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Bali Healing Ritual in Sri Lanka from a Medical Ethnomusicology Perspective

Zdravilni obred *bali* na Šrilanki iz zornega
kota medicinske etnomuzikologije

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IZVLEČEK

Medicinska etnomuzikologija je nova, rastoča poddisciplina etnomuzikologije, ki na enakovredni osnovi povezuje glasbo, medicino oz. zdravljenje in kulturo. Članek se osredinja na kompleks kulturnih prepričanj v povezavi z umetnostmi in rokodelstvom v mnogoplastnem zdravilnem obredu *bali*, ki ga v južnoazijski državi Šrilanki izvajajo z namenom zdravljenja posameznikov in skupnosti.

ABSTRACT

Medical ethnomusicology, a new growing sub-field of ethnomusicology takes into consideration on an equal basis music, medicine/healing and culture. This article focuses on a complex of cultural beliefs intertwined with the arts and crafts, in a multi-layered *bali* healing ritual, which aims to restore wellbeing of individuals and communities in the South Asian country Sri Lanka.

Defining Medical Ethnomusicology

Medical Ethnomusicology is a multidisciplinary field that brings together a variety of cultural beliefs and practices associated with music and healing. *The Oxford Handbook of Medical Ethnomusicology* defines it as “a new field of integrative and holistic research and applied practice at the nexus of music, medicine and culture. It explores

music and sound across the biological, psychological, emotional, social and spiritual domains of human life, spanning the world of traditional cultural practices of music, spirituality and medicine”.¹

“Inherently integrative, often collaborative, and purposefully transinstitutional”, medical ethnomusicology takes into account “localized understandings of medicine, spirituality, healing, and general health care. Music is often a bridge that connects the physical with the spiritual, two interconnected aspects that suggest to anthropologist Arthur Kleinman a ‘sacred clinical reality’”.² It is not necessarily linked to non-Western cultural contexts and research paradigms, but it implies their usefulness for better comprehension of the triangle composed of music, healing and culture. For me, it implies both the new sets of knowledge and understandings on how to prevent and cure diseases in various cultures and their application for the sake of socially motivated causes.

Healing, Curative, and Therapeutic Aspects of the Rituals

Healing, cure and therapy are the three mutually related notions, which are the most important constituents of all known medical systems. *Complete Medical Encyclopedia* of the American Medical Association defines healing as “the act or process through which a person regains the normal structural and functional characteristics of health and wellbeing after an illness or injury”.³ Cure is explained as “the restoration of health of a person who has a disease or disorder”.⁴ *Merriam-Webster’s Medical Desk Dictionary* defines therapy as remedial treatment of mental or bodily disorder.⁵ These definitions of healing, cure and therapy seem broad enough to encompass the predominant western medical notion of the removal of symptoms or outer manifestations of sickness, as much as the notions prevalent in Sri Lanka’s Āyurvēdic medicine and animistic healing rites and rituals designed to treat root causes of maladies.⁶

According to Buddhist philosophy, a human being should be treated as a whole, as a single unit that encompasses body and mind. Human being cannot be treated or repaired as a machine part by part, a notion nicely reflected by Wigram, Pedersen and Bonde saying that “after nearly 250 years of separation, medicine, health psychology, and music therapy are approaching each other again, realizing that man is not a ‘machine’, but a complex, bio-psycho-social being”.⁷ Comprehension of this notion

1 Benjamin D. Koen, Jacqueline Lloyd, Gregory Barz and Kenneth Brummel-Smith, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Medical Ethnomusicology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

2 Gregory Barz, “The Performance of HIV/AIDS in Uganda: Medical Ethnomusicology and Cultural Memory,” *The Oxford Handbook of Medical Ethnomusicology*, ed. by Benjamin D. Koen, Jacqueline Lloyd, Gregory Barz and Kenneth Brummel-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 172.

3 Jerrold B. Leikin, Martin S. Lipsky, eds., *American Medical Association: Complete Medical Encyclopedia* (New York: American Medical Association, 2003), 634.

4 *Ibid.*, 428.

5 *Merriam-Webster’s Medical Desk Dictionary* (Springfield, USA: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated Publishers, 2005), 827–828.

6 For more details see Kalinga Dona’s *Music and Healing Rituals of Sri Lanka: Their Relevance for Community Music Therapy and Medical Ethnomusicology*, 2013.

7 Tony Wigram, Inge Nygaard Pedersen and Lars Ole Bonde, *A Comprehensive Guide to Music Therapy: Theory, Clinical Practice, Research and Training* (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2002), 21.

enables broad understanding of disease in Sri Lankan ritualistic domains, which will be presented in this article.

According to June Boyce-Tillman, “healing is associated with a dynamic model of wellness, which is wider than the curing of individual illness. It encompasses the realization of the full potential of the self within the context of the prevailing value system and is a process of rebalancing the system and can be attained through creative activity”.⁸ In tune with a well-known proverb that “prevention is better than cure”, therapies and healing methods aim to prevent a disease in the first place, and act as a remedy of an illness in the second. In Even Ruud’s terms, “... we do not want medicine that is only curative; we also need preventive as well as health-promotional medicine. In a broader folk-health perspective, greater emphasis is put on how the individual may promote his or her own health through health-performing behavior. In addition, we also find a movement toward a more humanistic way of thinking about health, where supplementary and alternative understandings of health, as well as a more critical and corrective perspectives are being welcomed”.⁹

Figure 1: The Notions of Therapy, Healing and Cure.

As presented in Figure 1, therapy refers to an action towards an ailment or disease, healing works as a process of curing it, while cure comes as the final result of it. These three notions are very much present in ritual practices, where busy life styles are negated by the time reserved for wellbeing and focused attention on individuals in need and community networking.

Music in Healing Rituals in Sri Lanka

Healing rituals are often a meeting point of music and drama, in which both serve the purpose of restoration of a psychophysical balance. “The effect of music on the psyche is based on a multifunctional process comprising physiological, emotional, and

⁸ June Boyce-Tillman, *Constructing Musical Healing: The Wounds that Heal* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2000), 16, 18.

⁹ Even Ruud, *Music Therapy: A Perspective from the Humanities* (Gilsum, NH: Barcelona Publishers, 2010), 3–4.

cognitive factors as well as on anthropological, cultural and individual conditions”.¹⁰ In a sense, healing rituals are related to the notion of psychodrama as defined by J. L. Moreno in the 1920s: “The method by which individuals can be helped to explore the psychological dimensions of their problems through the enactment of conflict situations, rather than talking about them”.¹¹ Just like psychodrama, they enable participants to move beyond the usual therapeutical limits and provide them with a liberating experience of dramatic enactment in an action-oriented yet protected reality, in which problems can be dynamically explored with the support of a director and group.¹²

Sri Lanka is one of the countries with rich ritualistic practices, which are called for in order to ensure individual and communal wellbeing. In addition to cases of prevention, rituals take place at the times of prolonged illness of individuals, epidemics, earthquakes, tsunamis and other calamities. This article takes into consideration only the rituals practiced by the numerically predominant Sinhalese agricultural communities, leaving aside those practiced by Tamils, Chettis, indigenous Veddas, Malays, Burghers, Bharats and other population strata. The data presented in the article result from my fieldwork in Central (Up-Country) and Southern part of the island (Low-Country).

Traditional healing rituals of Sri Lanka are a complex of art forms, which aim to remove deeply rooted fears and forbias and through the catharsis enable building of individual confidence and strengthen communal ties. The main ritual practices are known as *bali* and *tovil*. *Bali* takes place when the influence of planetary deities becomes malevolent. *Tovil* takes place when Sinhalese villagers fear that devils (powerful non-human beings) are becoming rough and dangerous, making people sick and causing other dreadful troubles. These musically rich rituals are understood as the tools for removal of malevolences (*dōsha*) and for re-establishment of psychophysical balance. They are varied and directed to four principal sources of power: gods, devils, planetary deities, and dead ancestor spirits.

When confronted by unwanted challenges, such as illnesses or natural disasters, communities approach them as situations, possibly caused by a bad *karma*, that require a communal response.¹³ Individuals within a community never treat a major problem as a personal issue, which would need to be considered solely by the affected person and his or her immediate family. Instead, all community members get together to discuss the problem, sometimes (depending on the situation) with a native physician (*veda mahattayā*), whose recommendations incite action.¹⁴ The importance of togetherness in the Sri Lankan context is echoed in related claims about other contexts by various researchers. For instance, Penelope Gouk states that “... indigenous cultures will reveal that the whole community may often be involved in the musical rituals connected with healing”,¹⁵ while R. D. Putnam claims that “our

10 Wolfgang Mastnak, “Non-Western Practices of Healing-Music and Applications for Modern Psychotherapy,” *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 24/1 (1993): 78.

11 A. Blatner, *Acting-in: Practical Applications of Psychodramatic Methods* (New York: Springer Publishing Co., 1988), 7.

12 Joseph J. Moreno, *Acting Your Inner Music: Music Therapy and Psychodrama* (Saint Louis: MMB Music, Inc., 1999), 2.

13 Karma, literary means «actions». *Bad karma* in this context refers to consequences resulting from one's bad actions.

14 *Veda mahattayā* refers to a village physician or a local physician who never had any institutional education or training in medicine. Sometimes he would be a leading Buddhist monk (*veda hānuduruwo*) of the village, sometimes an astrologer, sometimes simply a ritual practitioner/healer.

15 Even Ruud, *Music Therapy: A Perspective from the Humanities* (Gilsum, NH: Barcelona Publishers, 2010), 130.

relationship with other people will always be an important source in defining our state of health. One of the single most important factors contributing to health has to do with our social capital, i.e., how well we are integrated into the community – our social connectedness. (...) Our abilities to create relationships and to support each other will prevent social isolation, which is seen as the worst enemy to health”.¹⁶ Nonetheless, Heidi Ahonen-Eerikäinen points to the fact that “we need each other and some sense of ‘we-ness’ in order to survive and have quality in our lives”.¹⁷ Benjamin D. Koen’s observation based on his study of Pamiri healing practices in Tajikistan that “the role of individual and group consciousness – the intention and attention of the performer/healer and all participants – can be seen as a key component in facilitating flexible psychological states, which give rise to healing”¹⁸ is applicable to the Sri Lankan healing ritual context.

People become ill not only because of physical problems, but, due to various psychic problems as well. According to Robert Putnam, “our abilities to create relationships and to support each other will prevent social isolation, which is seen as the worst enemy to health”.¹⁹ In a related notion, Even Ruud reminds us that people become ill because they “become disempowered by ignorance and lack of social understanding”.²⁰ Consequently, Dorit Amir claims that “Improving quality of life means that as persons we feel better about ourselves, less isolated in society, that we keep the ‘right’ balance between our roots (past tradition) and our present life; between our uniqueness and the group’s identity”.²¹

Whenever a problem arises, an individual or a group within a community seeks to discuss it with the community leader or a healer so that the root cause and other relevant facts can be identified. The decision to organize a healing ritual is based on the beliefs and sometimes also on the legends known to the given community. From the beginning to the end of the ritual, there is a clear emphasis on a holistic healing, thus supporting Ruud’s notion of “a danger in a medical practice that separated biology and culture as we have seen in our times of modernity”.²² As far as medical ethnomusicology is concerned here, I continuously point out to “cultural understandings and interpretations of disease and illness while focusing on the performative nature of treatment and healing, potentially leading us to a much deeper understanding of how disease is made meaningful”.²³

16 R. D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 326.

17 Heidi Ahonen Eerikäinen, *Group Analytic Music Therapy* (Gilsum, NH: Barcelona Publishers, 2007), 6.

18 Benjamin D. Koen, “Music-Prayer-Meditation Dynamics in Healing,” *The Oxford Handbook of Medical Ethnomusicology*, ed. by Benjamin D. Koen, Jacqueline Lloyd, Gregory Barz and Kenneth Brummel-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 117.

19 R. D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 326.

20 Even Ruud, “Foreword: Reclaiming Music,” *Community Music Therapy*, ed. by Mercè s Pavlicevic and Gary Ansdell (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004), 11. Even Ruud, *Music Therapy: A Perspective from the Humanities* (Gilsum, NH: Barcelona Publishers, 2010), 126.

21 Dorit Amir, “Community Music Therapy and the Challenge of Multiculturalism,” *Community Music Therapy*, ed. by Mercè s Pavlicevic and Gary Ansdell (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004), 254.

22 Ruud, “Foreword: Reclaiming Music,” 118.

23 Gregory Barz, “The Performance of HIV/AIDS in Uganda: Medical Ethnomusicology and Cultural Memory,” *The Oxford Handbook of Medical Ethnomusicology*, ed. by Benjamin D. Koen, Jacqueline Lloyd, Gregory Barz and Kenneth Brummel-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 172.

Music is an integral part of Sri Lankan rituals. In addition to music, the essential components of ritual events are dance, drama, sculpturing, painting and decorating, costume designing, preparing stage sets and props, and use of masks.

Bali Healing Ritual

Bali refers to one of the principal healing rituals in Sri Lanka. It is dedicated to planetary deities and gods, who are believed to be in charge of peace and health. According to the astrology-related belief, planetary influences have strong impact on human lives. They can be favorable, unfavorable or neutral. This belief is a fusion of pre-Buddhist folk beliefs and Hindu religious concepts, covered with a superficial Buddhist coating. Misfortunes caused by planetary deities (*graha dōsha*) in an unfavourable astrological period (*apala kālaya*) call for the *bali* ritual, which is supposed to alleviate these misfortunes.²⁴ According to Seneviratne, the origin of Sinhalese *bali* ritual goes back to the Kōtte period in the 15th century.^{25,26}

Table 1 provides the names of planetary deities with translations, each deity's direction of overlordship, associated color, and symbol. Authors such as Prēmakumāra de Silva add to this list several other markers, including preferred food (*bhōjana*), weapon (*āyudha*), gem (*mānik*) and tree (*ruksha*) of each deity.²⁷

Name of the Planetary Deity	Literal Translation	Direction of Overlordship	Color	Symbol
Ravi	Sun	East	Red	Horse
Chandra or Sandu	Moon	North-West	White	Elephant
Kuja or Angaharu	Mars	South	Red	Peacock
Budha	Mercury	North	Green	Buffalo
Guru or Brahaspathi	Jupiter	North-East	Yellow	Human
Sukra or Sikuru	Venus	South-East	Rose	Ox or Bull
Shani or Senasuru	Saturn	West	Blue	Crow
Rāhu	Dragon's head	South-West	Black	Horse
Kētu	Dragon's tail	Nadir (Pāthāla)	Ash	Lotus

Table 1: List of Planetary Deities.

24 *Apala* refers to what is culturally (astrologically) perceived as evil or malefic influences of planets and *apala kālaya* refers to a time period during which these influences affect a particular person.

25 Anurādha Seneviratne, "Udarata Bali Yāgaya," [Bali Ritual of Up-country] *Lankāwe Bali Shānti Karma* [Bali Rituals in Sri Lanka], ed. by Jayantha Amarasinghe (Colombo: S. Godage publishers, 2007), 126.

26 Ratnasēkara suggests that *bali* has only been modernized in the Kōtte period (2000: 6), while Lionel Bentaragē claims that *bali* rituals were practised by Brahmins, and that Sinhalese localized them during the Kōtte period (2007: 73). See Kalinga Dona (2013: 70–77) for more data.

27 D. A. Premakumara de Silva, *Glabalization and the Transforamtion of Planetary Rituals in Southern Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Interantional Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2000), 25.

Exact time of birth of every child is carefully documented and an astrologer is asked to cast the child's horoscope. In times of illnesses and difficulties the predictions help to comfort the sick and console the depressed. It is believed that any matter of importance requires auspicious time for action. Taking a human being for his or her first outing, reading letters, cutting hair, arrival to school, menstruation, marriage, building a house, opening a business or any new beginning and funeral are some of the occasions at which evil consequences should be avoided. People believe that astrologers know how to avert dangers and provide remedies for certain dangers and illnesses.²⁸

Up-country *bali* in the central part of Sri Lanka is considered the most vibrant of all regional varieties. J. E. Sēdaraman claims that "its purity can be seen only in *Udarata*".²⁹ Dissānāyake and Rājapakshe confirm the existence of five regionally distinctive *bali* rituals: Udarata, Pahatarata, Sabaragamuwa, Ūva and Nuwara Kalaviya.³⁰

While casting one's horoscope, the astrologer finds out the types of misfortunes to be expected and advises the client about the rituals which have to be performed to avert them. He also prepares a list of practices to be avoided (*tahanchi*) for the sake of self-purification, concentration and spiritual empowerment (for instance, to be strictly avoided are alcohol, meat, and any ethically questionable deeds) and a list of offerings (*pooja*), and recommends the appropriate ritual for the treatment of the present situation.

Not unlike other ritual practices in Sri Lanka, *bali* requires long preparations, which may last for several days. Special structures should be erected in an outdoor space for the ceremony where the whole community will gather.³¹ On the ritual day, healer comes to the patient's house to make final arrangements and ensure presence of all required components for the ritual. At the auspicious time, he blesses the clay from which the images of deities associated with the planets will be moulded. Other decorative sets will be made out of natural ingredients, too. In Gunawardhena's words, "Large clay effigies, sometimes as tall as three meters, representing the planetary deities are constructed in bas-relief fashion, and mounted in upright position before the commencement of the ceremony".³² Once the images are completed, they are painted in bright colours, such as red, yellow, blue, white, green, and black.³³

There are two types of *bali*: (1) *kada bali*, in which the planetary deities are depicted on a large cloth, and (2) *āmbum bali*, in which the images of the deities are moulded in clay, painted and placed on a frame. The choice of the type of *bali* depends on the affordability of the client (comp. Dissanayake³⁴). The moulded figures are bigger than normal human size. The ritual requires a characteristic image (picture 1), flower altar

28 Compare: Wijesekera, 1987, 14.

29 J. E. Sēdaraman, *Bali Upatha* [The Origin of Bali] (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena Publishers, 1964), 7.

30 Mudiyanse Dissanayake, "Nuwara Kalāviyē Bali Yaga Visheshata" [Varieties of Bali Ritual in Nuwara Kalāviyē], *Lankāwe Bali Shānti Karma* [Bali ritual in Sri Lanka], ed. by Jayantha Amarasinghe (Colombo: S. Godage Publishers, 2007), 51–52. Shriyani Rājapakshe, "Kathina Baliya Hā Ehi Visheshata," [The Specialities of *Kathina Bali*] *Samajja Sanhitā* I/IV, ed. by Mudiyanse Dissanāyake (Colombo: Department of Dancing, Institute of Aesthetic Studies, 2000), 118–119.

31 In the past, paddy fields were most often used as the ritual arena.

32 A. J. Gunawardhena, *Theatre in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Department of Cultural Affairs, 1976), 6.

33 The colors are associated with particular planets (see table 1). They also attract the attention of the public and increase the visibility of the image in a relatively dark environment during the night.

34 Mudiyanse Dissanayake, "Nuwara Kalāviyē Bali Yaga Visheshata" [Varieties of Bali Ritual in Nuwara Kalāviyē], *Lankāwe Bali Shānti Karma* [Bali ritual in Sri Lanka], ed. by Jayantha Amarasinghe (Colombo: S. Godage Publishers, 2007), 50–51.

mal'yahan (picture 2), altar for food offerings (picture 3), plantain stems, tender leaves of the coconut palm (*gok-kola*), and coconut and areca-nut inflorescences. Coconut leaves and banana barks are composite ceremonial appliances at folk cults.³⁵ For the sake of consistency, all pictures used in this article refer to a single *ämbum bali* ritual event that took place at the patient's compound in the village of Ämbokka, Matale district, on 2nd August 2007. The pictures were taken by the author of the article as a part of the documentation process.

Figure 2: An *ämbum bali* image in upright position.

Figure 3: Flower altar.

35 M. D. Rāghavan, *Sinhala Nāṭum* [Dances of the Sinhalese] (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena and Company, 1967), 3. Obēysēkere, 1999, 88.

Figure 4: Food altar (in the back).

Ritual starts in the evening of a day recommended by astrologer. Buddha is invoked to dispel evil and the ritual starts by offering homage to the Buddha, *Dhamma*³⁶ and the *Sangha*.^{37,38} The patient is seated on a mat, in front of the *bali* image and two virgins are seated on either side (picture 4). Music is present during the entire ritual, all night long. Chanting the mantras is followed by singing of short poems, drumming on up-country *gāta bera* drums, dancing, playing of *vajra miniya* handbells (picture 5), and other sound offerings such as on a *sak* conch shells and by anklets which are believed to be the medium of connecting planetary world and human world.

Figure 5: Patient (in the middle) and two virgins (at either side) sitting on a mat during the ritual.

³⁶ *Dhamma* refers to Buddha's preaching.

³⁷ *Sangha* refers to Buddhist monks.

³⁸ Vinnie Vitāraṇa, "Bali Yāgaya," [Bali Ritual] *Lankāwe Bali Shānti Karma* [Bali Ritual in Sri Lanka], ed. by Jayantha Amarasinghe (Colombo: S. Godage publishers, 2007), 34.

Food offerings, incense offerings, and other ancillary performing arts are provided to planetary deities throughout the ritual. The healer recites several stanzas each of which is followed by a choral recitation of a blessing³⁹ started by the two virgins' wishes for a long life. At the end of the ritual, the patient's receipt of protection from the evil influences is symbolized by the *pirit huya* ritual thread tied around his/her wrist. It is believed that the *bali* ritual provides mental strength to a weak individual. Once the ritual is over, all carefully moulded planetary images are destroyed, which symbolizes the total eradication of the evil influences of the planetary deities.

Healers' costumes for *bali* are more intricately elaborated than for other rituals, including the earlier mentioned *tovil*. Costumes of the healer and the dancers in *bali* are the same. Up-country people wear headdresses, colorful earrings, bangles, anklets, and necklaces decorated with red ribbons, beads and pearls. The main healer (picture 6), dancers and drum accompanists always wear white color in *bali*, because this color symbolizes cleanliness, spiritual purity, and devotion. Seen as authorities with exemplary power to communicate with the intangible world, they expect their patients to be dressed in white as well.

Figure 6: The main healer of the Bali ritual.

Healers are in most cases associated with the lower social strata.⁴⁰ At the same time, they are highly respected due to their perceived purity and power to heal sickness. Women are considered unsuitable for the role of healers because of their widely perceived physiological uncleanness caused by their menstrual periods. Maturity and wisdom acquired through the aging process are widely regarded as necessary for the role of a healer. Consequently, there are no young healers.

Rhythms provided by the drummers, commonly three or more, create a distinctive soundscape for healer, patient and community members. Performance of recitations,

³⁹ This is contained in the phrase *Āyubō wēwā*, meaning "May you have a long life!"

⁴⁰ This fact is not considered important by Sri Lankan communities of today.

playing of musical instruments, burning incense sticks, and the use of *dummala* incense powder and *pandam* torches⁴¹ all help to open up and maintain a channel of communication between the perceived two worlds: one of the planetary deities and the other of the humans involved in the ritual. According to Anne Sheeran, “Drummer-dancers use hand-held bells to create an encompassing sonic envelope; they move gently and quietly, with their feet supposedly never lifted from the floor. Even the singing in parallel fourths, perhaps somewhat jarring to the unaccustomed ear, helps to delineate an arena of peace and tranquility”.⁴² *Bali* in the Up-country areas features antiphonal singing while in the Low-country areas there is more emphasis on dance accompanied by intense drumming. In words of a drummer and senior lecturer Karunāratne Bandāra, “sound of the bass-drum directly affects one’s heart in Low-country rituals. Strokes named *gum* or *gugunda* are essential. People achieve the state of trance thanks to these bass sounds” (personal communication, 2007).

In fact, Sri Lankans rather seldom get a chance to adjust their bodies and minds to a continuous musical rhythm for many hours, except at the rather recent young generations’ rave parties. Ritualistic events provide people with the extraordinary opportunity to harmonize their bodies and minds throughout the nightlong period. The sound environment created by repetitive drum patterns can be compared to the experience of meditation in the sense of undisturbed mental move. The whole ritual event can be compared to a surgical operation, at which a specialist (medical doctor), assisted by nurses and other personnel, works for an extended period of time to re-direct harmful development in the patient’s body. In the ritual context, a healing specialist, assisted by dancers, drummers, and other helpers, works for more than twelve hours to restore harmony in the patient’s system.⁴³

Stirring of the body creates an inner state of flow and resonance in tune with musical patterning. Fritjof Capra claims that the illness originates in the lack of integration of rhythmic patterns (comp. Capra⁴⁴). From this perspective, synchrony becomes an important measure of health. Individual organisms interact and communicate with one another by synchronizing their rhythms and thus integrating themselves into larger rhythms of their environment. To be healthy means to be in synchrony with oneself and with the surrounding world. When a person is out of synchrony, illness is likely to occur. It is customary for the healer to work closely with musical assistant, who provides the rhythmic accompaniment.⁴⁵ According to Erich Fromm, many esoteric traditions associate health with the synchrony of rhythms and healing with a certain resonance between healer and patient (comp. Fromm⁴⁶). E. T. Gaston considered that this concept contributed to the early acceptance of music therapy, the discipline being grounded in very basic patterns of human behavior.⁴⁷

41 *Pandam* refers to natural torches made of wooden sticks rapped in clothes. In the course of the ritual, the healer used these torches, soaked in kerosene oil to provide necessary light in the ritual arena.

42 Anne Sheeran, “Sri Lanka,” *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music. Vol. 5: South Asia, The Indian Subcontinent*, ed. by Alison Arnold (New York: Garland, 2000), 962.

43 More information can be found in Kalinga Dona, 2010.

44 Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (Boston: Shambhala, 1985).

45 Leslie Bunt, *Music Therapy: An Art Beyond Words* (London: Routledge, 1994), 185.

46 Erich Fromm, D. T. Suzuki and Richard de Martino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Harpercollins, 1970).

47 Gaston, E. T. *Music in Therapy* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 75–94.

Several researchers pointed out to the musicians who serve as active healing forces in their sociocultural contexts. One of them, Joseph Moreno, emphasized historical connections between music and healing in ancient shamanic traditions and related the sustaining, stimulating and organizing aspects of rhythm used by both shamans and contemporary music therapists.⁴⁸ The fact that repetitive drum patterns create hypnotic effects and help the healer to enter the altered state of consciousness (trance) is very true in Sinhalese rituals.

Three Medical Systems in Sri Lanka

The three major medical systems in Sri Lanka are healing rituals, Āyurvedic medicine, and Western medicine. In healing rituals music is an integral part of the holistic healing process, in Āyurvedic medicine music is not present, and in Western medicine music therapy is considered suitable for certain medical conditions. Survey of these three remedial systems in Sri Lanka would be incomplete without a reference to the question of their mutual relationships (more in Kalinga Dona 2009⁴⁹).

Co-existence of the three systems on the continuum between local rural tradition and westernized urban modernity is a clear advantage from the patient perspective. In everyday life, patients are generally free to decide which medical system to use for the treatment of their illnesses. Moreover, carriers within each of these systems, aware of both advantages and limits of their own and of the other two, feel free to propose to their patients where to expect best treatment for their medical conditions. Sometimes, one complements the other. For instance, victim in a car accident is most likely to receive the initial treatment in Western medicine, but if there is a need, permanent physiological cure may be sought in Ayurvedic medicine, and restoration of psychological balance in a healing ritual. Restoration of health is the ultimate aim and there is a general consensus that boundaries among the three systems would be counterproductive. Personal value systems and beliefs are subject to change due to urbanization, westernization, and other ongoing processes in Sri Lanka. Nowadays, healing rituals are certainly more likely to be an option for a villager than for a convinced urbanite. Still, the three systems continue to be interwoven. Table 2 shows the comparison of the three remedial systems practiced in Sri Lanka:

48 Joseph Moreno, "The Music Therapist: Creative Arts Therapist and Contemporary Shaman," *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 15 (1988): 271–280.

49 Lasanthi Manaranjanie Kalinga Dona, "Between Tradition and Modernity, Between East and West: Experiences with Music Therapy in Sri Lanka," *Muzika u društvu* [Music in Society], ed. by Ivan Čavlović (Sarajevo: Musicological Society of BiH and Music Academy, 2009), 215–217

	Healing Rituals	Ayurvedic Medicine	Western Medicine
Involved parties	Astrologer, Traditional healer, Buddhist monk + Individual patient or community	Ayurvedic doctor + Patient	Western doctor + Patient
Aim	Individual or community wellbeing	Individual wellbeing	Individual wellbeing
Therapeutic means	Elaborated ritual practices	Herbal products and Āyurvedic procedures	Western pharmaceuticals and procedures
Place	Indoors and outdoors: at patient's home, in a temple, or at a village field	Indoors: in a medical facility	Indoors: in a medical facility
Time and action	Night long performance lasting up to one week	Mainly long-term treatment	Mainly short-term treatment
Medication	None	Time consuming hand-made herbal medicine	Readymade pharmaceutical drugs
Role of music	Core of the event	None	Additional support

Table 2: The Three Remedial Practices in Sri Lanka.

Concluding Remarks

1. *Bali* ritual demonstrates and reinforces the importance of Sinhalese rural beliefs, community-based values, and their contemporary performance.
2. It demonstrates and reinforces the importance of holistic healing in trying to reach and treat the root cause of the problem.
3. Music combines all episodes and scenes together and keeps the whole community awake throughout the ritual.
4. Music acts as a medium in connecting the human world with the supernatural world.
5. A specific sound environment, lasting from the beginning to the end of the ritual event, significantly contributes to the mood of the patient and leads to restoration of his or her psychophysical balance.
6. Continuous musical sound enables the healer to acquire a special mood and enter the state of trance.
7. Incenses, *dummala* (rosin), turmeric powders, various flowers, betel leaves and all other herbs destroy bacteria and viruses in the ritual arena.

8. *Bali's* ultimate goal - to promote health on an individual and communal basis - rests on the integration of sound (music) therapy, color therapy, aromatherapy, psychotherapy, and community music therapy.
9. A healing practice deeply rooted in local culture, in which music serves as an essential ingredient, *bali* ritual as presented in this article should be regarded as a contribution to the growing field of medical ethnomusicology.

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POVZETEK

Svetovna zdravstvena organizacija (WHO) definira zdravje kot stanje popolnega fizičnega, duševnega in socialnega blagostanja in ne zgolj kot odsotnost bolezni. Ljudje na različnih koncih sveta se poslužujejo različnih načinov, da bi dosegli takšno stanje – tako v smislu preventive kot kurative. Med načine na Šrilanki se uvrščajo ajurvedska medicina, zahodna medicina in tradicijski rituali. Te tri možnosti se ne izključujejo, ampak se jih dojema komplementarno; ena je lahko za določeno stanje bolj primerna kot drugi dve. Na Šrilanki je veliko raznovrstnih ritualnih praks, ki bi jih lahko opisali kot kompleks umetniških oblik, ki ciljajo na to, da bi izruvale globoko ukoreninjene strahove in fobije ter s pomočjo katarze omogočile izgrajevanje posameznikove samozvesti in okrepile vezi skupnosti. Te prakse so glasbeno bogate in glasba služi kot eno ključnih orodij za odstranjevanje zlih učinkov in za ponovno vzpostavitev psihofizičnega ravnovesja. Rituali so različni in usmerjeni k štirim osnovnim virom moči: bogovom, hudičem, planetarnim božanstvom in duhovom preminulih prednikov. Dotični članek se osredinja okrog enega teh ritualov, rituala *bali*, ki ob ritualu *tovil* šteje za ključni ritual večinske sinhalske populacije.

Bali nagovarja planetarna božanstva in bogove, za katere se verjame, da so odgovorni za človeška stanja. Takšna prepričanja, ki predhajajo budizem kot prevladujočo neteistično religijo na Šrilanki, zrcalijo potrebo ljudi, da iščejo pomoč v nadnaravnih silah. Vpliv teh sil na človeško življenje je lahko ugoden, neugoden ali nevtralen, medtem ko se ritualna dejanja prakticirajo, da bi se

vplivalo na določeno situacijo, tj. da bi se ublažilo nesrečo, ki jo povzročajo planetarna božanstva v neugodnem astrološkem obdobju. *Bali* je kakopak spoj predbudističnih tradicijskih verovanj in hinduističnih verskih konceptov, odet v površno budistično preobleko. Priznani šrilanški učenjak Seneviratne zatrjuje, da je *bali* mogoče zaslediti že v 15. stoletju v obdobju Kōtte.

Ritmi bobnov in ročnih zvoncev ustvarijo specifično zvočno krajino za bolnika, zdravilca in člane skupnosti. Modeliranje podob enega ali več planetarnih božanstev, recitativno petje, igranje inštrumentov, zažiganje kadila in uporaba dišečih palčk in bakel – vse to je pojmovano kot orodje za odpiranje in ohranjanje stika med ljudmi in nadnaravnimi svetovi.

Za učinkovitost takšnih ritualov je za lokalno kulturo ključnega pomena ideja trikotnika, ki je inherenten definiciji medicinske etnomuzikologije. Tri komponente trikotnika so glasba/zvok, medicina/zdravilstvo in kultura. Na pogled na *bali* v tem članku je vplivala tako teorija kot tudi praksa medicinske etnomuzikologije, multidisciplinarnega področja raziskav kulturno determiniranih in medsebojno integriranih oblik zvočne terapije, psihoterapije, skupnostne glasbene terapije, plesne terapije, barvne terapije, aromaterapije, psihodrame in drugih terapevtskih praks po svetu. Članek razlaga pomen znanja in razumevanja holističnega koncepta zdravljenja za posameznike in skupnosti v sodobni Šrilanki. Skupnostni vidik je še zlasti pomemben v oziru na okoliščine, ki jih prinaša naraščajoča individualizacija, značilna za sodobni zahodni svet.