



## Singing bowls calm the (hectic holiday) mind



Attendees lie on the floor and soak in healing sounds. ANTOINETTE MARTIN/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

**By ANTOINETTE MARTIN**  
For Montclair Local

Stress-free holidays may seem like a contradiction in terms. Yet, a Nepalese singing bowls concert staged Dec. 1 in the sanctuary of First Congregational Church launched a season of serenity for a group of local folks from various faiths and traditions.

“Let go of your worries. Let in the things that really matter,” Jessica Morris of [Down to Earth Meditation](#) intoned softly as about 20 people sat in pews, lay on mats or assumed meditation pose. “This type of music is not just for your ears, but for your whole body and mind.”

Ordinarily, Morris plays the bowls in meditation classes or sound therapy sessions, in which the bowls are placed on and around the body as a healing type of massage, or to relieve tinnitus.

The performance earlier this month marked her first purely musical concert.

At the holiday event, Morris sat on the altar, her 200-year-old set of hand-made singing bowls, composed of a traditional seven-metal recipe, arrayed around her. On the floor in front of her, an older man lay on an air mattress, a couple lay on mats with the woman’s down jacket serving as a blanket, a bearded man sat with crossed legs and straight spine, and others lay, reclined or sat quietly. All were drinking in the subtle, humming chords of the bowls as Morris stroked their edges with a dampened mallet.

Dressed in black, with a scarf the color of low flame, Morris used her hands and wrists with elegant choreography as she drew the spectral sounds from the bowls.

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Then, another woman dressed in black with a scarf the color of burning fire, moved quietly to the stage, and sang an a cappella version of “Amazing Grace” with a blues-y ache in her voice that resounded in the hall. She was Jess Abreu, a friend of Morris.

“Cry if you need to cry,” Morris said gently. “Be quiet. Whatever it is, unburden yourself.”

The singing bowls returned, and the sanctuary, lit with Christmas trees, became a sort of bright cocoon of meditative awareness. Soon, a solo flute rendition of “Ave Maria” by musician Stevie Tryson, and a soaring version of “You Raise Me Up,” with Abreu singing and Tryson on piano, followed, as Morris continued to provide singing bowl interludes.



*Jessica Morris talks to audience, by the singing bowls.*  
ANTOINETTE MARTIN/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

The audience, mixed in age, spiritual practice, and backgrounds, listened as Morris explained the choice of the Dec. 1 date for the concert. It was the 100th birthday of Yogi Ramsuratkumar, whose spiritual lineage she follows.

“It’s a perfect way to begin the holidays,” said Martin Parker of Bloomfield, who said he was helping to prepare latkes for his family the next day, on the first night of Hannukah. “Whatever holidays you favor.”

Morris said she is planning more concert events in the sanctuary space, known for its excellent acoustics, in 2019.