approach in practice, research,

and personal interactions is necessary for clinicians to recognize and address racial microaggressions, cultivate allyship, and promote safety and trust among clients from marginalized racial backgrounds. (Williams, Faber, & Duniya, 2022).

Conclusion

Setting plays a pivotal role in shaping the psychedelic experience, influencing outcomes and therapeutic efficacy. While strides have been made in understanding the importance of set and setting in psychedelic therapy, challenges remain, particularly concerning cultural adaptation of approaches and protocols. Empirical studies of the differential effect of music in psychedelic therapy with diverse populations are lacking, highlighting the need for further investigation and innovation in therapeutic practices.

By embracing cultural sensitivity and personalized interventions, clinicians can create environments that promote healing and transformation for individuals from all backgrounds. As psychedelic therapy continues to evolve, ongoing attention to set and setting will be essential in maximizing therapeutic benefits and promoting inclusivity.

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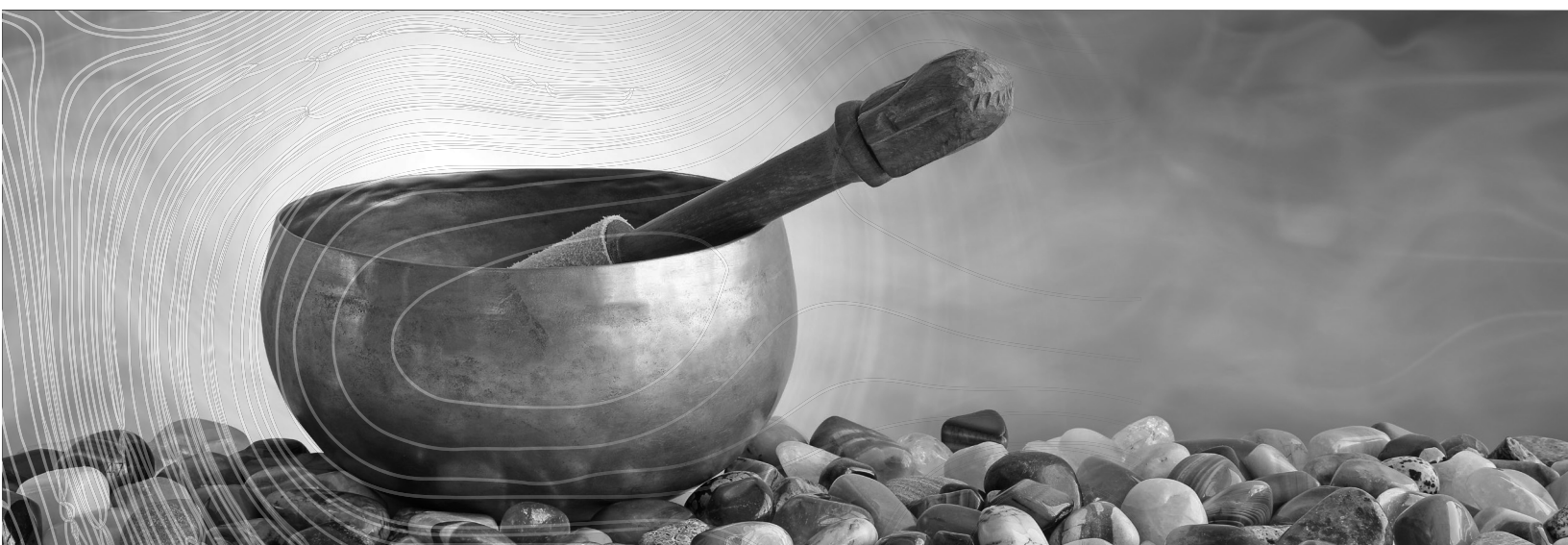
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Zoe Jahn Solis is a student researcher in the field of psychobiology. Zoe completed her undergraduate studies at the University of Connecticut in Biology with a minor in Physiology and Neurobiology. She is certified in Basic Life Support and as a Medical Assistant.





DMT, My Music, and Psychedelic Research

Raphael Egel



Meditating Psychonaut
Raphael Egel, 2023

I am an autodidact musician and artist who stumbled into psychedelic research, a story I would like to share here with you.

In my musical life, I have always aimed to improve my improvisation. The goal of total flow in improvising music can be compared to meditation or low psychedelic doses; the “zone” is reached when you stop thinking and become one with the sound. The ability of psychedelics to induce flow in music improvisation is a neglected research area, but it would certainly bring insights into flow states beyond music and art.

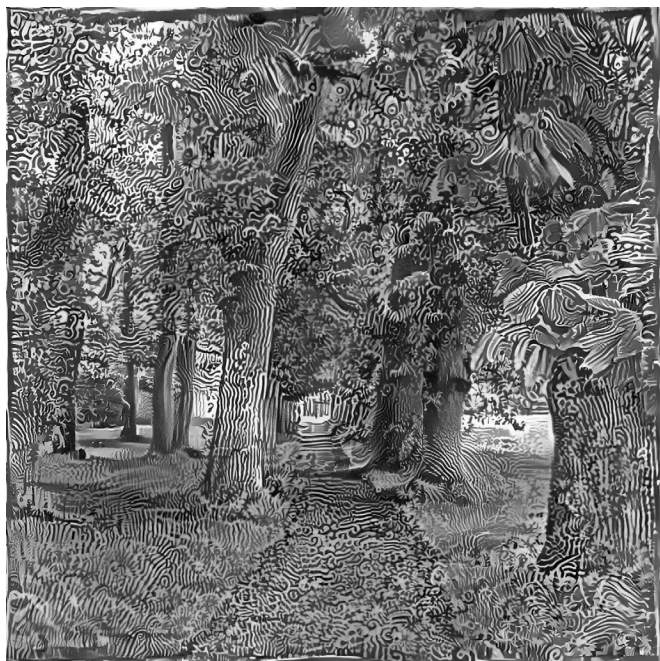
My first psychedelic experience with magic mushrooms in Palenque, Mexico, in 1995 pushed my musical and artistic development into the direction of flow in free improvisation. Further on, I have seen some amazing psychedelic kingdoms in my life from time to time. Since the birth of our son, I have been a lucky houseman, and I absolutely love it! Taking care of my family while my wonderful wife is running a scientific career as a psychedelic neuroscientist. Luckily, we always found room in our tiny houses to be creative together, such as our invention of light painting in 2015. Three years later, our little family left Germany since my wife took the chance to conduct Brazil’s first modern LSD study on humans for her PhD thesis under the supervision of Prof. Luís Tófoli at the University of Campinas (Wießner, 2022).

Since we arrived in Brazil, I have been “enlightened” twice in my music production.

The first time, in July 2019, I was offered to participate in a Santo Daime ritual with ayahuasca. After a soft, beautiful trip in the absence of any “bad” side effects, the Mestre told me that I had taken “a lot.” I have only a few memories of the experience, but the most concrete is seeing a fractalized cosmic snake unfolding multidimensionally within space and time. People told me later that I said: “I feel like talking through my hands!” and then started to walk on them.

I also remember having this idea of receiving new grooves from the universe. Maybe I was a little bit too funky in my rhythm interpretation for that Italian anthropologist who soon decided to take away my rattle. While coming down from the effects, I found myself jamming some guitar tunes with Imperial College DMT scientist Christopher Timmermann.

This first, truly mind-bending ayahuasca experience had a strong impact on me, leaving me energized and enthusiastic about my musical activity.



Many ways lead to the psychedelic kingdom.
Raphael Egel, 2021

In April 2020, I worked on a music video for the psychedelic folk band TAU and The Drones of Praise. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I had just canceled my solo tour through Europe. Instead, I was stuck in a tropical garden in Campinas, São Paulo. I was in a rebellious, almost angry mood, jamming with my loop station and electric guitar barefoot under the roof of the terrace when a thunderstorm came up. In an act of spite, I didn't unplug my equipment and kept playing even though it would become the heaviest storm I had experienced in Brazil, and the rain was already dripping through the roof.

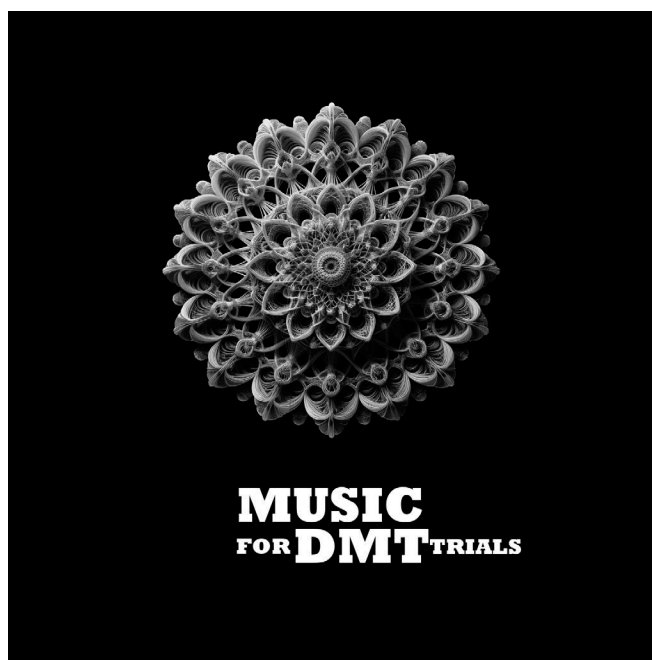
Thereupon, everything happened as if in slow motion. I heard a gigantic BANG about 50 meters above me. At the same moment, I saw a 25 cm-long electrical lightbow leaving the microphone and entering my mouth. My body twisted in a strange dance move, and I noticed a small lightbow exiting my left toe into the puddle I was standing in.

Only the effect section of my audio mixer broke that afternoon, but two essential things changed in my life. First, my fear of dying from a new, unknown virus was gone; I realized that the number of possible deaths was countless. Second, I began to memorize piano chords way better than before.

My musical connection with psychedelic science started two years later. We moved to Natal in Brazil's Northeast to join Prof. Draulio Araujo's psychedelic research lab at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte. For the world's first clinical trial with vaporized DMT, I was offered the opportunity to compose and produce music tracks to be listened to by healthy participants and patients with depression during their experiences.

The scientists wished for dedicated music for their study. The specifications were to produce original, comparable, calm, relaxing, ambient-like tracks to be played during two dosing sessions (lower dose, higher dose). I had only two weeks to create six musical pieces of 11 minutes each, but I accepted the offer to support psychedelic research.

My only chance to produce that fast was my father's good old straight-ahead method: no pondering, just acting and then living with the outcome. I started with the harmonic structure, added some percussive and ambient elements (nature sound samples), and finally improvised melodies over everything. Another requirement was a soft, calm, one-minute intro for preparing and adminis-



Music for DMT Trials, Raphael Egel, 2024

tering the inhaled DMT. With the rapid drug onset, the sound should intensify to support and guide the experience. My goal was to provide secureness, like, "Hey you, don't worry, I'm here playing some tunes for you while you are traveling."

The results of my DMT compositions can be streamed or downloaded here for free: <https://egel.bandcamp.com/music> (donations are very welcome; my piano broke recently).

Furthermore, I contributed visual and auditory stimuli for more complex EEG studies. So, over time, I sneaked into that lovely group of scientists surrounding Prof. Draulio Araujo, all of whom are now progressing amazingly, founding the Center for Advanced Medical Psychedelics (CAMP). As part of the team, I was lucky to join a DMT pilot session at the lab. The first dose was 20 mg of inhaled DMT, and the second was 60 mg.

What beautiful insights into unknown worlds! Now I know what people mean when they talk about sacred geometry. Listening to Harmonic Trip, I synesthetically



Me right before receiving the second dose of DMT.
Photo: Fernanda Palhano-Fontes

explored these detailed cosmic panoramics of light fibers, their behavior, and forms directly influenced by the music (I still need to smile when I remember this). At the same time, part of my mind was constantly analyzing the track for mixing issues: too loud here, less bass there, maybe too much flute in this part?, fewer chord changes in that

part, yeah, here the flute fits! I hope to find the resources to improve my musical outcome further in the future.



Interview for the documentary "Psicodelia" by Brazilian filmmaker Estevão Viana. Foto: Isabel Wießner

The first studies have concluded, and the results on DMT's safety and antidepressant action have been published. More projects that will use my tracks are in prospect!

The impact of music and the specific pieces on healthy participants and those with depression are currently being analyzed and will be presented in further works. However, I will already give a quick glance into some reports of healthy subjects on how my music influenced their DMT experiences:

At first, many images at the same time, fast and very colorful images, fractal images, there was no kaleidoscope. And then it calmed down (...). It was interesting, when there was no music it was a bit loose, just reflecting, and when the music was on again, some of the colorful images came back. It was just like I said (...), the music guides you. [P26]

The shapes were all in tune with the music, they danced to the music. And the thoughts came in accordance with the music too, everything was very simple, very slow, it spoke to me very calmly. [P04]

If music had a color and created an image, it would be the one I was looking at. The images danced with the music, it's incredible. [P21]

(T)here was a very interesting synchrony between the beginning of the inhalation, the retention of air and the music, it came, it was very pleasant and it started like little bells: 'blim blim blim'; then, when I was about to enter the experience, the music changed, that was very appropriate and it guided me a lot and I felt myself smiling throughout the experience a little bit, because of the music. [P27]

What I saw was already a really crazy trip, and music, in fact, has a lot of influence because the music buzzes, and it's as if I was traveling with it. (...) speed and rhythm (...) guided my experience because I traveled or flew over these shapes according to how the music was unfolding. [P06]

Contemplative to the extreme. These things make it seem like you are facing something extremely superior. And it elevates your thoughts. Fantastic method. The song was very peaceful; it left me very calm and in that contemplative state, of understanding, of deepening. Deep perception and contemplation. [P23]

These quotes not only allow for delightful insights into participant experiences but also spotlight the crucial potential of music to influence and shape the quality of psychedelic journeys. I am thankful to contribute my little part to this great scientific adventure of exploring human consciousness and excited about what will come next.

In December 2024, I will give my first lecture about flow states in music and art in the CAMP course: Journey of knowledge in therapy with psychedelics for mental health.



Happy psychedelic scientists and me (bottom row left) at the first actualization course in Psychedelic Medicine of the Center for Advanced Medical Psychedelics (CAMP). Foto: Lucas Maia archives

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Raphael Egel is an improvisation musician and visual artist. He is Creative Director of the Center for Advanced Medical Psychedelics (CAMP) at the Brain Institute of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte, Natal, Brazil. He recently produced music and art for clinical trials with DMT.

Born in 1975 in the Black Forest, Germany, he grew up in a family of classical musicians.

In his early youth, he started to experiment with synthesizers and drum computers, soon after connecting his simple gear to an Atari computer with a built-in MIDI interface. Sometimes he samples his great grandfather or grandmother to create new music of classical recordings. Also together with his wife and brothers he produced art.

Since 2013, with the birth of his son, Raphael has been focusing on solo live improvisation with loop station, drum machine, keys, voice, and electric guitar. In addition to his engagement in painting and photography, he has been remixing his art with AI since 2019.

Instagram: @liveenlightenment

<https://egel.bandcamp.com/>

<http://raphael-egel.com>

Facebook: Raphael Egel



Psychedelics Teach Simplicity

Mary Cosimano



Psychedelics teach simplicity. I love that. Simplicity has been a theme in my life for a long time, but it wasn't until I began teaching at California Institute of Integral Studies in their Center for Psychedelic Therapies and Research certificate program in 2016 that I began talking about it openly. Since then, I have become more aware of the importance of bringing it forward, the importance of understanding the simplicity of life, and my deepened interest and respect for working with psychedelics when I realized it was one of their teachings.

Although I didn't know it at the time, my childhood was where my need for simplicity began. I was a good student in school but had to spend extra time studying to keep up because my attention was compromised. I could keep up with all subjects except reading. I couldn't stay connected to even the simplest readings. Growing up in the 1960s there was no understanding of learning disabilities (ADD, ADHD, dyslexia, etc.) so I was put into a speed-reading class with four other students who had similar issues. We were separated from the

rest of the class, which in itself was embarrassing, but what made it humiliating was that speed reading made it even harder for me to read. It was the exact opposite of what I needed to deal with my learning disabilities. This led to low self-esteem, which continued into early adulthood because I couldn't keep up with not only readings but also with conversations. Big words, concepts, current events, I knew very little about because I didn't read or couldn't remember what I read. I went through high school without hardly ever reading a book—only Cliffs Notes—the infamous summaries that saved so many like me. Feelings of unworthiness grew deep within me. I began to fear being “found out” how “stupid” I was. Much of my life was led by that fear.

If I had found the following quote at that time, it would have been my motto, and even though I have worked through much of this, the quote still speaks to where I'd rather be with others today.

“It is more fun to talk with someone who doesn't use long, difficult words but rather short, easy words like “What about lunch?”

- Pooh's Little Instruction Book, by Joan Powers,
inspired by A. A. Milne

I was in my early 20's when I realized I needed to find a way to get over my fear. What could I possibly have to offer with my disability? I began to search for answers to the questions, *Who am I? Why am I here?* and *What's the meaning of life?* Nothing was more important to me. My search led me to a few events that had a profound impact on me, leading to a conscious realization of my life purpose. One of those events was when I read (yes, I did learn to read but that's another story) Dr. Gerald Jampolsky's book, *Love is Letting Go of Fear*. It is a short book based on *A Course in Miracles*. There are several powerful lessons that were compelling to me when I first read it that remain important to me today:

1. There are only two emotions: Love and Fear.
2. Peace of mind is our only goal.
3. Forgiveness is our only function.
4. The present moment is all there is.
5. Love is the answer to all questions.
6. The essence of our being is LOVE.

I remember so clearly when I read this that I knew deep inside those statements were true, that my search for life's meaning was over. But I also knew I couldn't

embrace their simplicity, that I had more work to do. I felt anxious by this fact but also felt a sense of peace knowing that my search for those questions could be boiled down to such simple, easy-to-understand principles. To embody those teachings became my life purpose and remains so to this day.

What I came to believe and still do is this: At its core, what humans want is to give and receive love, and that the nature of our true, authentic self is love. By love I mean connection—to ourselves, to others, and to everything.

Over the years this belief just deepened in me. Most exciting was decades later when I started to write about my work with psychedelics that I began in 2000 at the Johns Hopkins Center for Psychedelic and Consciousness Research. I found that after guiding hundreds of study participants' psychedelic sessions, their common experiences revealed some of those same teachings from *Love is Letting Go of Fear*. Participants told us over and over that some of the most important messages from their experiences were often these same simple truths: We are all one. We are all connected. We are all love.

One of our study participants said of her experience, “I just found it funny, that life really is that simple, and it's all about love.”

The simplicity of these lessons became one of the foundations of my life and relates to my belief in love as our true nature. I began speaking of this openly when teaching because I felt it was important to reveal my beliefs to the students. One year a student in the program expressed anger at my making it sound so simple. I understood this and knew it was necessary to address her feelings. I was grateful for the opportunity as it made me clarify for others who may have felt the same as her.

Yes, it is simple, but don't let this simplicity fool you. Just because it is simple doesn't mean it is easy. Simplicity is usually hidden. All the unnecessary things must be peeled away before the essence of anything—the simplicity—can be revealed. It's finding the essence.

The ability to embrace, to be, this simple truth—that we are all one, all connected, all love—is to me, the most difficult and the most important achievement of our human existence. I believe that everything anyone does is an attempt to achieve this state, and yet we fall short over and over again. There are many reasons for this, but I believe one reason is that we make our lives so busy and complicated. As Confucius said, “Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated”.

In today's world, we are busier than ever with so much information at our fingertips—and many are addicted to these technologies. I recently heard that “information consumes attention, and therefore a wealth of information equals a poverty of attention.” We get so caught up in our lives that we forget this or don't make it a priority. Our attention is everywhere except on ourselves, others, and the world around us. We spend less and less time in quiet, in stillness. We become disconnected from ourselves and others.

That's what we humans do—we make our lives complicated. Then we develop fears, and because of our fears we put up walls and barriers that disconnect us, and thus we lose our sense of who we are: our true authentic self.

Disconnection is the source of our unhappiness (dysfunction) because as I said I believe that our true self, who we are, is love, and love is connection. Johann Hari talks about disconnection in his book, *Lost Connections*:

“... Every one of the social and psychological causes of depression and anxiety they have discovered has something in common. They are all forms of disconnection. They are all ways in which we have been cut off from something we innately need but seem to have lost along the way.”

How do we get that connection back? I believe one way is with psychedelic-assisted therapy.

The Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy Model

Many are familiar with the model used by most, if not all, in the clinical trials with psychedelic-assisted therapy. There are three simple phases: the preparation, the psychedelic session, and the integration.

Although they may not seem simple to all, the longer I have been guiding psychedelic sessions and embodying the principles I came to believe in, the more I realize their simplicity. This does not take away from the depth of the content of each of these phases. It just makes it easier for me to be present in each one. Being present is key to being a more effective guide.

Phase I—Preparation

Preparation for psychedelic-assisted therapy sessions is actually very simple. These are basically twofold: (1) preparing the participant for a high-dose psychedelic session and (2) developing trust and rapport between the partici-

pant and their guides. The model we use to develop trust and rapport is simply having the participant tell their life story. Lives can be and usually are complicated, but the method for telling the life story is the same for all. We ask: *Who are you?* Answering this question is a powerful process in itself, and many participants have said at the end of the preparation meetings that if they didn't have a psychedelic session, answering that question would be enough to help them understand themselves. (But no one has stopped there).

Phase II—The Psychedelic Session

Next is the psychedelic session. My understanding of how to approach a session has shifted after years of guiding. I now see the psychedelic session as simple once you have taken the substance there is nothing to do but for the participant and guide(s) to spend the rest of the day together without expectations, judgment, or agenda. Sessions can and often do have many ups and downs and can be quite difficult, but after guiding hundreds of sessions, I've come to believe that once the psychedelic has been ingested, the role of the guide is simply to keep the participant safe and be present with whatever comes up. Everything is welcome and whatever happens is supposed to happen.

Phase III—Integration

Integration is simple in that there is only one question: *What are you going to do? That is, what changes are you going to make to your daily life?* It is best to start with small steps and simple practices such as going for a walk in nature, starting a meditation or mindfulness practice, calling an estranged family member or going to lunch with a friend. One of our study volunteers discovered one of his ways.

“I feel I am moving, thinking, and acting in a thoughtfulness mode”, he said. “I feel more aware of the energy of Love. I am choosing more eye contact with people I meet, I listen more intently, speak more clearly, and generally am more aware of Life as Love. I have learned since my session that when people make a lot of money it comes with a responsibility of sharing, letting go of the money in a responsible, loving way.”

Again, simple, but putting it into a committed, lifelong practice is the complex part. It takes intention, awareness, and action. It is important to have a plan and goals, and then to let them go and allow the present moment to

lead the way. The guidelines for the psychedelic sessions apply to the integration as well—no expectations, no judgment, no agenda.

One participant told me his meditation practice had become more regular, more focused, and “taken to a whole new level” by incorporating his daily exercise workout into a powerful meditative practice. He used to have two televisions on simultaneously watching the news and/or reading newspapers. At his six-month follow up he said, “My cardiovascular workouts have been transformed into what I like to call cardio ‘heart yoga’. I dim the lights in my cellar, put on appropriate music, and then do a very conscious meditation using my breath and mantra while pumping on my stationary bike.” He also expressed the desire to deepen his relationship with his wife, and now every weekend he makes a “date” with her.

Other participants’ simple integration practices included meditating, reaching out to old friends and making new friends, eating a healthier diet, journaling, taking up guitar lessons, starting an exercise program, reading again, practicing yoga, getting more rest, and making time for stillness.

The more I have embraced the belief in the simplicity of this model, the more I can relax, be present, and connect with the participant. Connection and simplicity are evident in this quote from one of our terminal cancer participants:

“I was at the center or at least **aware of being emerged into a greater whole—it seemed oddly simple**—no real struggle—it was so easy—and I questioned myself about the possibility that such an awareness was so easy to die into.”

These feelings of simplicity and connectedness are true of non-cancer participants as well. One of the participants said:

“Once I was past the darkness, I began to experience an increasing feeling of peace and connectedness...an intense feeling of love and joy emanated from all over my body, and I can’t imagine feeling any happier. I knew that the worries of everyday life were meaningless and that **all that mattered were my connections with the wonderful people who are my family and friends**”.

The Lasting Effects

How long do these effects last and what are they? That depends on the individual and the amount of integration work and most often, as you saw above, it is a result of simple, small steps towards their values and goals.

We have long-term follow-ups in most of our studies that range from six months to two and a half years.

Some of the lasting effects are shown in the following comments following the six-month follow-up from cancer/end-of-life participants:

One participant told us, “I am able to sleep better, have much less anxiety, no fear of death, much improved sense of self and confidence, more relaxed, improved relationships, more open, more empathetic.”

Another stated that he continues to value his experience in the study and that his personal well-being and life satisfaction increased significantly. His fear and anxiety over his death had decreased, despite the recent report that his cancer had metastasized to his lungs. His mother said the study helped him immensely with his anxiety and without the study “he would be ten times worse.”

In our dose effect study at the one-year follow-up, a participant told us that she is more interested in connecting with others on a deeper level and values relationships more. “I am more open and less judgmental” she said. “I have a greater sense of love as being a unifying and primal force in the universe and as the appropriate response to my understanding of reality.”

When through psychedelic-assisted therapy we become aware of the simple truth of our essential being, the happier we can be. The simpler we are, the more people we can connect to. My desire is to connect with as many people as possible and to not make anyone feel like I did all those years ago when I couldn’t learn to read: stupid. To me, that means being simple. The less barriers the more connections.

The world of psychedelics has grown immensely since I became involved with psychedelic research at Johns Hopkins 23 years ago. Many are calling it a psychedelic renaissance. With growth often comes growing pains, and one of those seems to be that what these substances can teach is getting lost or complicated. I believe that psychedelic-assisted therapy has the potential to bring the message of simplicity to more and more people, and I hope that this remains true despite the growth in the field of psychedelics.

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Simplicity is important to me. When I finally began to own and embrace my need for simplicity and to bring that to my personal and professional life, my life has been more free and joyful. I believe this can be helpful for many others as well.

In *Dharma Bums*, Jack Kerouac said,

"One day I will find the right words, and they will be simple." Maybe I found the right words for me: "What about lunch?"

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Terence McKenna's Alien Dreamtime

Graham St. John



Figure 1. Terence McKenna, Lisbon, 1994, on the set of *Manual of Evasion LX94*.
Courtesy of Edgar Pêra.

The following is a story untold in the life of Terence McKenna, a towering figure in the history of psychedelic culture, as enigmatic as he was charismatic. The story emerges from an extensive study bearing fruit in a biography to be published by MIT Press in 2025, *Strange Attractor: The Hallucinogenic Life of Terence McKenna*. While he died in 2000, aged 53, from the aggressive brain cancer glioblastoma multiforme, McKenna became a shooting star in the backplane of cyberspace, where he remains today the single most sampled voice in electronic music. This strange circumstance is rooted in the early nineties when McKenna adopted rave as a much-vaunted creode in the “Archaic Revival.” While not a music person himself, nor someone even known to dance, McKenna became an overnight booster for a new dance movement.

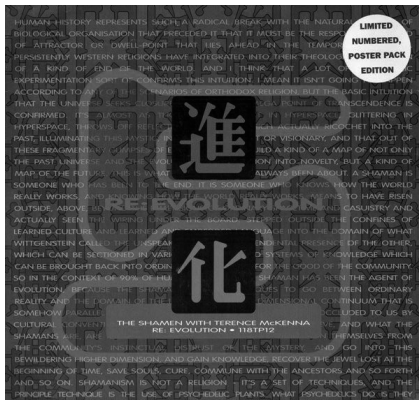


Figure 2. The Shamen with Terence McKenna, *Re: Evolution*, Single, 1993.

In this bizarre pre-millennial fling, ravers, in turn, adopted McKenna. The story I relate returns us to the heights of the rave-o-lution, to a time when McKenna was raver-in-residence at clubs in London and San Francisco, to a moment when he even enjoyed his own hit single. Featured on the Shamen's 1992 double platinum album *Boss Drum*, the eight-minute screed "Re: Evolution" was surely one of the strangest tracks to reach the top twenty on the UK Singles Chart (# 18) (Figure 2). The single was a digital trojan horse for McKenna's hope-filled eschaton. As he proclaimed from his podium on the Hit Parade, rave "is the cutting edge of the last best hope for suffering humanity."

Carrying a nudge-nudge, wink-wink attitude toward DMT and psilocybin, exposure to which McKenna advocated as a human right, "Re:Evolution" featured extraordinary messaging for a hit single. But the celebrity stature deriving from McKenna's association with the Shamen was tinged with irony. As everyone on the street knew, the Shamen's chart-topping single "Ebenezer Goode," also released on *Boss Drum*, was a sonic billboard for "Ecstasy." In other words, it promoted a substance McKenna imagined in his preacherly moments to be among the trash peddled among "whores of mammon." He had long committed to distinguishing "shamanic" plants from what he saw as "onanistic" and "soulless" drugs. In a 1987 lecture, "Psychedelics Before and After History," McKenna contended that taking MDMA was akin to self-gratification when it comes to experiencing "the felt presence of the other." Later, in *Mother Jones*, readers were urged to take the three-step "drug test." Does the substance occur in nature? Is it close to compounds naturally present in the human brain? Does it have a history of human use for thousands of years? (Olney, 1989). In application of Rupert Sheldrake's theory of morphic resonance, it was long affirmed that, by comparison to MDMA, "plants have souls," and they carry the morphogenetic field of thousands of years.

When you take psilocybin, it also takes you, you are participating in all of the trips that were ever induced in anyone. This is a tremendously stable field of experience. When you take a drug straight out of the laboratory [by which he meant MDMA and ketamine], it has no soul. It has no story, it has no direction. It's a product of the daemon artifice of man (Anon, 1993).

Illustrious chemist and rediscoverer of MDMA, Alexander Shulgin, was in the Esalen audience when McKenna once expressed the rank dichotomy: drugs that come from labs are "suspect" compared with "natural" products deriving from plants. "But Terence, I'm as natural as they come," Shulgin responded.

Excluding Ecstasy from the soulful vegetal kingdom had limited appeal among the rave-going populace. It also held little truck within the underground psychiatric community in which the compound became highly valued as a therapeutic aid. On this subject, Rick Doblin conveyed in an interview that McKenna's early objections to MDMA were so frustrating that, in 1984, his comments served as a catalyst for a "secret safety study" that was the first step on the long road to sanctioning MDMA as an assisted therapy.

A high point in McKenna's rave career was a multimedia collaboration and 48-hour rave held in San Francisco's SoMa district over 26-27 February 1993.

The brainchild of filmmaker Ken Adams, *Alien Dreamtime* was mounted in a warehouse on 11th St near Fulsom. The space, then called the Transmission Theatre (later Club Z, now Audio Nightclub), was leased by a real estate entrepreneur who also owned the club next door (in more recent years, Halycon). *Alien Dreamtime* gave McKenna the opportunity to belt out his greatest hits supported by Jonah Sharp's techno-ambient arrangement, *Space Time Continuum*, and didgeriduista Stephen Kent, with live video mixing by Rose X (as released on *Alien Dreamtime*, Figure 3).

Adams and then wife and Rose X partner Britt Welin intended to shoot a film over two nights. The event was a high watermark of the SF rave scene before it became a club, warehouse, desert, or beach scene. At this juncture, it was impossible to distinguish between random barefoot overalls-wearing pot smokers and future leaders of the tech industry. The event served as a platform for, as Adams reflected, the then-building "ideational matrix that allowed people to feel confident about going forward and taking risks." It was a proof of concept that was about to undergo serious performance testing. When the crowd filled out around midnight on the opening night, over a dozen police officers moved in. As the cops started pushing people around, and pulling plugs on video equipment, McKenna climbed up on stage. "We're being visited by some of San Francisco's finest," the crowd was entreated. "If you have a camera of any sort, come to the front of the stage and point it at a cop." People responded as instructed, greenlit camcorders effectively freezing the police in their tracks. "They weren't ready for this," Adams recalls, noting how the cops backed out of the building. There were too many people, and it was too much to deal with.

Filming was again disrupted on the second night when the police returned with a vengeance. As it was an unlicensed all-ages event, authorities were bent on protecting what they saw as corrupted innocence. But the kids were keen to meet the cops with a "force" of their own. They started dancing to protect the stage, a response which seemed communitarian and courageous to Adams. These kids were "dancing away the fear." It was a tense moment, and the stakes were high. Adams convened with the senior cop in the property owner's office. The overbearing officer, a silver-haired and buttoned-up character from a Superman comic started gnawing away at both men. "We're not going to have *psychedelic* preached in my precinct," he snarled. The owner took the heavy handle of his baked ceramic phone off the desk and announced he was calling "the Mayor." The officer shifted with skepticism. Someone on the other end answered, and the owner soon got to the point. "There's a show going on, and there's a cop in here with his foot on my neck. I want you to get this Nazi out of here!" He then handed the phone to the badge who was grilled by a high-ranking city official at 2:00 AM Sunday morning. When "the Mayor" disconnected, the cop threw the phone with great force onto the desk and departed. It was an unexpected outcome and a clarifying moment of "power alignment"—offering a perfect resolution to the animated storybook playing in Adams' mind. Permission had come from the top. The show would go on.



Figure 3. *Alien Dreamtime* — Space Time Continuum with Terence McKenna (Astralwerks, 1993).

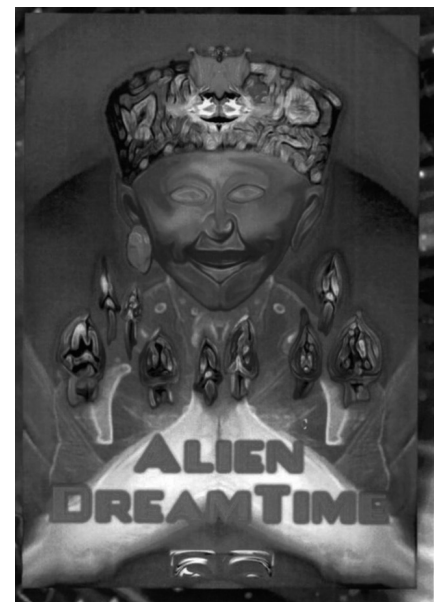


Figure 4. *Alien Dreamtime* was first released on VHS in 1993 by Rose X Media House and City of Tribes Communications, and subsequently on DVD by Magic Carpet Media, in 2003.

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The show did go on. In his UK tours of the early nineties, McKenna became the beneficent source of DMT (the legendary “pink packet”) extracted from *Psychotria viridis* home grown in Hawaii. In the testimonies of Martin Glover (aka Youth, founder of Butterfly Records) and Raja Ram, who were among many transfigured beneficiaries, McKenna served as an unwitting midwife to the emergence of Goa trance and its psychedelic progeny. McKenna’s DMT was pivotal to the formation of the lead act in the psychedelic diaspora, Shpongle, and catalyzed the birth of the seminal Goa label Dragonfly Records (St John, 2015). As I have related more recently in *Dancecult* (St John, 2023), through the medium of psychedelic electronica, McKenna became the voice of the unspeakable.

Alien Dreamtime intimates an extraordinary moment in the life of Terence McKenna and in the world of the Bay Area rave scene. The mounting historical crisis that became the persistent focus of his attention appeared to be echoed in the efforts of authorities to shut down the event. McKenna’s commentary on the “end times” continues to haunt us in the accelerated dystopia in which we are immersed. While he was gone within six years of the *Alien Dreamtime* production, McKenna became an unassuming figurehead for intrepid enthusiasts within the broad network of psychedelic electronica, where he has continued to serve posthumously as a cyberdelic trip-sitter.

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