

**PAULINE OLIVEROS**

**SONIC  
MEDITATIONS**

Dedicated to the ♀ Ensemble and Amelia Earhart

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A M E R I C A N M U S I C

# SONIC MEDITATIONS

by Pauline Oliveros

## INTRODUCTION I

Sonic Meditations are intended for group work over a long period of time with regular meetings. No special skills are necessary. Any persons who are willing to commit themselves can participate. The ♀ Ensemble to whom these meditations are dedicated has found that non-verbal meetings intensify the results of these meditations and help provide an atmosphere which is conducive to such activity. With continuous work some of the following becomes possible with Sonic Meditations: Heightened states of awareness or expanded consciousness, changes in physiology and psychology from known and unknown tensions to relaxations which gradually become permanent. These changes may represent a tuning of mind and body. The group may develop positive energy which can influence others who are less experienced. Members of the Group may achieve greater awareness and sensitivity to each other. Music is a welcome by-product of this activity.

## INTRODUCTION II

Pauline Oliveros has abandoned composition/performance practice as it is usually established today for Sonic Explorations which include everyone who wants to participate. She attempts to erase the subject/object or performer/audience relationship by returning to ancient forms which preclude spectators. She is interested in communication among all forms of life, through Sonic Energy. She is especially interested in the healing power of Sonic Energy and its transmission within groups.

All societies admit the power of music or sound. Attempts to control what is heard in the community are universal. For instance, music in the church has always been limited to particular forms and styles in accordance with the decrees of the Church Fathers. Music in the courts has been controlled through the tastes of patrons. Today Muzak is used to increase or stimulate consumption in merchandising establishments.

Sonic Meditations are an attempt to return the control of sound to the individual alone, and within groups especially for humanitarian purposes; specifically healing.

Each Sonic Meditation is a special procedure for the following:

1. Actually making sounds
2. Actively imagining sounds
3. Listening to present sounds
4. Remembering sounds

Because of the special procedures involved, most all of the meditations are available to anyone who wishes to participate regardless, or in spite, of musical training. All that is required is a willing commitment to the given conditions.

Sound making during the meditations is primarily vocal, sometimes hand clapping or other body sounds, sometimes using sound producing objects and instruments.

Sound imagining is encouraged through the use of various questions designed to trigger auditory fantasy. Individuals are then asked to share what was heard inwardly, with members of the group using any means to describe the experience. Conditions given for listening to present sounds are intended to expand awareness of the auditory environment, both within and without of the individual.

Auditory memory is also encouraged by trigger questions with subsequent sharing of these memories in the group. Some of the meditations involve body movement as well. The term meditation is used simply to mean dwelling with or upon an idea, an object, or lack of object without distraction, or divided attention.

Healing can occur in relation to the above activities when 1) individuals feel the common bond with others through a shared experience. 2) when one's inner experience is made manifest and accepted by others. 3) when one is aware of and in tune with one's surroundings. 4) when one's memories, or values, are integrated with the present and understood by others.

In process a kind of music occurs naturally. Its beauty is not through intention, but is intrinsically the effectiveness of its healing power. This may be felt by the group, and the music relates to the people who make it through participation and sharing, as a stream or river whose waters offer refreshment and cleansing to those who find it.

### Teach Yourself to Fly

*Any number of persons sit in a circle facing the center. Illuminate the space with dim blue light. Begin by simply observing your own breathing. Always be an observer. Gradually allow your breathing to become audible. Then gradually introduce your voice. Allow your vocal cords to vibrate in any mode which occurs naturally. Allow the intensity to increase very slowly. Continue as long as possible naturally, and until all others are quiet, always observing your own breath cycle.*

*Variation: Translate voice to an instrument.*

—11—

*Search for a natural or artificial canyon, forest or deserted municipal quad. Perform Teach Yourself to Fly in this space.*

### **Pacific Tell**

*Find your place in a darkened indoor space or a deserted out-of-doors area. Mentally form a sound image. Assume that the magnitude of your concentration on, or the vividness of this sound image will cause one or more of the group to receive this sound image by telepathic transmission. Visualize the person to whom you are sending. Rest after your attempted telepathic transmission by becoming mentally blank. When or if a sound image different from your own forms in your mind, assume that you are receiving from some one else, then make that sound image audible. Rest again by becoming mentally blank or return to your own mental sound image. Continue as long as possible or until all others are quiet.*

### **Telepathic Improvisation**

*To the musicians with varied or like instruments:*

*Tuning — each musician in turn sits or stands in front of the audience for a few minutes. The audience is asked to observe the musician carefully and try to imagine the sound of his or her instrument. The audience is instructed to close eyes and attempt to visualize the musician, then send a sound to the musician by hearing it mentally. The musician waits until he or she receives an impression of a sound mentally, then he or she produces the sound. Members of the audience who have successfully “hit the target” raise their hands as feedback to the musician.*

*After the tuning exercise the musicians distribute themselves throughout the space among the audience members and utilize the following instructions:*

*Play only long sustained tones*

*Play only when you are actually hearing a pitch, or pitches, mentally*

*Assume you are either sending or receiving*

*If you are sending, try to visualize the person to whom you are sending. If you are receiving, listen for the sound and visualize the sender. The quality and dynamics of the tones you play may be influenced by your feelings, emotional or body sensations, or even impressions of colors, which might come from the audience members. Continue until it seems "time" to stop.*

*To the observers: Try mentally to influence the musicians by wishing for one or more of the following elements: (the musicians are instructed to play only long sustained tones)*

- A. Focus mentally on a specific pitch. If you are sending, visualize the musician to whom you are sending. If you are receiving, listen for the sound which matches yours. Also visualize the musician.*
- B. Focus mentally on stopping or starting a sound at a particular time.*
- C. Focus mentally on loudness or softness of tone production.*
- D. Focus mentally on the quality of the tone.*
- E. Focus mentally on an emotional character for the tone.*

*This meditation is best done in very low illumination, or with eyes closed.*

—IV—

*Divide into two or more groups. Each group must have a tape recorder and be sound isolated from the other groups. The distance might be small or great, i.e., thousands of miles or light years. Each group then performs Pacific Tell or Telepathic Improvisation, attempting inter group or interstellar telepathic transmission. A specific time period may be pre-arranged. Each group tape records its own sounds during the telepathic transmission period for later comparison.*

*Variation: Instead of working in groups each participant works as an isolated soloist.*

—V—

Native

*Take a walk at night. Walk so silently that the bottoms of your feet become ears.*

### Sonic Rorschach

*With a white or random noise generator, flood a darkened room with white noise for thirty minutes or much longer. The band width of the white noise should be as broad as the limits of the audio range. A pre-recorded tape or a mechanical source such as an air compressor may be substituted for the generator, if necessary or desired. All participants should be comfortably seated or lying down for the duration of the meditation. Half way through, introduce one brilliant flash of light or one loud, short pulse. The high intensity flash source could be a photo lamp flash or one pulse of a strobe light. If a sound pulse is substituted for the light flash, it must necessarily be of higher amplitude than the white noise.*

- Variations:*
- a) *Find a natural source of white noise such as a waterfall or the ocean and go there for this meditation.*
  - b) *If the white noise generator is flat, equalize until the source is apparently flat for the human ear.*
  - c) *Do this meditation with a different band width represented in subsequent meditations such as one octave at 5k to 10khz.*

Removing the Demon or Getting Your Rocks Off.

*Sit in a circle with persons facing in and out alternately. If the number in the group is odd, seat the left over person in the center. Each person except the center person has a pair of resonant rocks. Begin the meditation by establishing mentally a tempo as slow as possible. Each person begins independently to strike the rocks together full force maintaining the imagined tempo. When enough energy is present, shout a pre-meditated word. Once selected, the word remains the same. The shout is free of the established tempo, and may occur one or more times during the meditation. The center person is without rocks and selects a word, phrase or sentence to say or intone repeatedly either silently or audibly for the duration of the meditation.*

- Variations:*
- a) *Persons without rocks may surround the circle and follow the same instructions as the center person, independently.*
  - b) *Persons may repeat mentally, or actually, one body movement as slowly as possible. One body movement may be simple or very complicated as long as it is continuous and can be repeated exactly as a cycle. Kinetic participants could include the shout or the repeated word, phrase or sentence.*
  - c) *Do this meditation in an outdoor environment. Move slowly away from the circle. Move anywhere in the environment but keep in audible contact with at least one other person. Gradually return to the beginning circle.*

**The Flaming Indian**  
**For Gerald Shapiro and Margot Blum**

*Tape record a selected environment alone or with a group. Place the microphone carefully in one location. Do the environmental dialogue mentally while you are recording. Reinforce everything you hear mentally. When the meditation is complete, make a translation of the environmental dialogue in the following way: Reinforce the pitches of the recorded sounds with vocal, instrumental, electronic or a combination of these sources. The resulting translation may exist in one or more channels as the translated sounds only or a combination of the translation and original dialogue. A new dialogue is then performed in the same or a different environment with the recorded translation and a soloist or a group, either vocal, instrumental or electronic or any combination. The live dialogue should include the sounds of the live environment as well as the recorded translation.*

### Environmental Dialogue

*Each person finds a place to be, either near to or distant from the others, either indoors or out-of-doors. Begin the meditation by observing your own breathing. As you become aware of sounds from the environment, gradually begin to reinforce the pitch of the sound source. Reinforce either vocally, mentally or with an instrument. If you lose touch with the source, wait quietly for another. Reinforce means to strengthen or sustain. If the pitch of the sound source is out of your range, then reinforce it mentally.*

ENVIRONMENTAL DIALOGUE FOR THE NEW HAMPSHIRE FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA  
To Mary and Tom Nee

*On Lake Winnepausaukee at sunup or sundown, players of the orchestra are dispersed heterogeneously in small groups in boats all over the lake. Players begin by observing your own breathing. As you become aware of sounds in the environment, gradually begin to reinforce the pitch of the sound source or its resonance. If you become louder than the source, diminuendo until you can hear it again. If the source disappears listen quietly for another. If the source is intermittent your pitch reinforcement may be continuous until the source stops. Aural awareness of the source is necessary at all times even though your reinforcement may be momentarily louder. Reinforcement is distinctly different than imitation. Only strengthen or sustain pitch. Allow the boats to drift unless guidance past obstacles or away from shore becomes necessary.*

### The Greeting

*Informed persons should begin the greeting at least half-an-hour or more before a scheduled meeting or program.*

*After you are seated and comfortable, allow a tone to come into mind. Keep returning your attention to this same tone. Everytime a person or persons enter this space, greet them by singing the tone, as you were greeted when you entered this space. Continue this meditation until all are present.*

Have you ever heard the sound of an iceberg melting?

*Begin this meditation with the greeting meditation (IX). At the designated time for all persons to be present, begin an eight to fifteen minute imperceptible dimming of the house lights down to as dark as possible. When the lights are about halfway down begin the flood of white noise at the threshold of audibility. Slowly make an imperceptible crescendo to a pre-determined sound level, safe for human ears. Approximately twenty minutes later introduce one brilliant light flash. After an hour from the beginning has passed, begin projections on the walls of colorful mandalas, patterns resembling the aurora borealis, or simply colors of the spectrum. The light intensity of these projections should be no greater than the threshold of visibility or just noticeable. These may continue for approximately thirty minutes. Thirty minutes before the white noise ends the space should be illuminated by white light slowly over about eight minutes from the threshold of visibility to as brilliant as possible. The brilliance must exceed normal house lighting and approach the intensity of daylight. The end of the light and sound should be sudden and synchronous. Darkness and silence should be maintained for ten minutes or more, then illuminate the space with dim blue light for continued meditation in silence and finally exit of the participants. The duration of this meditation is approximately two to four hours or more. All adjustments of light and sound intensity should be pre-set and preferably voltage controlled in order that all present may participate in the meditation, and that activities extraneous to meditation may be avoided. Participants must be comfortable, either sitting or lying down.*

*Variation: If multiple speakers are used for the production of white noise, one or two persons per speaker could perform meditation movements such as tai chi in front of the speakers at a distance of two to four feet thus creating sound shadows. The sound shadows could gradually be complemented by visible shadows activated by just noticeable light sources. The duration of this part of the meditation could be approximately thirty to forty minutes and succeed or overlap the just noticeable projected images.*

--X--

*Sit in a circle with your eyes closed. Begin by observing your own breathing. Gradually form a mental image of one person who is sitting in the circle. Sing a long tone to that person. Then sing the pitch that person is singing. Change your mental image to another person and repeat until you have contacted every person in the circle one or more times.*

—XI—

### Bowl Gong

*Sit in a circle with a Japanese bowl gong in the center. One person, when ready to begin, hands the striker to someone else in the circle. That person strikes the gong. Each person maintains the pitch mentally for as long as possible. If the image is lost, then the person who has lost it, hands the striker to someone else in the circle. This person again activates the gong in order to renew the mental pitch image. Continue as long as possible.*

**One Word**

*Choose one word. Dwell silently on this word. When you are ready, explore every sound in this word extremely slowly, repeatedly. Gradually, imperceptibly bring the word up to normal speed, then continue until you are repeating the word as fast as possible. Continue at top speed until "it stops."*

# **SONIC MEDITATIONS XII - XXV**

All of these Sonic Meditations are intended to begin with observation of the breath cycle.

PAULINE OLIVEROS

One Word

*Choose a word. Listen to it mentally. Slowly and gradually begin to voice this word by allowing each tiny part of it to sound extremely prolonged. Repeat for a long time.*

- Variations:*
- 1. As above, but increase the speed of each repetition as imperceptibly as possible. Continue beyond the normal pronunciation of the word until the repetitions are as fast as possible. Continue.*
  - 2. As variation one but when the top speed has been reached and maintained, reverse the process by slowing down again as imperceptibly as possible until the original utterance returns.*

Energy Changes

(For Elaine Summers' movement meditation, Energy Changes)

*Listen to the environment as a drone. Establish contact mentally with all of the continuous external sounds and include all of your own continuous internal sounds, such as blood pressure, heart beat and nervous system. When you feel prepared, or when you are triggered by a random or intermittent sound from the external or internal environment, make any sound you like in one breath, or a cycle of like sounds. When a sound or a cycle of sounds, is completed re-establish mental connection with the drone, which you first established before making another sound or cycle of like sounds.*

--XIV--

### Tumbling Song

*Make any vocal sound, but always go downward in pitch from the initial attack. The initial attack may begin at any pitch level. Go downward in a glissando or in discrete steps continuously. Go any distance in range, at any speed, dynamic or quality, but the breath determines the maximum time length of any downward gesture.*

### Zina's Circle

*Stand together in a circle, with eyes closed facing the center. One person is designated, the transmitter. After observing the breathing cycle, individually, gradually join hands. Then slowly move back so that all arms are stretched out and the size of the circle increased. Next stretch the arms towards center and move in slowly. Finally move back to the normal sized circle, with hands still joined, standing so that arms are relaxed at sides. Return attention to breathing. When the time seems right, the transmitter starts a pulse that travels around the circle, by using the right hand to squeeze the left hand of the person next to her. The squeeze should be quickly and sharply made, to resemble a light jolt of electricity. The squeeze must be passed from left hand to right hand and on to the next person as quickly as possible. The action should become so quick that it happens as a reflex, before the person has time to consciously direct the squeeze. Simultaneously with the squeeze, each person must shout hah. This shout must come up from the center of the body (somewhere a little below the navel) before passing through the throat. There must be complete abdominal support for the voice. When the first cycle is complete, the transmitter waits for a long time to begin the next cycle. When the reaction time around the circle has become extremely short, the transmitter makes the cycles begin closer and closer together until a new transmission coincides with the end of a cycle, then continue trying to speed up the reaction time. If attention and awareness are maintained, the circle depending on its size, should be shouting almost simultaneously.*

- Variations:
1. *Reverse the direction of the pulse using the left hand to transmit and the right hand to receive.*
  2. *Reverse the direction of each cycle.*
  3. *Each person chooses which direction to send the pulse. The transmitter continues to control the beginning and ending of a cycle.*

—XVI—

*Begin simultaneously with the others. Sing any pitch. The maximum length of the pitch is determined by the breath. Listen to the group. Locate the center of the group sound spectrum. Sing your pitch again and make a tiny adjustment upward or downward, but tuning toward the center of the sound spectrum. Continue to tune slowly, in tiny increments toward the center of the spectrum. Each time sing a long tone with a complete breath until the whole group is singing the same pitch. Continue to drone on that central pitch for about the same length of time it took to reach the unison. Then begin adjusting or tuning away from the center pitch as the original beginning pitch was.*

*Variation: Follow the same instructions but return to the original beginning pitch.*

Ear Ly  
(For Kenneth Gaburo's NMCE)

1. *Enhance or paraphrase the auditory environment so perfectly that a listener cannot distinguish between the real sounds of the environment and the performed sounds.*
2. *Become performers by not performing.*

—XVIII—

## Re Cognition

*Listen to a sound until you no longer recognize it.*

–XIX–

*Lie flat on your back or sit comfortably. Open your eyes widely, then let your eyelids close extremely slowly. Become aware of how your eyelids are closing. When your eyelids are closed, turn your eyes slowly from left to right, around, up and down. Let your eyes rest comfortably in their sockets. Try to be aware of the muscles behind the eyes and of the distance from these muscles to the back of the head. Cover your eyes with your palms and shut out all the light. Become aware of all the sounds in the environment. When you think you have established contact with all of the sounds in the external environment, very gradually, introduce your fingers into your ears or cover them with your palms. Try to shut out all external sound. Listen carefully to the internal sounds of your own body working. After a long time gradually open your ears and include the sounds of the external environment.*

—XX—

## Your Voice

*Think of the sound of your own voice. What is its fundamental pitch? What is its range? What is its quality? What does it express no matter what you might be verbalizing or singing? What was the original sound of your voice before you learned to sound the way you sound now?*

—XXI—

*What constitutes your musical universe?*

*Think of some familiar sound. Listen to it mentally. Try to find a metaphor for this sound. What are the real and imaginary possible contexts for this sound? How many ways does or could this sound affect you? or how do you feel about it? What is its effect upon you? How can this sound be described?*

*As a group meditation, sit in a circle. Find a sound common to all, then ask the above questions one by one. Allow plenty of time between each question. When all of the questions have been asked, the group shares their answers.*

*Variations: Try the same meditation with*

- 1. an imaginary sound*
- 2. a live sound*
- 3. a remembered sound*

**Pure Noise**

*Sing the purest tone possible, that is, with the fewest partials, in a comfortable register. Gradually change the quality of this tone to include more and more partials until it approaches or becomes a noise band. Continue as long as possible, going from pure tone to noise band with each breath.*

*Variation: Reverse the above process.*

—XXIV—

*Focus your attention on an external source of constant sound. Imagine alternate sounds while remaining aware of the external source.*

**Your Name**  
**The Signature Meditation**

1. *Dwell on your name. Write it down as slowly as possible.*
2. *Visualize your name as you sign it mentally.*
  - a. *with eyes closed*
  - b. *with eyes open*
3. *Visualize your name in different kinds of writing, script and printing.*
  - a. *vary the sizes from microscopic to gigantic*
  - b. *vary the colors and backgrounds*
  - c. *vary the dimensions from 2 to 3*
4. *Visualize or actually sign your name backwards, forwards, upside down, inside out.*
  - a. *with the right hand*
  - b. *with the left hand*
  - c. *with both hands simultaneously mirroring each other*