

AWC 2015 - Effective use of music and movement in ritual.

By Gabrielle Cleary

A mixture of theory and practice covering different ways of including music and / or movement into ritual; facilitating mystery, cohesion, trance and participation. Tips, tricks, do's and don'ts.

INTRODUCTION:

Participants to sit in a semi-circle, with enough room to enable everyone to participate in a circle dance and a processional.

This workshop will look at different types of ritual scenarios and discuss how we could utilise music and movement in them – regardless of the particular path. We will look at how different combinations of music and / or movement can be used to manipulate and enhance energy as well as enable participants to work with ritual shapes and staging.

- Due to time constraints, this workshop will be an overview of techniques and ideas that you can hopefully take away to inspire you to create *your own* ways of working in *your own* rituals.

- Before we start getting into some of the theory, I wanted everyone to experience a combination of ritual work, recorded music, chanting, singing and movement. I'm basing this on a wiccan-style of circle dance as it will probably be something that many of you have seen in group ritual settings. Since the circle that I work with knows this particular piece really well, we will usually chant it in unison, and we can layer intoning and singing as we go. We can do this because we are used to working together and used to watching for energetic and physical cues from each other. We also usually have time to practice anything tricky. For this workshop I just want everyone to dance and feel the music and rhythm and energy and I will do the chanting and singing – this is only because I don't know what versions of this piece anyone knows and also because of very specific timing.
 - PRACTICAL: PRACTICE CIRCLE DANCE STEP
 - Everyone stand in a circle holding hands. This dance is moving anti-clockwise – to the right.
 - Step right, cross left foot behind, step right, cross left foot in front, step right, cross left foot behind, step right, cross left foot in front, step right etc.
 - The Witches Rune – danced, chanted and sung to:
[MUSIC: CANARIOS / Australian Brandenburg Orchestra / Tapas / Track 5.](#)

- That was an example of using dance for energy raising, for bringing people together in a ritual scenario, for getting everyone involved, for working towards a common goal, and working with co-ordinated movement in a specific pattern – in this case – a circle.

MOVEMENT

- Not all paths or types of rituals use circles. Some rituals also utilise different patterns in combination, such as a straight line of a procession that turns into a circle, or even spirals into an eventual circular shape.
 - QUESTION: CAN ANYONE THINK OF SHAPES, OTHER THAN CIRCLES, THAT RITUALS ARE PERFORMED IN?
 - QUESTION: IS THERE A PARTICULAR PATH THAT USES THAT SHAPE?
 - QUESTION: IS THE SHAPE OF THE RITUAL INFORMED BY THE RITUAL SPACE?
 - EXAMPLES: Hellenic ritual tends to use straight lines or a rectangular shape.
- So we can see that the type of path can inform the shape of the ritual space. This is something you need to take into consideration when planning a ritual. If you want to use movement, you will need to constrain the movement to the ritual shape or to a shape that fits within your standard ritual shape.
 - A square or equal armed cross will fit in a circle, for example.
 - Or start in one shape and end up in another such as processing in a straight line to a circular area, entering the circle area in a spiral and ending up with everyone forming the circular boundary.
 - A pentagram will fit inside a circle or a square
 - An equal armed cross will fit inside a circle or square
 - An eight-spoked wheel will fit inside a circle
- We'll look at movement first, since the type of movement can be enhanced by music and / or song.
 - QUESTION: WHY WOULD WE USE MOVEMENT IN RITUAL?
 - EXAMPLES:
 - To get participants involved
 - To raise energy
 - To empower a sigil
 - To move people around the circle
 - To join different parts of a ritual together
 - To create a sacred space
 - To celebrate
 - To enact a journey
- Types of movement:
 - Walking with or without music
 - EXAMPLE: Having people walk around the circle to get themselves equally spaced within a circle. This can be done with or without music but if it is done in a formal way it serves to bring people into the space in a smooth manner. Can also just use drums.
 - Spiral dance patterns may be walked in single file.

- Processional walks or dances
 - [EXAMPLE](#): Processional walks are a great way to get people into a ritual space and frame of mind. They can serve as a transition from the mundane to the spiritual if that is needed. Processions may be led by a musician or by several musicians and / or drummers. This may depend on the length or the processional way, the number of participants and the number of live musicians available (if any).
 - [PRACTICAL](#): Walk a processional to:
[MUSIC: BRANLE DE LA TORCHE / Wolgemut / Shauspiluden / Track 16](#)
 - Torchlit and masked processions can be intensely magical and spiritual on an inner level as well as being theatrical on an outer level.
 - Processions are a part of many religious traditions
 - Walking backwards with hands on shoulders at Samhain.
 - Do this with candles and in darkness if possible. Left shoulder in – walk clockwise backwards.
 - [PRACTICAL](#): Walk backwards holding candle to:
[MUSIC: SANVEAN / Lisa Gerrard / The Mirror Pool / Track 4](#)
- Skipping
 - This is one of the simplest dance steps and is used in many traditional dance forms. It can be wild and delightful and danced in many different patterns – from straight lines, to circles and spirals.
 - Skipping is often used in cord or wheel dances.
- Holding hands
 - Holding hands whilst moving about a ritual space can link all of the participants together in both a spiritual and physical sense.
 - Holding hands can be useful when dancing in a circle or in a spiral.
 - Also good for keeping participants evenly spaced within a ritual area.
- Simple side steps
 - Can be danced to the sides or in a forward movement. Zipper.
 - Can be danced in pairs, side-by-side or face-to-face. (Open or closed side steps).
 - Common step in set dances.
 - Good way of getting two people on opposite sides of a ritual to meet in the middle or cross over and change ends.
- Circular side steps (one direction or multiple directions)
 - Basic circle dancing step that can be performed at different tempos.
 - Can be danced clockwise or anti-clockwise depending on need or with multiple circles (centre / middle / outer in the same or different directions).
 - Can be used for delineating sacred space, for energy raising and for celebration.

- Dance steps – Morris double stepping
- Dances simple:
 - Circular Grapevine / Chain / meeting dance.
 - [PRACTICAL](#): everyone to perform a grapevine dance to:
[MUSIC](#): SACKPIPSLÄT / Azam Ali / Portals Of Grace / Track 7
 - Circular Maypole dance weave
 - Circular Dance of the Lame God – two steps to the right then one step to the left, two steps to the right then one step to the left, repeated.
 - [PRACTICAL](#): everyone to perform Dance Of The Lame God to:
[MUSIC](#): LA VOLTA / The Mediæval Bæbes / The Best Of The Mediæval Bæbes / Track 13
- Dances – more complicated:
 - An Dro – Circular dance step: right / left / right / kick, left / right / left / kick. Hands: join pinkie fingers, around then down / around then up.
 - [PRACTICAL](#): everyone to perform an An Dro to:
[MUSIC](#): Andro / Faun / Licht / Track 2
 - Volta
 - Bransle
 - Pavane / Galliard
- Morris set dances – shape depends on number of dancers
 - Single (1)
 - Double (x 2)
 - Square (x 4)
 - Rectangular (x 6 or 8)
 - Triangular (x 3)
 - [EXAMPLES](#): We have danced pentagrams in a Morris style for ritual purposes – e.g. The Apple Reel that was used in 2012's AWC Ritual.
 - We have also had a solo Morris dancer dance around the circle holding a bunch of ribbons instead of hankies. The ribbons were charged during the dance and then each person in the ritual was given a ribbon to put their fertility wishes into. The ribbons were then tied to the ends of the maypole ribbons and used in the maypole dance. After the maypole dance the ribbons were detached and taken home by the participants to tie onto a tree branch, cloutie fashion.
 - We have also enacted a ritual battle with two Morris dancers clashing sticks across and around the circle.
- Set Dances
 - Witches Reel
- Cultural dances if your path / ritual is Reconstructionist. There may be movements, instruments and tunes that are traditional.
- Free dance

- This is where participants move about the ritual area as their will takes them.
 - Often used in trance or ecstatic ritual.
 - Great as a lead in to trance prophecy.

- Types of Ritual
 - This is a brief list of different types of ritual. There are elements of movement that can be utilised for these ritual types, but some types are more suited to instrumental music or songs.

 - Celebration / Mourning
 - For celebration you might want dances that are fast or that start slow and get faster and faster. Music that creates the feeling of joy and ecstasy.
 - For a ritual of mourning, you might want a movement / or dance that is slow and reflective, a masked processional for example.

 - Worship / Offering
 - Movement could involve a single or double line of participants processing to an altar carrying offerings.
 - We have performed rituals where small items were collected from different parts of the ritual space and then joined or woven together as a joint offering to the Gods.

 - Mystery
 - Mystery rituals offer keys to understanding that which cannot be put into words or explained.
 - Some traditions and religions will use mystery plays to aid understanding.
 - Rituals that involve journeys to multiple ritual spaces will often utilise the transitional movement as keys to building up an understanding of the mystery.

 - Trance / Trance Possession
 - Rituals of trance and trance possession may utilise specific ritual movements and / or rhythms designed to create an altered state of mind in the participant.
 - They may also use movement and dance of wild abandon to create a frenzied state.

 - Rite Of Passage / Initiation
 - Rites of passage and initiation are often rituals that include worship, offerings, mystery, and journeys and sometimes trance. They usually conclude with a celebration which may be part of the ritual format, or not. As these are rituals designed to create change in the participant(s) they may contain many combinations of the different techniques of movement and some of the techniques of music that we will be discussing shortly.

MUSIC

- Whilst working with movement we have encountered quite a few pieces of music. The one thing that they had in common was that they were all **instrumentals**. Of course there are other different forms of music that we can use in ritual. These include:
 - Intoning
 - Chants
 - Songs
 - Drumming
- We will be using some of these forms in combination later in the workshop. Each of these could also take up a whole workshop by themselves.
- There are also different ways that these forms of music can be performed in ritual. They can be:
 - Solos – one drummer or musician, one singer or alternate singers
 - Choruses – solo singer with group singing of choruses
 - Unison – everyone singing or chanting in unison
 - Call and Response
 - Ensemble of musicians
- Ritual music can also come from different sources, such as:
 - Playing recorded music of traditional, classical or modern music
 - Performing music live in ritual – whether just with voices or with instruments or both.
 - Playing out or performing purpose based music, songs or chants which can include setting liturgy or poetry to music.
- Before we begin to concentrate on songs, I just want to briefly explore some of the other uses of instrumental music in ritual, other than as an accompaniment for dances. These can include:
 - Backing music for entire ritual
 - Create a specific playlist or use a whole album that has been designed as a suite so that any breaks in the music or changes of key between tracks are not jarring.
 - There are some fabulous soundtracks that can be used if you remove some of the more bombastic tracks (unless you can time your ritual very, very well)
 - My favourite album for a ritual backing track is Howard Goodall's "The Seasons" which is a suite of music composed as a soundtrack for a TV series on the seasons. It is beautiful and each piece can be played individually, as part of a seamless seasonal movement, or as the whole work.
 - Backing music for a meditation
 - ALWAYS make sure that you have more than enough music for the timed duration of the meditation. Add a complimentary extra track to your playlist or CD with the least break in the music as possible.

Meditation durations will often change when they are performed with live participants rather than just read aloud.

- Music that will be complimentary to any pauses in the meditation is useful. My favourite pieces for use in meditations are “Mabon” by Omnia (MABON / Omnia / Crone Of War / Track 3) and “Winter” by Elena Kats-Chernin. (<https://vimeo.com/105737701>)
- Music to help energise and accompany an invocation
 - This can be pre-recorded but is better if it can be performed live. I personally love working with low musical drones during invocations and magic. Drums and pipes can work well too.
- Music Tips
 - If you have multiple pieces of music in a playlist or on a CD then put a track of silence in between. This will prevent the next song playing before you are ready, and gives you time to get to the device to push stop.
 - If you are using a phone to play MP3s, make sure you set your phone to flight mode so you don't receive calls or alarms.
 - Make sure you have a power source or fresh batteries.
 - If you are outdoors and using music devices or musical instruments, make sure you have something to put them in or to put over them in case of sudden changes in weather.
- Intoning
 - Intoning is used in many ritual practices. Basically, in a ritual context, it means singing one note for either a sound or a word. The note is sung with power and purpose and is sometimes accompanied by a visualisation or a movement.
 - We can use intoning to provide a base for other magical work. We can intone sacred names or magical words.
 - Certain notes or frequencies can have different effects on the body and the mind. You will find that there are notes that can be comfortable to intone and notes that are uncomfortable.
 - Usually we are only intoning one note per person, but in some situations we will climb up the scale of notes to release energy (often shortening the duration of the notes as we go up the scale) or go down the scale to ground the residual energy and lengthen the duration of the descending notes.
 - When intoning with a group, it is important that each person takes a breath at a different time so that there are no gaps in the wall of sound.
 - When intoning it is useful one person to start the sound and the rest join in on the same note or finding a note that harmonises well.
 - Speaking of harmony, when intoning with a group it is possible to intone in chords. The most basic chord consists of three notes, being the tonic or root note, a note a third above the root, and a note a fifth above the root. These are the notes that usually sound pleasant together to western ears. (1, 3, 5)
 - If you have only two voices it is better to use the 1st and the 5th notes. We will be intoning these notes as a drone, accompanying a song, later in this workshop.
 - What I am actually talking about are the distances between the notes – these are called ‘Intervals’ and it can be useful to know about them when

intoning with other people. You don't need to know any complex musical theory, just remember to use 1st, 3rd and 5th and an 8th if you want, or 1st and 5th.

- Briefly, an easy way to remember the intervals are as follows:
 - 2nd clash DO / RE
 - 3rd "While shepherds watch their flocks by night" DO / ME
 - 4th "Auld Lang Syne" DO/FA
 - 5th "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" DO/SO
 - 6th "My Bonnie Lies Over The Ocean" DO/LA
 - 7th Clash DO/TEA
 - 8th "Somewhere over the Rainbow" DO/DO.
 - PRACTICAL: PRACTICE INTONING IN CHORDS (1, 3, 5, 8)
 - PRACTICAL: PRACTICE INTONING IN FIFTHS.

- Chants

- Chanting is another common technique that is used in rituals.
- Chants can create a cohesiveness in a ritual as a group uses them to make a point or to raise energy.
- A chant can be spoken or sung, as they are usually short and repetitive.
- Chants should be easy to remember and have a good flow. When writing chants, always practice them by getting faster and faster to make sure that there are no tongue twisters.
- Unless the chant is spontaneous or really easy to learn, it is a good idea to practice chants together before a ritual, or have enough people who know it that can carry the rest of the participants. Chants in ritual should always have a strong leader. If the person leading the chant sounds unenthusiastic, then those who join in will generally sound unenthusiastic as well.
- Chants should have a strong and consistent rhythmic base.
- Chants can be used in combination with other musical and movement techniques.
- There will be lots of opportunities for chanting, this weekend, so we will just practice one chant together.
- PRACTICAL: Chant
 - *The moon goes round the earth, the earth goes round the sun, when day and night are equal, the greening has begun.*

- Songs

- Songs are useful in a ritual context as they are the most easily adaptable to different forms of ritual.
- The lyrics of a song can convey a ritual theme or story. They can be allegorical and act as keys to mystery.
- Both the music and the lyrics can inform the mood of the ritual and also be used to change the mood to something else.
- In the first half of the workshop we discussed the different ways that music can be performed in ritual. In the context of songs and singing these are:
 - Solos - one singer or alternate singers
 - EXAMPLE: "Edge of Night" from LOTR
Home is behind, the world ahead

*And there are many paths to tread,
Through shadow, to the edge of night
Until the stars are all alight
Mist and shadow, clouds and shade
All shall fade, all shall fade.*

STEWARD OF GONDOR (Pippin's Song) / Lord Of The Rings /
Return Of The King Soundtrack / Track 5

- Solo singing can be used in ritual to focus a mood or magical act. The singer may channel gathered energies through themselves and into the ritual area and participants, or they may be gathering the raised energies from the participants and sending them as an offering or act of magic.
- We have used "Edge Of Night" during many harvest festivals as both a solo song and also layered over a chant such as [EXAMPLE: "Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter, all things pass, all things fade, all things die"](#)
- We also have songs that are written to convey a mystery. They have been sung as solos or with several Priestesses singing the song softly into individual participant's ears as they send them into trance.
- Choruses – solo singer with group singing of choruses
 - Chorus songs are great for celebrations as they enable everyone to join in with energy, but still have to concentrate on a story. They can provide both focus and active participation.
 - As with many songs, people may know the chorus very well, but have not memorised the verses.
 - Some of the good chorus songs we have used in ritual include [EXAMPLES:](#)
 - [WEAVING THE SUMMER / Spiral Dance / Magick / Track 1](#)
 - [MUSIC: THE MUMMER'S DANCE / Loreena McKennitt / Book Of Secrets / Track 2](#)
 - [GREEN MAN / XTC / Apple Venus Pt 1 / Track 6](#)
 - [A TREE SONG \(Oak, Ash and Thorn\) / Rudyard Kipling & Peter Bellamy](#)
 - Plus our original songs :
 - [COME DANCE WITH ME \(Imbolc\) / The Hearthfyre Ensemble / G. Cleary & J. Dunster](#)
 - [DANCE TILL THE DAWN \(Midsummer\) / The Hearthfyre Ensemble / G. Cleary](#)
 - [THE KING OF MAY \(Beltane\) / The Hearthfyre Ensemble / G. Cleary / K. Stamford](#)
 - [SING A SONG OF SUMMER \(Midsummer\) / The Hearthfyre Ensemble / G. Cleary](#)

- Choir
 - Sometimes as a ritual co-ordinator you are lucky enough to have fabulous singers who can harmonise. If you use them shamelessly you can get them to learn songs for you in harmony.
 - For a Hellenic ritual that we ran a couple of years ago, I wrote a series of hymns to Hestia, Persephone and Demeter. These were based on re-workings and combinations of the Orphic and Homeric hymns and used ancient musical styles and modes.
 - I sent our choir their parts way in advance. We sang the hymns in the ritual when the first fire for Hestia was lit and when offerings were being poured. It was very special.
 - I don't have a copy of the final choir's performance but I do have the example that I recorded for them to listen to.
 - [MUSIC: HESTIA HELLENE / Gabby Cleary](#)
- Unison – everyone singing unison
 - Singing a song in unison gets everyone involved.
 - Unison songs shouldn't be too long with lots of verses. They need to be easy to remember.
 - They don't even need to have a chorus, maybe a couple of verses that are repeatable.
 - They are fabulous to use in processions, even better if they can be accompanied by a drum
 - [MUSIC: BARLEY SEEDS / M. Grey & G. Cleary](#)
- Call and Response
 - Call and Reponse songs have either a question and answer format, or a repetition of lines sung by the leader.
 - They can be energy producing like a military call and response song, or they can be repetitive and contemplative.
 - [MUSIC: SAMHAIN RAIN / G. Cleary](#)
- Ensemble of musicians
 - Musicians in a ritual can play both instrumental music and accompany songs. They can lead processions or stand in the centre of a circle.
 - It is usually easier to have portable and acoustic instruments in a ritual.
 - Make sure that the volume of the instrument is appropriate to the ritual space.
 - We have used harmoniums, recorders, harps, drums, violins, flutes and autoharps in rituals.
 - Unless your muso knows lots of long complicated music off by heart, it is probably better to have short repetitive tunes played without music. It can be difficult to read music by flickering candlelight.
- Drumming
 - Drumming is very useful in ritual. A steady beat can aid trance or a frenzied beat can contribute to ecstatic ritual.
 - Drums can be loud however, so drummers need to listen and feel what is going on in a ritual. They need to stay with their brief.

- If there are multiple drummers, someone needs to be the lead drummer who the others take their cues from and usually they should have the loudest drum. Never give the loudest drum to someone who is inexperienced. They will throw everyone off.
 - When a drummer is accompanying a singer make sure it has been worked out beforehand who is following whom. Either the drummer should follow the singer or the singer can follow the drummer, it really depends on the piece.
 - A good drummer should be able to pick up the underlying energy of the ritual and enhance it
 - Make sure there is room in the ritual space for the drums. If someone is playing a large djembe then they will need something to sit on or have a djembe stand. Smaller drums are usually okay to play cross legged on the floor.
 - I have a drum that has a chest harness and is great for processions and to use whilst walking around circles. I also have a tom-tom on a stand. It is played with sticks and can be put in the corner of the ritual space. It is fantastic to use during invocations free dancing as I can pick up the energy and change the beat accordingly. Usually the sticks are held loosely and the energetic beat that is needed will come through.
 - [MUSIC: CEREMONY OF PASSAGE / Azam Ali / In The Garden Of Souls / Track 5](#)
 - Percussion
 - Percussion is great in rituals too. We sometimes pass out baskets of shaker eggs for a spring equinox ritual, using the egg theme but also providing rhythm.
 - If there is going to be a lot of dancing in a ritual we will give some of the participants ankle bells on elastic. They create a fantastic atmosphere.
 - We also sometimes go all out and use Morris bells too if we have Morris dancers present. They are very loud though.
 - We have also had lots of participants drumming a rhythm on the ground – usually to wake the land. This works well with children’s ritual too. Getting them to bang sticks on the ground.
- PRACTICAL Music exercise
 - As an example of a piece of ritual music where everyone can be involved in some way, we are going to perform a ritual piece together.
 - This involves me singing a song that was originally an invocation but has now been set to music. Usually this piece is sung in ritual against a harmonium drone and a drum.
 - We can perform it by having everyone drumming a simple rhythm and intoning either of two notes.
 - This will use both drumming and intoning as well as singing in intervals (in this case 1 and 5) as well as combining rhythm, drones and vocals and energy.
 - We could have everyone walking in concentric circles as they intone as well.
 - [PRACTICAL: Perform YOUNG STAG with clapping and intoning.](#)
 - [MUSIC: YOUNG STAG / The Hearthfyre Ensemble / G. Cleary](#)