

Love in resonance – Harp therapy in palliative care

by Renaud Kuleman, CHTP

In a nationwide movement toward a more humane and holistic approach to end-of-life care, new forms of presence are gently finding their place. Alongside caregivers, loved ones, and companions, certain sensitive practices offer complementary support. It is within this evolving landscape that therapeutic music finds its place: a musical, vibrational, deeply human presence, serving peace, connection, and love.

In the stillness of rooms where time holds its breath, the harp becomes a whisper. It is there, in these spaces filled with a special intensity, that I intervene as a harp therapist.

Harp therapy, as I experience it, is neither a concert nor mere background music. It is a living presence, a weaving of sound that follows the breath, the emotions, and the needs of the moment. In palliative care, each note becomes a silent prayer, each vibration an invisible gesture of support.

When I step through the door of a patient's room, I enter a sacred intimacy. Often, family members are present; their presence is essential, for they are part of the sacred moment we share. The harp does not speak only to the person at the end of life—it fills the space and supports the loved ones as well—in their silence, their tears, and their smiles.

Each situation is unique, no moment is like another. Each room is a world, a story, a distinct atmosphere. I let myself be guided by what is present, by what I hear, perceive, and feel. I play without a score, in improvisation, in service of the moment. The harp becomes a sensitive language, adapting and transforming to embrace the singularity of what is being lived.

It is love that emanates powerfully from these spaces... A deep, pure love, often silent but palpable: love in its noblest sense. The kind that connects, supports, and transcends fear, pain, and parting. The music becomes a reflection of this love, its resonance.

What families offer me is invaluable. They open the doors of their inner world to me in a time that is often fragile. I receive this trust with infinite gratitude. It is an honor to accompany this passage with tenderness, modesty, and respect.

My presence is also often welcomed with great kindness by the healthcare teams. Nurses, nursing assistants, doctors, psychologists—all share the same concern of offering holistic support, closely attuned to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of patients. Harp therapy is seen as a gentle, complementary presence, one that soothes the atmosphere and supports the caregiving momentum in its most human dimension.

Sometimes, members of the team request my presence for certain patients, particularly when pain or anxiety is hard to ease. Occasionally, the caregivers themselves pause for a moment—just to listen, to breathe, to recentre. It's not uncommon for me to meet a teary gaze or hear a sigh that speaks more than a thousand words.

In a room bathed in soft light, a woman was surrounded by her children. There was a palpable intensity, but also tenderness. I improvised a piece that seemed to



Renaud Kuleman plays therapeutic music for a patient

come from the very heart of that family. The children smiled, and one of them whispered: “She seems to be breathing better... Mom, can you hear your beautiful music?” That day, we shared something rare: a collective presence in the moment. A moment of love, in resonance.

Harp therapy interventions, especially with families, have this unique power to dissolve social masks. In palliative care—where emotions run close to the surface and family roles are often rigid—music creates a space of truth and simplicity. It allows loved ones to reconnect in an authentic relationship, free from pretense or barriers. Smiles, tears, and shared silences become fragile and precious bridges, where each note invites release and the rediscovery of humanity.

These social masks, roles imposed by convention and circumstance, fall away naturally under the harp's influence.

What then emerges is the essence of the human being: a vulnerability that reveals deep beauty—the capacity to feel, to give, to open up, and to love.

Through sound and silence, the harp connects us, supports us, and brings us peace. In the journey of palliative care, music becomes a subtle bridge, a path to deep, unspoken emotions. It is not

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only the end of life we accompany, but the beauty of the present moment, the love that endures in spite of everything, and the humanity that reveals itself in its fragility and authenticity.

Through every vibration, every arpeggio, there is an invitation to acceptance, to reconciliation, to gentleness. The notes released by the harp are not merely sounds—they are messages of light that touch the hearts of those who receive them: patients, families, caregivers, and the harpist too. At the heart of this exchange remains a fundamental truth: like love, music knows no boundaries, no end.

In the whisper of the strings, we know that moments of eternity can be lived in reclaimed calm—to feel that inner peace that transcends us. And it is perhaps there, in that silent encounter between the soul, the music, and love, that we touch what is most precious: the resonance of humanity, in all its beauty and fragility. ♥

Renaud Kulemann lives in Tours, France. He began his musical journey with classical singing at the conservatories of Tours and Bourges in 2002 and was awarded a first prize in 2006. In April 2024, he graduated from the first French training program of the International Harp Therapy Program.

He now works in therapeutic music at the Blois Hospital in the palliative care unit, in Paris hospitals (Créteil) through the Inventio association, and in a medicalized retirement home (Villa Eleonore near Tours).

Renaud draws on both his voice and harp to offer the most appropriate therapeutic music for each setting.

He is actively involved in end-of-life support and serves as an ambassador for the French association "Happy End," which provides safe spaces for individuals to talk about death and grief.

The cosmic harp and number five

by Sarajane Williams

An article, "Harping in the fifth dimension: Carlos Salzedo, Dane Rudhyar, and the number five," which appeared in the *American Museum of Paramusicology's* Issue 27 in July 2025, caught my attention. The magazine's publisher Matt Marble authored the fascinating, deep dive, including a robust bibliography, into the symbolism and metaphysical underpinnings of the number five, and its impact on the beliefs and works of renowned harpist, composer, and conductor Carlos Salzedo and composer Dane Rudhyar, a pioneer of modern transpersonal astrology.

The men became friends after their arrival to America during the early 20th century. It was a time when Salzedo noted the radical changes in the American soundscape from industrial noise, and that a new social and artistic era were being ushered in. Rudhyar also felt there was a cultural transformation underway and that the number five, symbolized by a five-pointed star or "seed man," could catalyze the culture and produce a spiritual influence, primarily through the works of dedicated artists. The "seed man" symbolizes the descent of the diety into earthly form.

[The harp is] a medium of cosmic expansion, for which its Aeolian nature seems to have destined it. — Carlos Salzedo

The number five played out in Salzedo's groupings of five preludes, 5/4 rhythmic meters, note patterns of fifths, pentatonic scales, the design of his Lyon and Healy Salzedo Harp model featuring five-fold geometry, and a monogram for his name **5** forming a five-like figure. Salzedo felt the harp's impact would be greatest in large ensembles using ancient modes to represent the cosmic power of related sounds.

Like Salzedo, Rudhyar also composed a piece entitled *Pentagrams*. After discovering his love for astrology through his study of Theosophy, Rudhyar devised a radical music theory based on the number five, "Dissonant Harmony: A New Principle of Musical and Social Organization." Not only was five a significant number symbolically, but he felt it was also key to the structure of living organisms and that it represented five archetypal stages of development of human activity at three basic levels. The fifth octave marked the first stage of the process of individualization; the stage at which cultural wholes are formed. He wrote,

The harp... changes in its morphology so as to symbolize the new life, the NEW SPIRITUAL RHYTHM of mankind. Mankind is no more a soul descending into matter, but evolving out of the forms and relations which it has previously generated in order to gain experience thereby. The harpist, the musician-soul, has no more to manipulate matter, that is cosmic matter, but to arouse into life his individual natures.

There's much more enlightening information in the article about the influences of the two artists in shaping 20th-century music and ideas. ♥

Matt Marble, Ph.D., is an artist, author, musicologist, audio producer and director of the American Museum of Paramusicology. Visit: <https://www.mattmarble.net/>