

MENTAL REALMS

How Music Shapes the Psychedelic Journey

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THE PAKMAN

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Chapter One

MUSIC IS THE MEDICINE

*"If you want to find the secrets of the universe,
think in terms of energy, frequency and
vibration."*

— Nikola Tesla

Each musical note is a frequency. When I first understood this connection, something clicked. I'd spent years studying melody, harmony, counterpoint—all the technical elements of composition—but Tesla was pointing at something deeper. Music isn't just organized sound. It's energy in motion, vibration made audible, frequency that doesn't just reach your ears but penetrates your entire body.

I love harmony, but I also love dissonance. There's real beauty in tension and release, in how musical phrases tighten up before they resolve. Stand next to a speaker at a concert sometime and feel the kick drum massage your heart. That's not metaphor—those are literal sound waves interacting with your physical body, maybe even your electromagnetic field. We just happen to call it music.

How I Fell in Love with Sound

Long before any of this theoretical understanding, I was drawn to music for a simpler reason: how it made me feel.

I was a curious kid studying violin, falling asleep to classical music—not because it was boring, but because listening was such an active process for me. My brain would analyze every phrase, memorize every melody, carrying the music into my dreams. But I really fell in love with music the first time I heard jazz chords—specifically in the song "Stolen Moments." Something about those voicings reached inside me and grabbed

hold. I didn't understand why certain combinations of frequencies could do that. I just knew they did.

The truth is, musical sounds elicit specific feelings deep in our souls. Like a movie soundtrack, the right song at the right moment can bring tears or spark joy. Music motivates us, entertains us, soothes us.

And music can heal us.

The Combination Nobody Talks About

I discovered this during my first Ayahuasca journey.

Honestly, I thought the music was just a playlist of random hippie songs. But during that ceremony, something happened. The music became a lifeline, an anchor, a guide through the experience. When I got home and listened to those songs again, they weren't random anymore. Each one carried a piece of the journey—a memory, a feeling I could access again.

That's when I realized music has the power to help us recall and integrate the lessons from these experiences.

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It wasn't an immediate revelation that I should work with music in ceremonies. That understanding came gradually, over years. But once I saw what was happening, I knew my musical training had found its deeper purpose.

For those new to the psychedelic plant medicine world, these substances open up a new way of being. They allow you to see yourself and your situations from a different, more objective vantage point. They reveal blind spots. They enable better decisions moving forward after the experience ends. Some people describe meeting God during their journeys, or having profound divine encounters.

What remains are conscious memories and unconscious feelings we carry from this mental and spiritual journey. And one of the most powerful anchors for recalling and integrating this new way of being is the music experienced during the journey—the imprint it makes on our minds and hearts.

What People Discover Afterward

Here's what happens now after ceremonies: people confide in me, almost surprised, "I had no idea how important the music would be."

They ask about specific songs. They discover a new passion for actually listening to music—not as background noise, but the way they listened during their journey. With their whole being.

This is similar to how Alzheimer's patients' memories can be triggered by music from their teenage years. Totally lost in the fog of dementia, but once the music comes on, they instantly return—sometimes even regaining motor skills like playing piano as the power of music takes effect.

Music isn't just accompanying the healing. Music IS the medicine.

The Collective Field

The plants are powerful gifts of nature. But the next layer is equally important: the manner of partaking, the people in the room—often a group of perfect strangers, each carrying individual struggles and concerns.

Then the journey begins together. Eyes closed, but connected through the shared experience of the musical soundtrack everyone hears simultaneously.

This is where something remarkable happens. Everyone's listening to the same music in the room together, yet each person is in their own mental world. People share the space both physically and spiritually, in an almost telepathic way. Perhaps the plants awaken a part of us that's been dormant—nothing spooky or strange, just a forgotten capacity for deep connection.

The music becomes the invisible thread that weaves individual healing into collective transformation. Same frequencies, same melodies, same emotional landscapes unfolding in real time, creating a shared container for

profound personal work. When people journey together with shared sonic guidance, they become what I call a collective organism—individual yet unified, separate yet connected through sound.

Tension, Resolution, and the Art of Curation

Remember what I said about dissonance and release in music? That same principle applies to how I curate music for ceremonies.

I juxtapose songs—some that naturally flow together, others that are worlds apart yet somehow still complement each other smoothly. Understanding frequency from a musical perspective, knowing how harmony and dissonance work together, this allows me to guide the journey with sound.

It's about the resolution. How things tighten up before they let go. The same way a jazz chord creates tension before resolving, the progression of music during a ceremony creates a container for emotional release and integration.

The Sacred Question

Given this understanding—that music serves as both guide and anchor during encounters with expanded consciousness—a crucial question emerges:

What kind of music should be played during an encounter with the divine?

This isn't a question to take lightly. The wrong music can disrupt a healing process, create anxiety, or lead someone down an unhelpful path. But the right music, chosen and delivered with skill and intention, becomes medicine itself. It can support someone through their darkest moments, celebrate their breakthroughs, and help them integrate profound realizations.

The music doesn't just accompany the journey—it actively shapes it. Each song becomes a realm, a story, a space for the mind to explore. The progression from track to track guides the arc of healing, supporting the natural rhythm of the medicine while responding to the real-time needs of the participants.

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The sounds are not just background. The music becomes part of the medicine itself, woven together—curating a sonic journey, one frequency at a time.

In the chapters that follow, I'll share what I've discovered through ceremony work: how the right song at the right moment can give someone permission to surrender into the experience. That silence can be its own medicine. And that a single tone from a singing bowl can hold someone through their darkest moment.

The healing power of music in psychedelic ceremony isn't just about what you hear—it's about how sound becomes a vehicle for the soul's deepest healing.

But before we dive into how music shapes modern ceremony, we need to honor where this wisdom comes from—the ancient lineages that discovered these principles thousands of years before we had speakers and Spotify. Let me take you back to my first encounter with this ancient medicine, and how it changed everything.

Chapter Two

FROM ANCIENT WISDOM TO MODERN HEALING

My first encounter with plant medicine happened in 2021, in a large circular room called the Meloca in Florida. About 40 people sat dispersed around the perimeter—we had plenty of space, but I was still adjusting to being so close to strangers who might witness me at my most vulnerable. Ayahuasca is known for its purging effects, and I wasn't sure I wanted these new people to see that side of me.

I laugh now because everyone probably felt the same way. Part of what makes this medicine so powerful is that no matter how hard we try to maintain control, eventually we must surrender—and sure enough, we all

did. It's remarkable how quickly bonds form when we show our most vulnerable sides to each other.

The Sound of Ancient Medicine

After drinking from the cup, my musical ears immediately perked up, analyzing what was happening in the space. A playlist was running—songs with harmonica, guitar, and voices singing in what sounded like Spanish, or maybe some tribal language I couldn't identify. I later learned that much of what's sung in these spaces is "light language"—completely improvised words that carry emotion and energy without literal meaning.

Then my jazz training kicked in. Growing up studying scat singing, I'd spent years appreciating vocalists like Ella Fitzgerald and Bobby McFerrin—the way they could outline complex harmonies with pure syllables, turning their voices into improvisational instruments. I understood something essential: the human voice doesn't need literal words to carry meaning.

Even without the intricate chord progressions I was used to in jazz, I could appreciate what was happening here. These improvised sounds served the same fundamental purpose as the great scat singers, just in service of healing rather than harmonic exploration. Once I made that connection, I could embrace it.

I was there with purpose, but honestly, I didn't care for the music at first. Still, I kept an open mind. As the ceremony deepened, I realized there's an entire musical universe specifically created for healing work—songs I'd never heard, in styles completely foreign to my training. My initial reaction was that everything sounded old, which made sense given that these healing traditions span thousands of years.

The contrast with my regular work couldn't have been starker. Soon after that first ceremony, I was called to orchestrate music for the Oscars Awards show, even performing on stage with my trombone while Megan Thee Stallion rapped alongside the cast of singers from

Encanto. Two completely different musical worlds, serving entirely different purposes.

But here's what surprised me: despite my analytical mind tracking every musical choice, when the medicine truly took hold, I surrendered completely. The ceremony felt like a natural evolution, as if some part of me had been preparing for this moment my entire life.

From Analysis to Creation

As time passed, I realized the healing I'd experienced was becoming a more important part of my life. It actually worked—not in some vague spiritual sense, but in tangible, life-changing ways. And beyond that, I wanted to go deeper. This natural affinity to the space called me to question what I might create musically.

What would it sound like if I brought my production skills and formal training to this ancient tradition? I began imagining music that could bridge these worlds—something accessible to Western ears while preserving the sacred intention and sonic wisdom of indigenous

heritage. This exploration became a major focus of my musical and spiritual life, as they are now intertwined as one.

Three Paths to the Sacred

Music has always been my gateway to something deeper than entertainment. Growing up with quiet Catholic hymns taught me one path to the divine through contemplative introspection. Later, playing keyboard bass and organ in an African American Episcopal church revealed another path entirely—connecting through movement, energy, and emotion that affirms faith with physical certainty. Having orchestrated for gospel artists like Kirk Franklin, I understood how music could transform worship into transcendent experience.

But there's a third path now reemerging: direct communion with the sacred through plant medicine sacrament, as indigenous cultures have practiced for millennia. We're living through a collective reassessment of humanity's spiritual wisdom from all traditions, taking

what serves and forging new pathways that help us rediscover our hidden capacities.

This renaissance raises crucial questions: As plant medicine gains acceptance, what kind of music will serve this space? What sonic landscape will support modern humanity's dive into ancient healing practices? The laws are shifting, social acceptance is growing, and people are discovering they can address root causes of pain through substances that grow from the earth itself—medicine that reconnects us to the natural world.

Through this reconnection, we remember something essential: while we are spirits, we also are having an animal earthly experience. We can embrace our animalistic nature within the framework of natural law, bringing about peace and prosperity. We can let it flourish, aided by music that we experience together as community.

Why This Matters Now

And we need it. We're navigating a mental health crisis that's become so pervasive people have started accepting it as normal—but it's not. Genuine human connection feels increasingly rare. Prescription medications often mask symptoms without addressing root causes. We've built technology that connects us globally while somehow leaving us more isolated than ever. Something has to shift.

Plant medicine offers one path forward. Not the only path, but a powerful one that's helping people who've tried everything else. And as more people discover this work, the question of how to support their journeys—including what music serves healing versus what accidentally hinders it—becomes increasingly urgent.

Building Tomorrow's Sacred Sound

When more people realize they need this ancient wisdom, I hope artists like myself will have created modern, accessible soundscapes that naturally welcome

fresh ears—where traditional music flows seamlessly into new electronic creations. This evolution encompasses soothing, calming pieces for deep ceremonial work, and more energetic expressions like ecstatic dance that connect us to our tribal roots while moving emotion in dynamic, joyful ways.

Within medicine music, distinct subgenres have emerged, each serving different aspects of the healing journey. I've been pleasantly surprised to discover artists already building these bridges between ancient wisdom and contemporary expression. The field is alive with creative possibility—and in the next chapter, I'll map out this entire landscape so you can navigate it yourself.

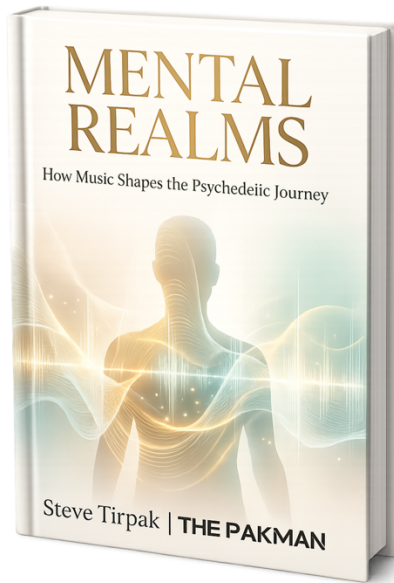
What to Expect

For anyone approaching plant medicine ceremony for the first time: don't expect Billboard hits, at least not initially. Open your ears to unfamiliar sounds. Each tone and pulse supports your inner journey with the medicine, helping shape your experience for maximum healing

benefit. As the music evolves, so will your musical palate. After experiencing how sound can guide, anchor, and transform, your entire relationship with music may shift.

The music you'll hear isn't background ambiance—it's medicine itself, carefully chosen to create safe spaces for emotions, memories, and revelations to emerge within the container of community and sacred intention. Each song becomes a realm where specific aspects of healing can unfold.

This isn't just about preserving tradition or creating something entirely new. It's about honoring the wisdom of our ancestors while meeting people where they are, creating sonic bridges that allow ancient healing to serve modern hearts.



You've just scratched the surface..

In the full book, you'll discover:

- My six-folder system for real-time ceremony curation
- Why song length can trap—or free—someone's mind
- The "arsenal of intensity" for trauma work
- How silence became my most powerful tool
- Stories from the field that could only be learned through experience

Get the complete book at

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