



Photos courtesy of Dr. Avi Sussman

AVI SUSSMAN

Healer, mystic, musician

by Phyllis Feldman

I admit I was more than a bit skeptical when I first heard that Dr. Avi Sussman was treating his patients with large doses of Ravel and Debussy. But, after visiting his Richmond Hill clinic, I realized that what he was prescribing was not so different than the self-medicating I had done all my life. Listening to a specific genre of music to enhance or commiserate a mood—from Chopin, to Simon and Garfunkel and recently Joan Osborne, always worked for me.

Sussman, a naturopathic doctor and chiropractor, and principal tubist for the York and Oakville Symphony Orchestras, and his research partner, Karen Moore, a professional pianist and music teacher, both believe that music is an effective tool for emotional body healing. Through Harmonic Resonance Research Inc., the musical arm of the practice, they arrange and perform classical and popular music for individual and group sessions, specifically adapted to put patients "in touch with their own soul's purpose and potential."

After graduating from the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College in 1979, Sussman began practicing traditional chiropractic medicine, and learned very early on that there is no such thing as a textbook case. "The formal training only gives you the credentials to go out and do the work, but I soon realized how little we actually know."

To add depth and scope to his practice, and enhance the path he was forging as a healer, Sussman sought techniques and methods from a great number of additional sources, emphasizing mind-body medicine, psycho-spiritual approaches, aboriginal healing and intuitive rebalancing of the human energy field. He studied kinesiology and naturopathy, graduating from the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine in 1987.

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Sussman says, "A person who is presenting themselves in front of me is the sum total of their genetic makeup, life experiences, traumas and successes, as well as their exposure to toxins in the environment, diet, lifestyle and self identification. And they have compensated for many of these factors in order to be where they are now."

"A healthy mind and body starts with a healthy energy field, which is vibrant, well organized and free flowing," says Sussman. "I was working with autistic, dyslexic and highly allergic children, cancer patients, and people with chronic diseases, and found the common denominator was that their energy fields were way out of whack."

Sussman says, "Because music is an organized energetic structure which resonates, it is able to repattern the disordered structures in the body, releasing the build up of emotional sludge and with it the specific physical problem. When you feel like you have hit a brick wall and can go no further, music opens the door to change."

"Music first found me when I was 5 years old, when I picked up a harmonica and my parents decided I had some talent." Sussman then took up classical guitar, and in junior high started playing the tuba in the school band. "Music was the profession I left behind because I figured I couldn't make a living from it, but I continued performing in community orchestras for pure enjoyment."



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A classically trained musician, with a Bachelor of Music in Performance from the University of Toronto and an A.R.C.T., (teaching certificate), Moore performed regular stints at popular Toronto venues, and was resident pianist at The Top of Toronto Restaurant and Bristol Place Hotel in the early '80s. Moore also spent 7 years in a duo with Canadian tenor Mark DuBois, appearing at concerts and festivals in the Toronto and Montreal areas.

Moore first met Sussman in 1990, when she accompanied a friend to an appointment at his Thornhill office. Subsequently becoming his patient, Moore soon established a strong connection with the work Sussman was doing, and took on the position of naturopathic assistant.

"In 1997 I started feeling that Avi and I should also work together musically, and asked him if we could play together sometime," says Moore. "We started practicing, realized we really

had something, and began recording our work. We decided to call our duo "Harmonic Design Konsorte."

Sussman and Moore explain why their collaboration worked so well: "The tuba and piano together encompass the entire low to high vibratory frequency range. The energy of the tuba resonates positive change. As a foundational instrument, the tuba's sound is multidirectional, interpenetrating cells and tissues in all directions. It operates dynamically throughout the entire human energy field. The piano connects and aligns the foundational soul design to synchronize the outer personality with the character and personality of the higher self."

When a patient comes in with a specific complaint, Sussman guides them to tune in to a higher form of consciousness, to be able to assess what the core of the problem is. Through his intuitive gifts, he is able to interpret the symptoms being presented to him.

"Because I am able to tune in to the energy fields, says Sussman, I became aware that I could bring through information that was relevant to problems that were being studied in the mind or body. There are different transitional periods of life—puberty, menopause, old age—where we have the opportunity to shift significant amounts of energy. We've developed a process which utilizes music to help bring the changes through positively. If we are not con-

Photos courtesy of Dr. Avi Sussman

scious of our limiting thoughts and beliefs, these transitional shifts can be negative, creating disturbances and deterioration in our health.

Sussman explains: "Each piece of music has certain characteristics that will bring up particular thoughts and emotions, i.e., grief, joy, freedom. And we perform the music specifically for that reason, with the purpose of shifting the negative energy." In a similar fashion, music can be used to resonate positive feelings and allow them to be expressed in the body.



Sussman and Moore select many of their therapeutic interludes from Johannes Brahms, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Maurice Ravel, Claude Debussy, Camille Saint-Saens and Reinhold Gliere. They recently recorded and now include Max Bruch's arrangement for "Kol Nidre," originally written for cello and orchestra in the late 1800s.

Sussman explains that "Kol Nidre, the prayer recited in synagogue on the eve of Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, is about releasing one from old vows. People enter into vows at different points in their life with all good intention, but sometimes find the vows are no longer applicable 5, 10, or 20 years later. When they are broken we are faced with all kinds of self-judgment and get stuck trying to work through it. This particular music seems to help release and move people forward."

Sussman, from a traditional Jewish middle-class home, and Moore who grew up in a Jewish neighbourhood in North York, both feel the pull of communal inclusiveness, as well as the sense of connection and ethos that Jewish music evokes. From age 7, Moore studied harmony and music composition with the late Canadian composer Srul Irving Glick, and speaks fondly of him as "my mentor and inspi-

ration for becoming a professional musician."

"We would like to get our information and healing music out to the masses, in our CD's where people can listen to them as needed" says Moore. "We realize that we can only reach a certain population in our practice. We



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want to extend this to a wide spectrum of the general public, and feel it is our calling to do just that."

In order to generate funds for further research and development, Sussman and Moore created a full line of all-natural first aid kits under the banner of Doctor Avi's RemediKits. The broad range of naturopathic products include The Children's Kit, The Sports & Trauma Kit, The Cough Cold and Flu Kit, The Great Outdoors Kit and The Home & Travel Kit. All come in a reusable pouch, with an easy to follow Remedy Guide explaining all ingredients and their application. Doctor Avi's RemediKits are sold in healthfood and outfitter stores, as well as on Sussman's website, www.doctoravi.com.

In order to continue to expand their collaborative research and creative output, Sussman and Moore require additional sources of funding. "We welcome suggestions and proposals from Lifestyles readers for mar-

keting and distribution of both our music and our RemediKits. We are also seeking donations and/or philanthropic sources for ongoing support of this valuable cutting edge work."

As I settle in my seat dead center of two giant speakers to fully experience the musical selection I have

chosen, I look around at the composer-lined walls to see Rachmaninoff staring at me - as if he knew how enveloped I get in turbulent music. Ignoring him, I choose to listen to "The Swan," from Camille Saint-Saens's Carnival of the Animals, because Sussman tells me it induces a feeling of airiness and freedom.

The piece is as promised - very pretty, intertwining piano and tuba, the high with the low, the melody lifting me higher with each bar. When the music comes to an end, I thank Sussman and Moore for a most enjoyable session, and exit the studio. As I say my goodbyes and step out the door, I realize my umbrella is in the car. I hope the rain won't dampen my feathers. lifestyles