

# THE POWER OF SONG

BY MICHAEL STILLWATER

There are few immune to the power of song.

Even those with the coolest demeanor can be undone by the impact of a well-turned melody.

When set to music, learning is easier- a proven phenomenon witnessed when working with children. How did we learn the alphabet? On the other hand, the infectious nature of music can be used to any end- have you ever struggled unsuccessfully to unhook an advertising jingle, TV theme or pop song chorus that became looped inside your head?

My first song was written while strumming two chords on my mother's Silvertone. Being left-handed, I reversed the strings within minutes of trying to play the 'right' way. This also temporarily eradicated mom's playing- until I bought my own guitar.

My first sing-along was in a high school hallway, during school hours- much to the consternation of the vice-principle. Having moved from D.C. to California for my senior year, I performed Neil Young's 'Down By the River I Shot My Baby' in a Saratoga coffeehouse. In the midst of singing it dawned on me that I didn't shoot my baby- and had no intention to.

I made a conscious decision that night, simultaneously shaping my music and path- to tell my story in song, and sing words aligning with what I wanted for myself and others.

Thirsty for spiritual and artistic development, I studied composition with W.A. Mathieu, director of the Sufi Choir, with further studies at the University of Oregon. I so much wanted to impress people with fast lead guitar, elaborate chords and clever rhymes.

My momentum in this direction, however, was thankfully derailed upon discovering the joy of chanting.

While spiritual practice is primarily an inward affair, shared practices fulfill an innate impulse for connection. A core motivator for my music has been to connect with others in a deeper way. Singing lyrics of affirmation and inner reflection with others became a practice for cultivating the remembrance of this connection.

If you are on a path of inner growth, I encourage you to integrate singing into your practice. And when people gather to sing, join in. Don't let anything, whether fear of other's judgment or your own self-criticism, keep you from cultivating your voice as an instrument for your own healing, joy and freedom.

For an example of contemporary chant, listen to 'ChantWave' online. Let your spirituality and your singing voice come together. It is inspirational, healing, fun, and a beautiful way of connecting to yourself and others, all at the same time.

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*An award-winning musical artist, inspirational educator and co-creator of Graceful Passages and Care for the Journey, Stillwater lives in Switzerland and tours worldwide.*