

# An Icaro's Musical Analysis for Therapy

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## Introduction

Since the dawn of human civilization Music is used in therapy processes in order to reinforce and speed up their effects. Music is always an essential part in rituals aiming to heal various disturbs, in ceremonies dedicated to the preparation of various natural remedies and in rehabilitation therapy.

Considering the basics of the relationships between music and medicine the most important element is the **rhythm**. An iso-rhythmic (same rhythm) pattern repeated during the rituals stimulates in the brain of participants the production of endorphins. These "brain's natural opiates" produce a trance state in which the subjects become prone to a direct physical treatment or to a hypnotic suggestion aiming to act upon their psychical and/or physical disturbs. The music used for therapy is a basic component in the process of medical cure, combining the rhythmic cells with low tones acting as sound generators played or singed for relatively long periods of time, and short melodic motives belonging mostly to pre-pentatonic or pentatonic modes either of hemitonic or anhemitonic types. Note that this music always belongs to the not-temperate modal systems.

The word *icaro* is believed to derive from the Quechua verb *ikaray*, which means "to blow smoke in order to heal". Icaros are either whistled or vocalized in words and vowels. As a student of icaro noted : "neither the words nor the understanding of the text of icaros are indispensable". (Mabit, see references).

Icaro is the main tool in Ayahuasca ceremonies, where a special beverage made of various plants, mostly halucinogeous, are brewed and ingested in order to heal various real or imagined disease.

The music of icaro has the role described above, as in any other ritual ceremonies.

I analyze it in this paper in order to understand what works in it and to propose the use of the musical structure in writing the music for therapy in clinical music therapy environment.

## **Musical Text**

Recording (listen to): ICAROS CHAMANICOS - Ayahuasca, Cantos for travel in Ayahuasca ceremonies at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Av2bPolPpkA>

From 1h 11' to 1h16'

Duration: five minutes

**Note:** I transcribed the musical text eliminating the small differences in interpretation of the music. That mean: sometime the highest of the pitches differs, usually by a major second above or below the written one; the duration of the final notes is longer or shorter, mainly when the modal dominant is implied.

I choose to offer a synthetized version, easier for the analysis and understanding of the music and its structure.

As mentioned before, the lyrics themselves has little importance; I do not noted them, consequently.

I noted as Maracas the accompanying percussion instrument; effectively, the instrument used is a chakapa, a rattle of bundled leaves. The sound is quite identical with that of a couple of maracas.

I done that in order to offer to the composers a basis for their work for therapy, by using common, everyday practice instruments.

The essence of the musical structure is presented in order to further explain the effects on the Brain-Mind-Brain-Organism system and its possible applications in a music based .therapy.

# ICARO

Score

♩ = 78

Maracas

Soprano

Mrcs.

S

Mrcs.

S

## Analysis

### Melodical:

It is an anhemitonic (without half steps) pentatonic mode based on G, of a major type (with a major third at the base) made by two sections.

The first section (A) is made of a tetrachord of a minor type (minor third at base);

The second section (B) is made of a pentatonic mode of a major type (major second at base).

The modal dominant (b) is present in both sections; in the first as the first sound, in the second as the last sound.

### GENERAL MODE

## The melody line

Small and rather symmetrical spatial development.

The first section: 3m-2M-2M-3m | 4P-3m-3m-2M-3m

**Design:** ↑↑↓↓↓ || ↑↑↓↓↓

In the second section: 3m-3M-2M-2M | 6M-2M-3m-2M-2M (2M)

**Design:** ↓↓↑↑ || ↓↑↑↑↑(↓)

The modal dominant (corda di recitazione) acts both as attractor and constant in the dynamic system. This is typical for the monody (the rhythmic accompaniment is a constant of second order).

The real tonic (G) is presented only as the final note; the relationship between the tonic and the modal dominant is of a major third.

## Rhythmical

The rhythmical cell  acts as a pedal (ostinato). Its role is fundamental in order to obtain the therapy effect (see below).

## Musical Form

Binary composed.

a = measures 1 and 2; b= measures 3 and 4; MD = measures 5 and 6

c= measures 7 and 8; d= measures 9 and 10; MD' = measures 11 and 12

A= measures 1 to 12 B= measures 13 to 24

A = (a-b-Modal Dominant) ; B = (c-d-Modal Dominant')

Number of measures: 2 x each subsection

### [A A B B]

Number of measures for each section: 12 (2+2+2+2+2+2)

Total number of measures for the whole period: 24 (12 + 12)

## Instrumentation

Monody song, female voice, vocal range mostly soprano.

Accompaniment is exclusively rhythmic; an unpitched percussion instrument called chapaka is used. The same effect could be obtain by using a pair of maracas.

## Target Area

Thalamus; Pituitary gland; Solar plexus; Cardio-pulmonic Plexus.

The rhythm acts on Solar and Cardio-pulmonic plexuses regulating and normalizing the breathing rhythms. Through them, the brain waves are lead to a normal beta and then delta form waves and related frequencies. In some patients even a deep theta wave could be stimulate.

The pituitary gland in the same time is induced to contribute at the releasing of endorphins, with all the consequences that implies.

### **Possible use**

General stress; depression; focusing attention; insomnia.

### **Conclusions**

In composing the music for therapy, I am often using the structural models of the traditional music of healing rituals from all over the world. If it works since the dawn of human civilization, it means that there IS something valid in its structure.

The only problem is, for us in the contemporary world, that the rituals are lasting for long periods of time, hours and, sometime, days in a row.

Using the general structure of this music, the musical form in all its aspects (melody, rhythm, instrumentation, formal structure) we can compose a music that reach the same goals for therapy, only in a by far shorter length of time.

It is like in medicine, where the active principles of herbal medicine are used to produce new drugs, more effective than the original brews, but still maintaining the non-toxicity of them.

**Note for the Western clinical music therapists:** the patients in the Western cultures are used to accompanied music.

So, you can choose to harmonize with this structure:

Subsection a: G

Subsection b: e

Modal Dominant: G

Subsection c: G

Subsection d: C- D

Modal Dominant and Final: G

Remember that the most important element for therapy is the rhythm.

### **References**

**Graur**, Alexander : Composing for Healing, vol.1, Body and Sound (1998/2002)

MPD- Medicamus Publishing Division, Edgewater,NJ, USA

**Mabit**, Jacques: (no date): The 'Icaro' or Shamanic song at

<http://www.ayahuascommunitiy.com/the-icaro-or-shamanic-song/>

Web sites dedicated to Icaro and Ayahuasca (selection) :

<http://sacredvalleytribe.com/medicine-songs/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xahX0btLbp4>

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