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Music to soothe the soul: Joseph Carringer shares his belief in the healing power of an ancient instrument

By RYAN ALAN
Contributing Writer

It's not a question you hear asked everyday on the Seacoast:

"Do you play the didgeridoo?"

Yet it was posed to Joseph Carringer as he browsed through a Portsmouth shop early in 1997.

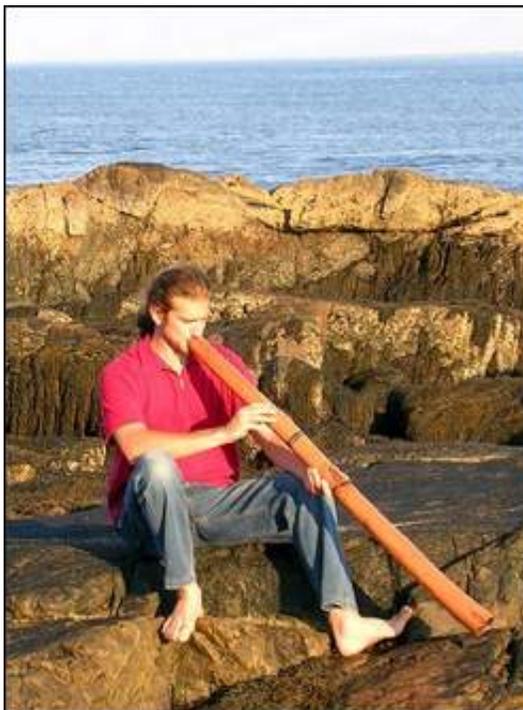
Looking through a basket with a sign over it that said, "didgeridoos," he picked up one of the large instruments long associated with Australian Aborigines, made the basic drone sound and stopped.

The woman from behind the counter asked if he played the instrument.

He replied, "No."

She responded, "Yes, you do."

Carringer repeated, as if in a moment of epiphany, "Yes, I do."



Joseph Carringer plays the didgeridoo on Rye Beach. (Courtesy photo)

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So he bought a more economical bamboo didgeridoo, instead of the eucalyptus one he had picked up, because he said his friends thought he was crazy for wanting to spend that much money on a hollow log.

He played it the entire ride back to what was then his home in Merrimack.

By the time he got there, he had split the dry bamboo instrument in half from playing it so hard. He phoned the store and made arrangements to purchase the didgeridoo, or didge as it is known in its shortened version, that he had originally picked up and played.

He soon discovered a natural affinity for the instrument, and began performing live with local blues and jazz musicians. In 1999, he began accompanying electronic music DJs throughout the Northeast in nightclub performances, providing a layer of organic sound to synthesized music.

He blends didgeridoo as breath percussion into genres of music that range from electronica/tribal house, rock, jam band, blues, jazz and alternative rock.

Carringer said he never felt completely comfortable playing his first instrument, the saxophone, because of his own inhibitions and self-judgments.

"With the didgeridoo, I have always felt confident that I was playing something for people that they might not otherwise get to see live, so I have always felt honored to be playing," he said.

The clincher for him was the freedom he felt.

"There were no rules, no music books, I was my own master, teacher and student, yet I always knew what I needed to learn next and how to integrate it. I play the didgeridoo because it is one of those things that I knew I was supposed to be doing."

Today, the Portsmouth resident's name, in many ways, is synonymous with the intriguing instrument, as a performing and recording artist and in the musical healing arts.

In January of 2005, after a period of extensive research, Carringer and his wife, Nicole Salotti, opened Ancient Voices Harmonic Therapy in Portsmouth, a holistic medical practice built around the didgeridoo.

Carringer is a founding member of the New England Seacoast Holistic Health Association, on whose executive board he sits, and he presents workshops throughout New England and the East.

His goal is to help people realign their bodies' natural rhythms on a cellular level through harmonic therapy. Some people who come to him want to meditate, reduce stress, anxiety, tension

and be treated for related issues such as insomnia.

Carringer also works with cancer, chronic fatigue, fibromialgia and head trauma patients, developmentally disabled adults and, he said, "anyone who wants to take personal responsibility for directing the healing energies within their own body."

He said clients report feeling relief of muscle tension and pain, and of headaches and migraines, as well as accelerated healing of hard and soft tissue trauma.

Clients lie comfortably on a cot or mat while Carringer plays the instrument around them.

His practice is a form of sound therapy through didgeridoo "entrainment." Entrainment is defined as the tendency for two oscillating bodies to vibrate in harmony.

The didge produces natural ultrasound waves, Carringer explained.

"Fundamentally, the ultrasound produced by the didge is in the same frequency range as allopathic ultrasound machines, and similar effects can be expected and witnessed for a wide variety of physical applications."

Allopathy is a term that refers to conventional medicine.

In his book, "The Healing Power of Sound," Dr. Mitchell Gaynor describes "entrainment" as the process by which the powerful rhythmic vibrations of one object — in this case, the didge — are projected upon a second object — the person being treated or "entrained" — with a similar frequency, thereby causing that object to vibrate in resonance with the first.

Carringer sees the didge as a powerful tool to help lift an individual's vibrations back to a less chaotic and more natural rhythm. He said the tones produced by the instrument make it possible for people who have never consciously focused on meditation and breathing techniques to reach these deep healing states with very little effort.

"The part that I really enjoy is helping people find the sources of negative tension, emotion and stress in their world and then work on its release," he said.

He explains in all of his workshops and individual sessions that what he does is not an Aboriginal tradition, but a very Westernized approach to interacting with the



Courtesy photo Carringer playing an agave didgeridoo for a small boy in Pisac, Peru.

instrument.

He said the instrument, as described in some of the Aboriginal teachings that have been shared with him, is to be "pulled" not "played."

That means that the job of the player is to remove ego and connect with the energy of the environment, Carringer explained.

"In sound therapy, I also describe it as connecting with the person or group to provide them with whatever vibration they require to connect with their personal healing potential," he said.

He sees his job as helping people connect with their mind and their body.

He believes he has a calling to help people, which he sees as a gift.

Life is a constant lesson, he said. "My day to day being is just learning how to continue to be present in the moment and integrate my experiences and lessons so I can help others to heal themselves. This is the shamanic path."

He uses the didge as a deep meditative tool in his own journey, he said. When he discovered the instrument and began to play for hours, it offered him an escape.

He often found himself expressing sadness, depression and pain to distant ancestors, asking them for guidance, strength and change.

"I had no idea that this was meditation at the time. The amazing thing is I can look at my life and see that those things I meditated on have come into being," Carringer said.

"If making it through life's toughest lessons were an Olympic sport, I would have at least qualified for tryouts. I have always tried to believe that it will get better, and it does and has," he said.

Through his Ancient Voices Harmonic Therapy, he tries to give his clients similar hope.

"In my practice, meditation is the foundation of all of the healing work that people do for themselves. Meditation is the primary way I work with people to find their healing path," he says.

The didgeridoo helps people to reach deep meditative states allowing them to re-engage their mind-body connection, he added.

"In this place, we literally can consciously ask our body to heal in particular areas or connect with our inner wisdom for direction and guidance," Carringer said.

He said that meditation is the most effective tool available in directly reconnecting our mind with our body.

"This in turn empowers a person to make healing a conscious practice. The didgeridoo is one of the most effective meditation inducing instruments on the planet," he added.

Carringer finds great satisfaction in the volunteer work he does with terminally ill patients.

"It is one of the most rewarding things that I get to do in my practice," he said. "I would never turn a cancer patient away that wanted to use my work as part of their healing process. The regiment of treatment that any cancer patient has to work through is tremendous, and every client I have had, as well as the contact I have had over the years with cancer survivors, all say the same thing: 'You need a positive mental attitude to beat it.' "



Courtesy photo Joseph Carringer conducts a didgeridoo entrainment session, in which he uses the didgeridoo to help a client reach a meditative state.

Where does the mainstream medical community weigh in on sound therapy in general, and what he does specifically?

Says Carringer, "I have support from nurses and doctors ... at Maine Medical Center in Portland, as well as supporting research provided by Dr. Mitchell Gaynor from 'The Healing Power of Sound.' Even a hard nosed doctor will agree that meditation and proper breathing are positive healthy habits to be involved in. Both of those practices are at the foundation of my work, so I have been very fortunate to be embraced by the allopathic community that I have come in contact with."

He said he has received referrals from both holistic and

traditional medicine practitioners.

Carringer said his practice continues to grow on a monthly basis, and he also sees this with his other colleagues in holistic medicine with whom he is involved with collaborative services.

"People are starting to see that developing and practicing positive wellness habits is an important thing," he said.

He cites the growth of the organic food sector as one example.

"I believe that people want to have alternatives. We spend so much money and time numbing our bodies' senses so that we do not focus on our healing until we are really sick. I believe that people want to hear that we can do things like heal ourselves and are ready to take on that responsibility."

For more information on the work of Joseph Carringer, visit www.ancientvoicesharmonictherapy.com, call 433-7465 or e-mail infoancientvoicesharmonictherapy.com.

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