



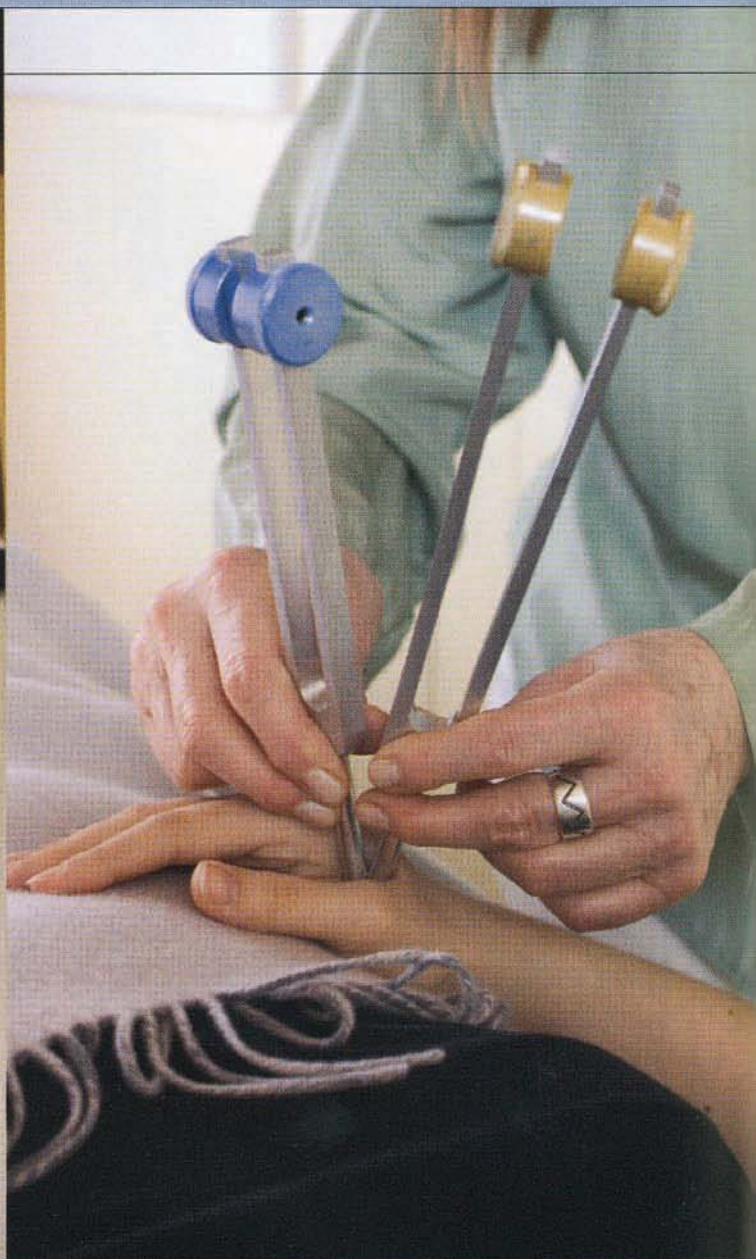
## OVER THE RAINBOW

Sound therapy is one of many secret weapons employed by the region's diligent bodyworkers.

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# Under Pressure

Bodyworkers throughout the region  
are on point to provide bliss

WRITTEN BY BESS HOCHSTEIN  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEFANIE MOTTA

**Y**OU CAN STAND A LITTLE closer if you like," says Elfi Six, as she gently strikes the enormous gong in the glass-walled living room of her South Egremont, Massachusetts, home. "You might even close your eyes." She carefully observes my posture as the gong's deep tones resonate not only throughout the room but within my body, creating particularly strong vibrations around my heart.

After a bit more gonging, the soft-spoken bodyworker—whose voice still bears a heavy German accent despite her nearly twenty-five years in the United States—leads me to her cozy treatment room, festooned from floor to ceiling with all manner of things to ring: smaller gongs, bells of all sizes, a kalimba, Tibetan singing bowls, and *tingshas*. A rainbow of chimes hangs above the massage table, and two sets of colored tuning forks line a nearby shelf. These are among the instruments of Acutonics, a healing practice that blends traditional Oriental medicine with sound therapy. Six discovered Acutonics, which she also offers at Canyon Ranch in Lenox, Massachusetts, through her dual passions for healing practices and drumming, which led her to explore music therapy.

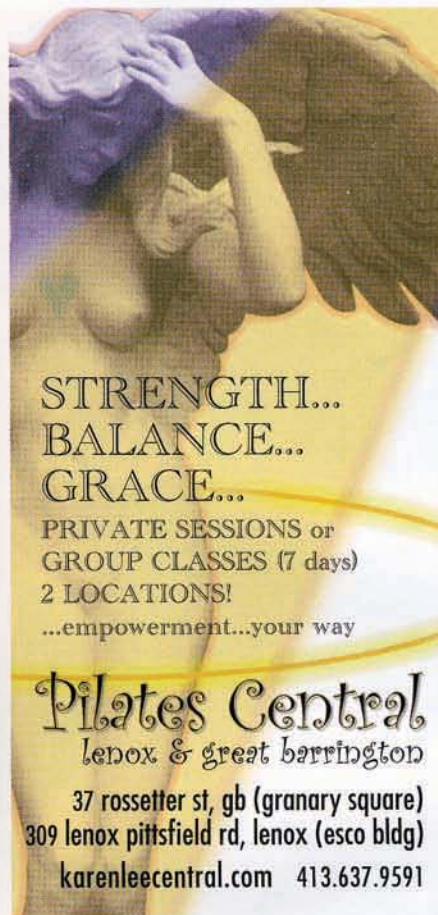
Central to Acutonics is the application of special tuning forks—which Six explains are calibrated to the frequencies of the earth, sun, moon, and planets—on distinct points of the body used in acupuncture. She strikes two or three forks, occasionally passing them near my ears before placing them on one or two points; as they ring out in pleasant harmonies, the vibrations course through my body. She also integrates hands-on touch, at times climbing onto the table to push and pull my limbs. There's a lot happening during this treatment, as Six strikes bells or chimes suspended from the rafters, or places a ringing, singing bowl on my abdomen. But rather than feeling frenetic, it's deeply relaxing. Six has created a sound sanctuary.

At the beginning and end of the treatment, Six gently presses her hands into specific spots in my abdomen, known as the *hara* in Japanese, where, as she explains, "... all twelve major meridians [channels of chi, or life energy, in the parlance of Oriental medicine] are mirrored, and where the energy expresses itself in terms of fullness and emptiness. Since our goal is to balance the energy, we would 'fill up' the more deficient meridians and disperse the stagnation in the fuller, or 'overflow,' meridians to create harmony. Of course, energy is always in flux, but sometimes it needs a bit of support to find its right course."

Most people associate bodywork with Swedish massage, a blend of long, gliding strokes, kneading, and tapping. But entire schools of bodywork—mostly those grounded in Eastern healing traditions—are based on the use of focused, if not static, pressure on distinct points of the body. The best known of these is shiatsu ("finger pressure," in Japanese), the foundation of Six's Acutonics practice, which she has taught internationally for the Ohashi Institute, based in New York City.

Molly Kerns, who says she's done bodywork ever since she was a child rubbing her massage-therapist father's feet, attended Manhattan's Swedish Institute of Massage Therapy (now the Swedish Institute College of Health Sciences) for her formal training before pursuing advanced studies of shiatsu at Ohashi. She plies her trade on a stretch of Water Street in Williamstown, Massachusetts, that might as well be known as Day Spa Alley; her establishment, Tsubo Massage Therapy, is tucked between Day & Beth Healing Arts and InTouch Massage & Day Spa.

Shiatsu with Kerns starts the moment a client walks in. She assesses posture, movement quality, and even personality type, using the discipline's five elements to categorize people and their imbalances: wood (spring), fire (summer), earth (late summer), metal (fall), and water (winter). The session begins with the client lying on a heated mat on the floor, as Kerns sits



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