

SACRED LISTENING TO MUSIC: MUSIC AND THE EARTH COMMUNITY
ECO CONTEMPLATIVE ONLINE WORKSHOP - THREE SESSIONS, WEEKLY -
FEBRUARY 2022

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This workshop and the outline of its three sessions, including Thomas Berry quotes matched with the sessions, and the song lyrics for each session, may serve as a model for others in the DTN who are working with music to elicit expressions in participants of contemporary dreams for Earth community. There were 20-25 participants in each session. Participants were free to attend one or all three sessions. The sessions ran for an online, one session per week for three weeks

Anyone who is perusing this resource is welcome to adapt it to their own context for offering their own workshop. I am happy to be contacted for any assistance or advice.

While the three contemporary songs chosen for these three sessions were unique to the sessions as they were conducted in February 2022, many other choices of songs are possible in order to achieve the goals of the sessions. The choice of songs and their lyrics needs to be made with care. The songs I drew on made a wonderful trio. Participants could attend one session or all three sessions.

The songs I chose:

Session One: Trumpeter Swans - Peter Meyer

Session Two: Love Song to a Bird - Diana Jones

Session Three: Underneath the Stars - originally by Kate Rusby (I used the VOCES 8 version of the song).

The songs can be found on any musical platform, Spotify, Apple Music...

The schedule for each session is included here as well. It outlines the steps in the process of *music divina*, sacred listening to music with which I work. This process is not original. It is an adaption of a process usually applied to the sacred reading of scripture texts but it is being adapted today to poetry, music, cinema, the visual arts.

In each session we listened to the song 4 times in all, using the steps in the process as outlined in the schedule for the session.

The Thomas Berry quotes were read slowly and contemplatively following on the third playing of the song in each session.

SESSION ONE OUTLINE

Please be on time

I encourage you to be on time - give yourself time to open your computer and to set up zoom, at least 10 minutes...

What you need to bring

Please bring a copy of the song lyrics with you, the quote/s from Thomas Berry related to the song, and your journal and pens, sketchpad and crayons etc. There will be time to write or to draw, and to sit in silence.

Contemplative/poetic process

The process is contemplative and reflective. The invitation is to engage with an open heart and to listen into what is arising in you by way of feeling, imagination, image, symbol, memory, association, expression, connection...

These sessions are not about explaining the song, or analysing the song, or agreeing or disagreeing with others about its meanings. They are not about solving the enormous challenges that beset our devastated EARTH.

The sessions are about sacred listening to music and where your own heart and imagination are stirred in the sharing of the dream of a new universe story, as imagined by one of the most important thinkers of our time, Thomas Berry. We are in a sense entering a shared dream space together, imagining an Earth Community where, in some words of Thomas Berry:

- “every existence is a mode of divine presence”;
- “the universe is a communion and a community. We ourselves are that communion become conscious of itself”;
- “the greatest human discoveries of the future will be the discovery of human intimacy with all those other modes of being that live with us on this planet...and reveal that numinous world whence all things come into being”;
- “We are not lacking the dynamic forces needed to create the future...But this energy in an ultimate sense, is not ours by domination but by invocation”.

Opening Breathing with Earth Meditation

WELCOME: welcome to each one of you and as we come together I want to acknowledge whatever it is that took your attention in the flyer describing these sessions, and invite your openness and hospitality to this group gathered today for whatever way it meets you in your being here and in the wider kinship of life.

Invite some slow, smooth breaths - to enjoy the luscious centering practice of attuning to our breathing.

Go slowly, there is no rush, and with each breath in, and out, draw your attention more fully into this space and time.....

Between each of my spoken invitations, I will pause for you to take another breath in the silence

Let's begin by simply taking a slow smooth deep in- breath together and an even slower out breath with a sense of gratitude for our breathing together with the breathing together of all living things.

.....

And let's take another deep slow breath in as we breathe in gratitude, and breathe out hope

....

And a final breath together in as we breathe in hope and breathe out love.

1. Welcome
2. Acknowledgement of country
3. Group coherence
4. Facilitator's context - Deeptime Network...Thomas Berry...
5. The process - invitational only, deep listening - about *imagining the Earth Community* (not about solving or analysis)
6. First playing of the song - listening for a word or phrase that shimmers, beckons or stirs in you in some way, that seems especially ripe with meaning - write in your journal

7. Invitation to share to the whole group. The word or phrase that shimmers for me is....
([elaboration or explanation required at this point - you are just taking a 'nibble' at the song])
8. Second playing of song - allow feelings, images, memories, symbols to arise...what *Earth Dreaming* in your own heart is addressed by the *Earth Dreaming* in the song, allow the word or phrase that has spoken to you to unfold in your imagination and speak more deeply - write in journal.
9. Turn to passages from Thomas Berry - to be read slowly...
10. Third playing of song
11. Silent time - listening as deeply as possible into the Earthsong in your own heart. This is a time for the deepest desires, aspirations, longings and intentions for *Earth Community* to arise in you; is there an insight here for you about your sense of the Sacred, Earth, Kinship, the Holy, however you might want to state this in your own way; is there a commitment or decision arising; *Earthsong in my heart....The Dream of Earth in my heart...an action I feel invited to take as I listen with all my heart to Earthsong in me today is....*
12. Invitation to speak into the whole group, 'Earthsong in me...*The Dream of Earth in me...*
13. Session Two - CD Diana Jones Song To A Refugee - encourage you to listen to the whole CD before we meet. The particular song for Session Two on this CD is 'Love Song to a Bird'
14. Final playing of 'Trumpeter Swans' - shared silence.

Thomas Berry Quotes Session One

We are aware that:

1. The natural world is the larger sacred community to which we belong. DE, p. 81.
2. The universe is composed of subjects to be communed with, not of objects to be exploited. ET, p. 38.
3. Without the soaring birds, the great forests, the flowering fields...we become impoverished in all that makes us human. GW, p. 200.
4. To wantonly destroy a living species is to silence forever a divine voice. DE, p. 46.
5. As human beings we come into being as an integral part of the millionfold diversity of life expression. ET p.34.
6. This interior world of...spirit...provides the basis of that interior presence that we experience with each other throughout the world of the living. ET, p.40.

Trumpeter Swans - singer songwriter Peter Mayer

"Trumpeter Swans" is a song I wrote for my photographer friend Craig Blacklock when he published a book called "The Enduring Gift", a collection of photos celebrating the St. Croix and Namekagon Rivers. I live near the St. Croix River here in Minnesota, and sometimes see these magnificent birds flying overhead. They are one of the largest birds in North America, with a wingspan of up to 8 feet. When I first wrote the song, the lyrics spoke of a single swan as it passes by. But Craig and his wife Honey pointed out that they virtually always see the birds flying in pairs, so I changed the lyric from "bird" to "birds". I hope you enjoy this piece, which I think of as a celebration of nature and our connection to it.

At the first light did I wake
And put on the cares of the day
The worries, the news, the thousand to-dos

And ventured out into the morning

The day had grown brighter by then
When I heard a sound overhead
A trumpeting call, and that's when I saw
Saw you fly over me, great white birds

I stood staring up at the sky
And watched you as you floated by
The sight of you made time go away
And time took a long time returning

And in that long moment it seemed
You reached out and swept my heart clean
Of all its heartaches and put in their place
The beauty and grace of you, great white birds

Trumpet the sun with its light on your wings
Trumpet the wind, the kinship of things
Trumpet this bright, shimmering life
This magical flight, day into night
Everything turning

Trumpet the sun with its light on your wings
The summer and fall, the winter and spring
Trumpet the trees, the river, the sea
That brought you and me, to which we will be
One day returning

It hasn't been too many years
Since you nearly disappeared
But the wise and the brave struggled to save you
Now you are saving me, great white birds

[released August 23, 2021
Music and Lyrics by Peter Mayer]

SESSION TWO

Our inquiry is what is Earth community (as envisioned by Thomas Berry) asking of us at this time of transformation and change?. What is your role to play, what is our role to play, and how is the song this week addressing us in relation to these questions? Again, we will sit with one another in a process that goes deeper with each listening to the song x 4 times.

1. Welcome
2. Acknowledgement of country
3. Breakout/dyads to introduce your self to another person for a few minutes
4. Group coherence
5. The process - invitational only, deep listening - our future and commitment to 'The New Story' (not about solving or analysis)

6. First playing of the song - listening for a word or phrase that shimmers, challenges, beckons or stirs in you in some way, that seems especially ripe with meaning.
7. Write in your journal.
8. Invitation to share to the whole group. The word or phrase that shimmers for me is....
(No elaboration or explanation required at this point - you are just taking a 'nibble' at the song]
9. Second playing of song - allow feelings, images, senses, memories, symbols to arise...allow the word or phrase that has spoken to you to unfold in your imagination and speak more deeply.
10. Write in journal.
11. Turn to passages from Thomas Berry - to be read slowly...
12. Third playing of song.
13. Silent time - This is a time for the deepest desires, aspirations, longings and intentions for *Earth Community* to arise in you; what are YOU holding in your heart...is there an invitation here for you? Drawing, writing....
14. Breakout group of three (optional - if you want to spend time on your own, then do not move).
15. Opportunity to share with the whole group.
16. Final playing of 'Love Song to A Bird'.

Thomas Berry Quotes Session Two

We are aware that:

1. Every component of the Earth Community, both living and non living has three rights: the right to be, the right to habitation or a place to be, and the right to fulfil its role in the ever renewing process of the Earth Community. E.T. p149.
2. Every human being has its own interior, its self, its mystery. To deprive any being of this sacred quality is to disrupt the total order of the universe. D.E. p. 134.
3. In the universe, to be, is to be different. U.S. p.74.
4. Concern for this Earth community itself must bring about a deeper sense of the community of peoples upon Earth.
5. Our greatest resource for peace is in our awareness that we enrich ourselves when we share our possessions with others. E.T. p. 139.
6. To preserve and develop a human quality of life is a common responsibility of all.
7. There is a need for awareness that the mountains and rivers and all living things, and the sky and sun and moon and clouds, all constitute a healing, sustaining sacred presence for humans.
8. We are not lacking in the dynamic forces needed to create the future...Bu this energy, in an ultimate sense, is ours not by domination but by invocation. G.W. p. 175.

Love Song to a Bird - Diana Jones from her CD Song to a Refugee

Love song to a bird that flew
above the clear blue ocean.
The sun will try to hurt our eyes
and the day will surely parch us.

Heaven seems to catch our wings
And my heart cries out for you.
Over hills so high that little bird flies, over deserts and mountains
she climbs and falls beyond fences and walls
mere mortals cannot conquer.

Heaven seems to catch her wings
and my heart cries out for you.
If we could rise so swiftly and high
and touch down like the angels
with no thought of where we land
no country and no border.

Heaven seems to catch her wings and my heart breaks for her song...
Love song to a bird that flew and she never knew, and she never knew...

SESSION THREE

Pre-reading

This is completely optional. There is a brief chapter that has been scanned from Berry's book, Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community. The chapter is titled "Evening Thoughts". Reading this chapter beforehand is an invitation to go more deeply into the experience in connection with a selected chapter of relevance to the song/lyrics for the session. The chapter is not long and some of you might like to go there before we meet.

Please be on time

I encourage you to be on time - give yourself time to open your computer and to set up zoom, at least 10 minutes...

What you need to bring

Please bring a copy of the song lyrics with you, and your journal and pens, sketchpad and crayons etc. There will be time to write or to draw, and to sit in silence.

Contemplative/poetic process

The process is contemplative and reflective. The invitation is to engage with an open heart and to listen into what is arising in you by way of feeling, imagination, image, symbol, memory, association, expression, connection...

1. Welcome/Context
2. Invitational only, deep listening - journey of discovery/encountering (not about judging or explaining)
3. Acknowledgement of country
4. Group coherence
5. First playing of the song - listening for a word or phrase that shimmers, beckons or stirs in you in some way, that seems especially ripe with meaning - write in your journal
6. Second playing of song - allow feelings, images, memories, symbols to arise...allow the word or phrase that has spoken to you to unfold in your imagination and speak more deeply - write in journal
7. Thomas Berry passages
8. Third playing of song
9. Silent time - what is Berry inviting us to appreciate, to commit to...time for arising and expanding of your deepest thoughts and feelings and desires - is there an insight here for you about your sense of the Sacred, Cosmos, Earth, Kinship, the Holy....however you might want to state this in your own way...is there a commitment or decision arising; do you want to simply rest in gratitude/what is your gratitude about/for; what difference will the song make to your day/your life...

10. Whole group, or breakout groups. For me...an insight, an appreciation, a commitment...'Earthsong' in me today...

Berry Quotes Session Three

We are aware that:

1. The universe is a communion and a community. D.E. p.91.
2. Even beyond union with the human community must be union with Earth, and with the universe itself in the full wonder of its being. G.W. p. 173.
3. We will recover our sense of wonder and our sense of the sacred only if we appreciate the universe beyond ourselves as a revelatory experience of that numinous presence whence all things came into being...We become sacred by our participation in this more sublime dimension of the world around us. G.W., p. 49
4. We need a spirituality that emerges out of a reality deeper than ourselves, a spirituality that is as deep as Earth process itself, a spirituality born out of the solar system. For it is in the stars that the primordial elements take shape...and out of the stars, Earth...and out of Earth, ourselves. S.U. p. 74.
5. In the end the universe can only be explained in terms of celebration. It is all an exuberant expression of existence itself. G.W., p. 170.

Underneath the Stars lyrics - singer songwriter Kate Rusby

Go gently
Go gently

Underneath the stars I'll meet you
Underneath the stars I'll greet you
There beneath the stars I'll leave you
Before you go of your own free will

Go gently

Underneath the stars you met me
Underneath the stars you left me
I wonder if the stars regret me
They come and go of their own free will

Go gently

Here beneath the stars I'm mending
I'm here beneath the stars not ending
Why on earth am I pretending?