



# HER SWEET MURMUR



Exploring the  
aural phenomenology  
of border experiences.

by *Greg Taylor*

**T**here are many exceedingly strange experiences which happen to people, from interactions with paranormal entities and unidentified objects in the sky, right through to anomalous encounters at the time of death. These are often grouped together under the title of ‘boundary experiences,’ sometimes ‘Fortean,’ and sometimes simply as ‘the paranormal.’ But this grouping is generally one of convenience, and each element of this group is, for the most part, considered to be a separate area. However, this may not necessarily be the case, as a scan of the literature, and individual experiences, will attest.

In order to explore the topic with some precision, I would like to concentrate on one particular aspect of boundary experiences – the

sounds heard by experiencers which accompany the phenomenon. Cross-referencing these seemingly disparate experiences via their aural aspects yields surprising results, with implications that are quite staggering for our modern conception of reality.

### WHAT DREAMS MAY COME...

I will begin at the end, so to speak, with the near-death experience (NDE). Perhaps the man most responsible for the modern fascination with NDEs is George Ritchie, whose experience inspired Raymond Moody to write his seminal book *Life After Life* in the mid-1970s. Ritchie begins his account by telling of a sound:

I heard a click and a whirr. The whirr went on and on. It was getting louder. The whirr was inside my head and my knees were made of rubber. They were bending and I was falling and all the time the whirr grew louder. I sat up with a start. What time was it? I looked at the bedside table but they'd taken the clock away. In fact, where was any of my stuff? I jumped out of bed in alarm, looking for my clothes. My uniform wasn't on the chair. I turned around, then froze. Someone was lying in that bed.<sup>1</sup>

In surveying others who had undergone strange experiences when flirting with death, Raymond Moody found that certain elements were recounted over and over. From these accounts, he constructed an 'archetypal NDE' which contained all of these common elements – one of which was the sound component:

A man is dying and, as he reaches the point of greatest physical distress, he hears himself pronounced dead by his doctor. He begins to hear an uncomfortable noise, a loud ringing or buzzing,

and at the same time feels himself moving very rapidly through a long dark tunnel.<sup>2</sup>

A survey of experiences shows Moody to be correct in including this as part of the NDE (though not ever-present, it certainly is prevalent). Beyond the whir/buzz/hum mentioned above though, there are also other sounds reported. Consider the following two examples:

I heard what seemed like millions of little golden bells ringing, tinkling; they rang and rang. Many times since, I've heard those bells in the middle of the night. Next I heard humming and then a choir singing. The singing got louder and louder, and it was in a minor key. It was beautiful and in perfect harmony. I also heard stringed instruments.<sup>3</sup>

and...

Vicki Umipeg also began to hear sublimely beautiful and exquisitely harmonious music akin to the sound of wind chimes. With scarcely a noticeable transition, she then discovered she had been sucked head first into a tube and felt that she was being pulled up into it. The enclosure itself was dark, Vicki said, yet she was aware that she was moving toward light. As she reached the opening of the tube, the music that she had heard earlier seemed to be transformed into hymns and she then "rolled out" to find herself lying on grass.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, the phenomenon of 'astral projection', often termed 'out-of-body experiences' (OBEs), is said to be heralded by sounds such as buzzing, roaring, humming, music, singing and voices. Any suggestion that these sounds have become associated with NDEs or OBEs through the spreading of modern NDE folklore (ie. via suggestion) can be discounted, as there are historical accounts of

this experience, such as in the Tibetan Book of the Dead, which explains that after the soul of the deceased separates from the physical body, it is likely that roaring, thundering and whistling sounds will be heard. The ‘practical’ exploration of the transition into the state of death was not peculiar to the Tibetans though, and we find another example in a passage from a Graeco-Egyptian magical papyrus, in which the dying subject is attempting to ensure immortality or regeneration:

When you have spoken in this wise [magical names], you will hear thunder and rushing of the air-space all around; and you yourself will feel that you are shaken to your depths. Then say again: ‘Silence...’; thereupon open your eyes and you will see the gates open and the world of the gods within the gates; and your spirit, gladdened by the sight, will feel itself drawn onwards and upwards. Now remain standing still and draw the divine essence into yourself, regarding it fixedly. And when your soul has come to itself again, then speak: ‘Approach Lord!’ [magic words]. After these words, the rays will turn towards you; and you, focus your gaze on the center. If you do that, you will see a god, very young, beautifully formed, with flame-like hair, in a white tunic with a red mantle and a fiery wreath. <sup>5</sup>

This passage obviously follows the archetype of the NDE – the hearing of strange noises, the feeling of the spirit being drawn upwards, and an experience with a divine light or being. However, the magical schema in which the above passage is rooted begs the question: is the NDE an experience unto itself, or part of a much wider catalogue of mystical journeys, available via other methods such as magical ritual, shamanic journey and even unwanted ‘intrusions’ from an external source?

## TO AN EXPLORER, A SHIP

To recap the sounds of the near-death/out-of-body state, we have specific, repeated accounts of:

- Buzzing/Humming
- Bells Tinkling/Chimes
- Thunder/Rushing of wind
- Stringed instruments
- Choir/hymns

Any person that has studied border experiences in general should recognize these sounds as being common to multiple phenomena. Turning to shamanism, we readily find a number of examples. For example, consider Terence and Dennis McKenna’s description of the onset of a ‘magic mushroom trip’, from the book *True Hallucinations*:

But it was definitely at some point in time near to that conversation that I first heard the sound, immeasurably distant and faint, in the region between the ears, not outside, but definitely, incredibly there, perfectly distinct on the absolute edge of audible perception. A sound almost like a signal or very, very faint transmissions of radio buzzing from somewhere, something like tingling chimes at first, but gradually becoming amplified into a snapping, popping, gurgling, crackling electrical sound.<sup>6</sup>

Terence McKenna also made much of ‘the Logos’: what appears to be an external voice, sometimes heard while under the influence of psilocybin mushrooms. It is interesting to note some research done on the prevalence of this phenomenon, conducted by Horace Beach, Ph.D. In his paper titled “Listening for the Logos,” Beach notes that “one of the most interesting findings of this study is that in over 45% of participants’ total experiences with a voice(s) and psilocybin,

sounds other than voices were present.” He goes on to list the words used by participants in describing these sounds: “high pitch, high tone, humming, buzzing, whirring, ringing, rustling, rushing water, howling, vibrations, whooshing, crinkling, insect-like, drumming, whirling-circular.”



Dr Rick Strassman, in his research into the potent hallucinogen DMT (dimethyltryptamine), catalogued repeated instances of ‘entrance’ sounds. “There was this loud intense hum,” said one research volunteer. Another, ‘Sara’ – who claimed to have been visited by an ‘angel’ once when she had a high fever as a child – said “there was a sound, like a hum that turned into a whoosh, and then I was blasted out of my body at such speed, with such force... there are sounds: high-pitched singing, like angel voices.”<sup>7</sup>

Anthropologist Michael Harner described the onset of a shamanic journey via the DMT-containing brew ayahuasca with these words: “the sound of rushing water filled his ears, and listening to its roar, he knew he possessed the power of Tsungi, the first shaman. He could now see...”<sup>8</sup> Cognitive psychologist Benny Shanon, recognized as one of the world authorities on ayahuasca, notes Harner’s description in his book *The Antipodes of the Mind*, and also relays his own insights about the archetypal nature of these sounds:

There are also specific auditory effects that drinkers of Ayahuasca commonly report. One effect, usually described as most annoying, is the hearing of a continuous buzzing sound inside the ears. Another effect is that described by many as ‘the sound of running water.’ This very phrase has been articulated by several of my informants and is also used by Harner; curiously, the ‘noise of great water’ is also mentioned in the most spectacular vision described in the Bible, the Divine vision opening the book of Ezekiel (1:24).

It should also be noted that Shanon cites Goldman in saying that during the ayahuasca trip one may hear “music, the sound of people singing, and the sound of flowing water.” Shanon points out that the hymns of the ayahuasca-using Santo Daime Church are ‘received’ music – either via the intoxicated individual spontaneously composing, or alternatively actually copying music heard during the experience. He even relates a personal experience in which he was accompanied by “a grand choir of angels.”

Reichel-Dolmatoff<sup>9</sup> says of the *yage* (ayahuasca) experience: “The hallucination has several phases, and during the first the person feels and hears a violent current of air, as if a strong wind were pulling him along.” Usage of *Heimia salicifolia* (sinicuiche), a plant that appears to have been used in Aztec rituals and which contains the alkaloid cryogenine, is reported to sometimes be accompanied by a ringing in the ears which turns into orchestrated music<sup>10</sup> – two sounds that are common to our investigation. Meanwhile, Paul Devereux, in his book *The Long Trip*, tells how during opium intoxication Reverend Walter Colton heard “harps and choral symphonies.” Interestingly, Devereux also relates that “the locations of oracles were often “hallucinogenic” in that they had roaring water or wind at them.”

## PROPHETS, MYSTICS AND VISIONARIES

Returning to Shanon’s off-hand comment regarding Ezekiel’s Biblical vision, we encounter yet another area to explore – the sacred ground of religious visions. This topic is often left out of paranormal investigations, though we are left to wonder why when there are so many parallels (Ezekiel and the ‘UFO’ is perhaps one of the more popular). Turning to the New Testament, we find this narrative during Pentecost (from Acts 2:1):

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Enoch also notes sounds during his shaman-like transformation:

As soon as the Holy One, blessed be He, took me to serve the throne of glory, the wheels of the chariot, and all the needs of the Shekhinah, at once my flesh was changed into flame, my tendons into a fire of glowing heat, my bones to glowing juniper coals, my eyelids to radiance of lightning bolts, my eyeballs to torches of fire, the hair of my head to glowing heat and flame, all my limbs to wings of burning fire, and my bodily frame to scorching fire. On my right were hewers of fiery flames, on my left torches were burning. There blew around me wind, storm, and tempest, and the noise of earthquake upon earthquake was in front of me and behind me.

Interestingly, considering the prevalence of the buzzing sound in multiple experiences, esoteric scholar Manly P. Hall cites Thomas Inman as saying that Beelzebub, "...which the Jews ridiculed as My Lord of Flies, really means My Lord Who Hums or Murmurs" (in the Bible, Beelzebub was an oracular deity of the Philistines).

Turning to Islam, we find the traces of these sounds in the very inspiration behind the faith, in the revelations to Mohammed from the Archangel Gabriel:

The Prophet heard at times the noise of the tinkling of a bell. To him alone was known the meaning of the sound. He alone could

distinguish in, and through it, the words which Gabriel wished him to understand.<sup>11</sup>

This is interesting – Mohammed hears the tinkling of a bell, but he “knew the meaning of the sounds”...distinguishing “in, and through it” the revelations from Gabriel. There may be a curious parallel here with the ‘Virgin Mary apparitions’ (and I use the term very loosely) of Fatima. In their book *Heavenly Lights*, Joaquim Fernandes and Fina D’Armada devote a chapter to the buzzing sounds heard by witnesses to the event. In particular, witness Maria Carreira relates that the buzzing seems to have coincided with the conversations between Lucia and the ‘Lady’:

We would follow the children and kneel in the middle of the field. Lucia would raise her hands and say, ‘You bade me come here, what do you wish of me?’ And then could be heard a buzzing that seemed to be that of a bee. I took care to discern whether it was the Lady speaking.

Maria subsequently described this phenomenon, from the June apparition, to another investigator with these words: “Then we began to hear something like this, in the manner of a very fine voice, but what it said could not be comprehended or put into words, for it was like the buzzing of a bee.” A month after the first event (the Fatima apparitions occurred on the 13<sup>th</sup> of each month from May to October 1917), another person witnessed the same effect:

After this question, she (Lucia) waited in silence for a short period of time, the time of a brief response. And during this silence, he (the witness) heard, as if coming from the oak tree, a faint voice, similar, he says, to the humming of a bee, but without distinguishing a single word.

Another witness described it as “the buzzing of a fly inside an empty barrel, but without articulation of words,” and on another occasion as an indefinable sound, heard throughout the duration of the experience, like that which is heard next to a hive, but altogether more harmonious. And another witness: “I thought I heard at that moment, a little wind, a zoa-zoa sound. While Lucia was listening to a response, it seemed there was a buzzing sound like that of a cicada.”

Buzzing was not the only sound heard at Fatima though. Fernandes and D’Armada point out that witnesses likened the sounds “to thunder, to rumors, to rumbling, to the clapping of hands, to the detonation of bombs, to the hiss of rockets.” For instance, one witness recounted that “when Lucia said, ‘There She goes,’ I heard a roaring in the air that seemed like the beginning of thunder.”

So what of other ‘Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM) apparitions’? Consider the the case of the ‘Virgin of Guadeloupe’:

...the apparition took place on December 9<sup>th</sup> 1531 in Mexico. it began with the ‘sweet sound of singing birds’ followed by a voice which came from the top of the hill. The source of the voice was hidden by ‘a frosty mist, a brightening cloud’. The technology of the BVM was at work!<sup>12</sup>



And while speaking of Virgin Mary apparitions, perhaps the best known case is that of Lourdes. The seer who experienced the visitation in that case – the young girl Bernadette – mentions these sounds in her own testimony:

Hardly had I taken off my first stocking, when I heard a sound as though there had been a rush of wind. I looked around towards

the meadow. I saw the trees quite still. So I continued to take off my shoes. Again I heard the same noise. I looked upward towards the grotto. I beheld a lady dressed in white. She wore a white dress a blue sash and a yellow rose on each foot...”<sup>13</sup>

It is interesting to note, in regards to this common ‘rush of wind’ sound, that there was an instance of this in the Fatima case also. In 1915, two years before the more famous sequence of apparitions, Lucia and her two cousins were said to have been taking shelter from rain in a small cave when they heard the rumble of a powerful wind and then saw a “youth of admirable beauty” who called himself the ‘Angel of Peace’. Jacques Vallee has pointed out the similarity of this particular apparition (and other ‘entity’ visitations) with the description in the Biblical Apocrypha of a young child appearing from a ‘bright cloud’ within a cave.<sup>14</sup>

Before moving on to the next section, there is one final aspect worth noting. Both the Pentecost account, and the Fatima event, yielded ‘group’ hearing...that is, more than one person present ‘heard’ the sounds. This is suggestive of some objective source, and is something we will return to.

### THERE’S NOTHING NEW...

The phenomena discussed so far – NDEs, entheogenic experiences, magical ritual – largely suggest that these sounds herald the onset of an altered state of consciousness. This appears to be confirmed when we survey mystical traditions from around the world, most especially those from the East, which are already well ahead of us in describing these sounds in connection with altered states.<sup>15</sup>

Beginning with the literature on kundalini, according to *Sat Chakranirupana*, written more than five hundred years ago by the Bengali yogi Purnanada:

The sleeping kundalini is extremely fine, like the fiber of a lotus stalk. She is the world-bewilderer, gently covering the “door” to the central Great Axis. Like the spiral of a conch shell, her shiny snake-like form is coiled around three and a half times; her luster is like a strong flash of lightning; her sweet murmur is like an indistinct hum of swarms of love-mad bees.

From the classic treatise on Hatha Yoga, *Shiva Samhita*, we learn of the ‘sounds’ that a practitioner is likely to experience:

The first sound is like the hum of the honey-intoxicated bee, next that of a flute, then of a harp; after this, by the gradual practice of Yoga, the destroyer of the darkness of the world, he hears the sounds of the ringing bells, then sounds like roars of thunder.

Another of the classic yoga texts, *Hatha Yoga Pradapika*, also describes sounds:

In the beginning, the sounds resemble those of the ocean, the clouds, the kettledrum and Zarzara (a sort of drum cymbal); in the middle they resemble those arising from the Maradala, the conch, the bell and the horn. In the end they resemble those of the tinkling bells, the flutes, the vina, and the bees.

Moving from Hinduism to Sufism, we find this extremely accurate description of sounds heard during the induced altered states of that particular mystical tradition, as described by the Sufi master Hazrat Inayat Khan:

An adept who practices Shaghal, after some time will have an experience of that Shaghal during times when he is not practicing. He will hear sounds of the sphere in ten forms: in the form of the buzzing of the bees, in the form of the bells

ringing in the ears, in the form of whistles blowing, in the form of the fluttering of the leaves, in the form of the running of the water, in the form of the sound of Vina, in the form of the cooing of the wind, in the form of the crashing of the thunder, in the form of the music of the spheres, in the form of the song of the angels.

It pays to revisit this final passage after reading the complete essay – Hazrat Inayat Khan obviously knew his topic!

### UFOs AND ALIENS, OH MY!

Surveying the topic of UFO sightings in regards to the sounds heard is problematic, not least because many UFO proponents will argue that the phenomenon has nothing to do with the paranormal, and that genuine (ie. unexplainable) UFOs are of extraterrestrial origin. Beyond that point, there is also no doubt many UFO sightings are actually of conventional or ‘secret’ (Earthly) craft. Therefore, roaring, buzzing and humming sounds could well be due to the propulsion systems of these craft (whether Earthly or otherwise). However, it is still worth surveying some of these sounds, especially considering the ‘high strangeness’ aspect of many sightings, which do suggest a paranormal origin. Researcher James McCampbell identified five distinct types of sounds emanating from UFOs in his survey of close encounters<sup>16</sup>, which are strikingly familiar to the sounds we have been discussing:

- Violent (roar, explosion)
- Low Pitch (hum, buzz)
- Rush of Air (whoosh, swish)
- High Pitch (shrill, whistle)
- Signals (beeps, pulses)

One such encounter, which featured two of the above sounds, is the UFO sighting of Charles Early. Early was raking leaves at his home in Greenfield Massachusetts, under a clear sky, when he heard a “swishing noise” as if a wind storm was coming. He looked up and saw two rings parallel to each other, one on top of the other separated by a distance of about 4 feet. He estimated the diameter to be about 30 feet and described them as “bright, like polished chrome” and tubular...Early said that when the double ring was directly over him it made a “humming” sound similar to the hum heard when standing under electrical wires.

In his book *Forbidden Science*, Jacques Vallee discusses the well-known ‘Affa’ case of 1954: A ‘contactee’, Mrs Frances Swan, told how she was in telepathic communication (via automatic writing) from the commanders of two alien spaceships (Affa and Ponnar). Vallee recounts that whenever Mrs Swan was in contact with the ‘aliens’, she would get a buzzing sound in her left ear “to indicate that they were ‘on the line.’” While this is interesting enough in itself, there was also apparent confirmation from the CIA and Naval Intelligence officers who interviewed Mrs Swan, who told of hearing these same buzzing sounds in their ears (though they did not receive any actual communication).<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, when the officers asked to see one of these alien spaceships, Affa (through Mrs Swan) told them to look outside – and when they went to the window, saw a circular object in the sky.

John Keel recounts the tale of Mrs Malley, who was driving home along Route 34 to Ithaca, New York, at around 7pm, when she saw a red light following her – “a disk about the size of a boxcar, with a domed top and square red and green windows... and it made a humming sound, something like the vibration of a television antenna in the wind.” Describing the experience in more detail, Mrs Malley says “a white twirling beam of light flashed down from the object...and I heard the humming sound. Then I began to hear voices. They didn’t sound like male or female voices

but were weird, the words broken and jerky...it was like a weird chorus of several voices.”

In a UFO and humanoid sighting report from 1914...

...the witness was at a local trash dump looking for old discards when he suddenly heard a “musical” humming sound. Turning around he then saw a strange craft hovering above a fence and partially above the street in front of a church. The object was gray in color with a high dome on top and a slight dome on the bottom. An opening, like two sliding doors, then appeared. Then two short figures emerged and took positions each on one side of the object, more came out until there were eight abreast.<sup>18</sup>

Introductory sounds are especially the case with alleged ‘alien abductions’, an area which has already been associated with what Dr John Mack called “intrusions from the subtle realms.” Respected ufologist Karl Pflock described one of the original ‘abduction’ cases, that of Betty and Barney Hill, as being preceded by a sound described as a “buzzing vibration.” Brad Steiger too has mentioned the prevalence of buzzing and ‘rushing’ sounds in both UFO sightings and ‘entity’ encounters. He also compares the sound to that heard in poltergeist activity:

A number of revelators and UFO contactees have since mentioned to me that just before the appearance of an entity they were aware of a strange buzzing sound. Witnesses of unexplained aerial phenomenon have also referred to a buzzing or rushing sound shortly before the ‘flying saucer’ appeared over them. I am also reminded that great deal of poltergeist activity produces a preparatory ‘signal’ of a buzzing, rasping, or winding noise.<sup>19</sup>

In their book *The Unidentified*, Jerome Clark and Loren Coleman also say that many contactees have reported a bee-buzzing sound that introduced and ended their encounters.



In the aforementioned book on Fatima, *Heavenly Lights*, Fernandes and D'Armada also recount a number of UFO/alien sightings which were preceded by a buzzing sound (often explicitly described, as at Fatima, as the 'buzzing of bees'.) John Keel also notes the variety of noises heard in his book *Operation Trojan Horse*. He points out that the well-known 'high strangeness' case of Joe Simonton consisted of 'humming' sounds and the sound of "wet tyres on pavement."

Jacques Vallee has been perhaps the most instrumental in focusing ufological research on the fact that there are significant parallels with UFO/paranormal events and folkloric tales from around the globe – suggesting that this is a phenomena intrinsically linked to human experience through the ages. We also find more examples of these same sounds...

### THE GOOD (BAD, AND UGLY) FOLK

Entity 'contact' experiences certainly come with their share of paranormal sounds. For instance, consider this Mothman report. Journalist Rick Moran tells how he interviewed...

...an older woman who said she had encountered Mothman in her backyard. Her property was close to the boundaries of the TNT area and, hearing a buzzing or humming sound coming from the back of her home, she went out to investigate. It was mid-afternoon, and when she opened the back door she found herself face to face with Mothman, hovering about 10 feet in front of her. Her description was detailed, suggesting something more like a machine than an animal.<sup>20</sup>

Consider too these other reports of entity contact: Near Croton Falls, New York, it was reported that "dwarf-like hooded beings" emerged

from a shimmering circle of blue that appeared in an outcrop of rock "following a buzzing sound."<sup>21</sup> In a humanoid entity report from 1975, "Angelica Barrigon Varela and co-worker Remedios Diez were on their way to work at a local factory along the wall that divided the railroad tracks and the street when they heard a loud buzzing sound coming from the area of the tracks. Looking in that direction they beheld a bizarre creature floating and balancing itself above the railroad tracks. It appeared to be wearing a monk-like smock or coat, dark green in color that emitted intermediate flashes of light under the light rain."<sup>22</sup>

Another strange phenomenon which features 'entity contact' is 'Old Hag' syndrome (also known as 'Night Terrors' and by other names around the world). These reports, in which an experiencer feels that someone is in the room with them, perhaps even on them, and has a terrible feeling of dread, have been related to the condition of 'recurrent sleep paralysis.' This too is introduced by the same certain sounds:

A buzzing / ringing / roaring / whistling / hissing / high-pitched screeching sound in the ears sets in and becomes louder and louder to the point of becoming unbearable.<sup>23</sup>

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century writings of the demonologist Fr. Sinistrari, we find this example of entity contact which happened to a young lady:

During the following night, while she was in bed with her husband and both were asleep, she found herself awakened by an extremely fine voice, somewhat like a high-pitched whistling sound. It was softly saying in her ear some very clear words: 'How did you like the cake?' In fear, our good lady began to use the sign of the cross and to invoke in succession the names of Jesus and Mary.<sup>24</sup>

Turning our attention to the British Isles, there are a number of similar cases, and one particular (relatively) modern tale which may have profound significance for our investigation.

In *Fortean Times* # 31, we find the curious case of the “Wollaton Park Fairies,” which occurred in Nottingham at the end of October in 1979:

Several children returning home after playing, heard a sound like a bell and saw coming out of the wooded area about 60 little gnome like men with wrinkled faces and long white beards, they were about 2-foot tall and were riding small bubble-like vehicles. The beings rode over the swamps near the lake and some chased the children towards the gate of the park. Some of the humanoids wore red hats and green pants and seemed to be laughing in a peculiar way. The children ran from the area.

Furthermore, in describing the Wollaton fairy event, Janet Bord adds this seemingly innocuous footnote, based on its similarities to the sighting:

Over six years before the Wollaton fairies were reported in the media, I had corresponded with Marina Fry of Cornwall, who wrote to me giving details of her own fairy sighting when she was nearly four years old, around 1940. One night she and her older sisters, all sleeping in one bedroom, awoke to hear a buzzing noise (one sister said ‘music and bells’). Looking out of the window they saw a little man in a tiny red car driving around in circles’. He was about 18 inches tall and had a white beard and a ‘droopy pointed hat’...he just disappeared after a while.<sup>25</sup>

This sighting stands out particularly because of the detail that one sister heard a different sound. Different, but still part of the subset which we have been examining (and in view of this, adds some

legitimacy to the story). This has the curious effect of making the sounds a ‘subjective’ experience (due to different perceptions of it), while seemingly coming from an objective source (as a number of people all heard a sound). Further to that, why did the sisters see the same thing, if it was a subjective experience? Interestingly, there are other accounts of groups of people subjectively hearing ‘paranormal’ noises, which are not to do with ‘entity’ contact. They are to do with death.

### THE CIRCLE IS COMPLETE

In his books *A Casebook of Otherworldly Music* and *A Psychic Study of the Music of the Spheres*<sup>26</sup>, D. Scott Rogo recounts a number of situations which have a similarity to the fairy story above – in that the sound (in this case, music), is heard subjectively. Perhaps one of the most interesting is the tale of the final hours of the German philosopher, Wolfgang Goethe.

Rogo tells how two hours before Goethe’s death, the great German writer was visited for the final time by a ‘Countess V.’, who upon entering the house was dismayed to hear music being played at such a somber time. However, the music was not actually coming from anyone in the house:

“So you have heard it too?” replied Frau von Goethe. “It’s inexplicable! Since dawn yesterday, a mysterious music has resounded from time to time, getting into our ears, our hearts, our bones.” At this very instant there resounded from above, as if they came from a higher world, sweet and prolonged chords of music which weakened little by little until they faded away.”

However, the account tells how each person hearing the music disagreed with another on what it consisted of. The Countess described

it as “a quartet playing fragments of music some way off,” Frau von Goethe “the sound of a piano, clear and close by,” while others heard “an organ, for the other a choral chant” and another a concertina.

There is a similar account in Sir William Barrett’s *Death-Bed Visions*, in which a husband and wife heard music/singing at the time of death (of the wife’s brother):

Mrs. Allen says the sounds she heard resembled singing – sweet music without distinguishable words – that she went upstairs directly she heard the music, which continued until she reached the bedroom. Mr. Allen’s impression is that the sound resembled the full notes of an organ or of an aeolian harp.

Rogo’s keen eye also recognized another similar example, though this time in the annals of mediumship. D.D. Home, one of the first mediums to be scientifically tested – and one of the ‘stars’ of the history of mediumship – was said to have encountered ‘psychic music’ throughout his life. One case in particular parallels the anecdotes we have mentioned above, and is recorded in Lord Adair’s book *Experiences in Spiritualism with D.D. Home*:

Almost immediately after we had gone to bed and put the lights out, we both heard the music...Home said that the music formed words; that, in fact, it was a voice speaking and not instrumental music. I could hear nothing but the chords like an organ or harmonium played at a distance.

Lord Adair’s account sounds extremely similar to the accounts of Mohammed, and Lucia at Fatima. Mohammed heard Gabriel’s words ‘through’ the tinkling of bells, while Lucia appears to hear the Virgin Mary ‘through’ a buzzing sound. It is almost as if the strength of ‘signal’ varies from person to person, and only those with



the strongest signal get the intended message...the others get the psychic equivalent of static.

Accounts of Home’s séances also mention the ‘rushing of wind’, with almost exactly the same results as those of the Pentecost (which I mentioned earlier):

Lindsay and Charlie saw tongues or jets of flame proceeding from Home’s head. We then all distinctly heard, as it were, a bird flying round the room, whistling and chirping, but saw nothing, except Lindsay, who perceived an indistinct form resembling a bird. There then came a sound as of a great wind rushing through the room, we also felt the wind strongly; the moaning rushing sound was the most weird thing I have ever heard. Home then got up, being in a trance, and spoke something in a language that none of us understood; it may have been nonsense, but it sounded like a sentence in a foreign tongue.<sup>27</sup>

## THE MYSTERY REMAINS

What are we to make of this? We have numerous ‘boundary’ or paranormal experiences, all of which appear to consist of definite sounds (enumerated previously in mystical literature, as above). What’s more, these ‘sounds’ appear to be subjectively perceived, but sometimes originate from some objective source, as evidenced by the group experiences.

There is some evidence to suggest that these sounds are caused by stimulation of certain parts of the brain. For instance, it is known that sufferers of Temporal Lobe Epilepsy (TLE) also experience a remarkably similar set of sounds:

Simple auditory phenomena such as humming, buzzing, hissing, and roaring may occur if the discharges arise in the superior

temporal gyrus; and olfactory sensations, which are usually unpleasant and difficult to define, can signal the start of seizures in the Sylvian region or ento-rhinal cortex.<sup>28</sup>

The comment about olfactory sensations should not go unnoticed either, considering many paranormal encounters also involve smells (from sulphurous to the sweet smell of roses). Most readers will also be familiar with the research of Dr Michael Persinger, who claims to have elicited ‘entity contact’-like experiences via magnetic stimulation of the temporal lobes – in fact, Persinger’s modified motorcycle helmet, fitted with magnetic induction devices, has been nicknamed ‘The God Helmet’.

At face value then, it might be surmised that all of the experiences listed in this essay are simply hallucinations, created by a malfunction of the brain. But a closer examination prompts more questions. How do we explain the ‘group hearing’, such as that of Fatima? Persinger would have it that some electromagnetic field was present, affecting the brains of all those within a certain radius from the EM source, and varying depending on the exposure. But then how do we explain the Wollaton fairy report, or the tale of Marina Fry, who with her sisters saw the little man in the tiny red car. In both events, the sound was heard by a group, but *the same thing was also seen* – and in the case of Marina Fry, we have the added complication that the sound was heard differently.

Furthermore, the reports of celestial music at the time of death – again, heard subjectively – confound the hallucination explanation, and also Persinger’s EMF theory. Apart from some over-construed physicalist explanation (describing a state of group catalepsy or similar), there is a real possibility here that the explanation we must face is that there is another facet to the time of death (and also, obviously, to paranormal events in life) which is thus far unexplainable.

Such experiences lend weight to the idea that the brain is certainly involved in these border phenomena, but that it is mediating or receiving

the experience, rather than creating it (as a hallucination). If so, we are faced with a real mystery – the true origin of these various phenomena. Whatever it is, it appears to be connected to everything from UFOs and mystical experiences, right through to our fate after death. We would do well to pay more attention to the crossovers between the various branches of paranormal research in future.

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