This edition of the World New Music Magazine presents aspects, both general and specific, of the creative work explored by artists in Australia and the surrounding region, including perspectives on performance practice.

The 2010 ISCM World New Music Days in Sydney was significant in that it was the first time in the ISCM’s long and distinguished history that the annual festival took place in the Southern Hemisphere. The festival presented a diverse program of contemporary music, and was particularly characterised by the complex collaborations that enabled the festival to take place – between the Aurora Festival as the host of the festival, the various venues in central Sydney and surrounds, the many performing groups involved, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, and the many involved in coordinating the logistics of the festival.

The articles in this edition of the magazine come from a variety of sources, highlighting some aspects of the festival program, but also highlighting a diverse range of creative practice not represented in the festival. We hope that you find this collection of articles to act not as a definitive summary of contemporary music in this geographic area of the globe, but rather, a stepping stone to further exploration of the rich and diverse landscape of creative practice in music and sound that exists here.

JOHN DAVIS
President, ISCM Executive Committee
**WorldNewMusic Magazine**

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Spiritual Essences:

Sounds of an Asian-Pacific Place, Personality and Spirit in *Double Resonances*

Bruce Crossman

Whether it is the shimmering brilliance of physical cascading sound underpinned by driving cymbal-based percussive ostinati of Mehldau jazz, or the slow-burn groove and exquisite structural tension in Gustavsen’s extemporisation, or the transcendent ecstatic richness of Southeast Asian percussion layered textures of Cambodian composer Chinary Ung, music has an *essence* of sound. This *essence* is at once physically sensual and spiritually transcendent. Korean *gayageum* master, Hwang Byong-ki (1978, pp. 29-31) speaks of a felt spiritual essence—*môt*—sensed within artistic endeavour and life, whilst Chinese Nobel prize laureate, the writer and painter Gao Xingjian (2004, p. 349), argues for an artistic practice based on sensory perception. Judaic-Christian thought (Barker, 1985, p. 828: Psalm 42:7) talks of the spiritually *deep* in sound. Artistic practice has both spirit and emotion. In my music, this duality of tensions wrestles towards a dichotomy that is resonant of the Pacific and yet aims for the transcendent. My work *Double Resonances* (2007-08) is about this *essence* of sound: at once felt-spirit and yet earthed in the sensuality of place and personality. In this music I consider that *essence* is evoked in a way that aims to speak in human and heavenly spheres. On the physical level, sounds located from within the Pacific basin such as Filipino *kulintang* percussion, Korean and Chinese gongs, and East coast Australian bird-call inspired heterophony within Asian modes are used to signify my Pacific environs. These resonances sit alongside what I consider to be personality sounds; they are personal in the sense that they are musical gestures drawn from a personal improvisational practice. On the spiritual level, emotionally symbolised sounds (communion bell-like crotales and Thai temple gong) suggest the higher dimension whilst this ‘other world’ *essence* is also expressed in an embodied way through interval-colour and reverberant sound—an inner felt-tension of spirit.
A Pacific Philosophy

Filipino ethnomusicologist and composer José Maceda argues for a Southeast Asian spiritual concept of time that lays a foundation for formulating a Pacific focused ethos. Essentially he argues that the Southeast Asian concept of time is not linear but metaphysically based with a focus on nature and the divine (Maceda, 1986, p. 11). In this world, temples and rituals, metals and symbolic resonances related to place are paramount. Maceda puts it this way: ‘In Southeast Asia… ideas about a relationship between musical time and culture may also be viewed as philosophical concepts which find expression in a respect for nature, infinity, and the divine’ (p. 12). This concept of time is rooted in the materials and their symbolic overtones. The awareness of bronze with its long resonances and ritual associations gave birth to the idea of drone and its spiritual mystery associations. Maceda muses: ‘A sense of mystery pervades gong sounds associated with rituals, ceremonies and communications with spirits; and a fundamental element that characterises these sounds appears in a concept of drone or ostinato, as this is present in many, if not most, gong ensembles of Southeast Asia’ (p. 12). Maceda sees the heart of this sound as free vibration: ‘a vibrating medium… is allowed to vibrate freely with one stroke’ (p. 12). In this latter sense, the principle ties in with the single entity approach to sound which Filipino scholar Francisco Feliciano relates to Chinese Confucian philosophy. He states ‘each single tone… is a musical entity in itself’ (Feliciano, 1983, p. 9). In jazz, as in Asian music, this intensity of the moment is treasured. Danish jazz improviser Tord Gustavsen notes the ‘intensity of the moment’ (Gustausen, 1999, p. 3) in improvisation although he pairs it with an architectural design sensibility favouring multidimensionality; he dismisses the isolated moment approach as ‘the dark side of a dialectical theme’ (p. 15). However, here in the Pacific, the Confucian single entity moment, Southeast Asian drones marked by time-pulse and timbre (Maceda, 1986, p. 13), and metaphysical overtones of gongs formulate the basis for a Pacific located approach to the physicality of sound and its spiritual resonances whilst not denying the intensity of European music making.

The approach I take to sound is shaped by this Pacific philosophy but is also formulated through practical interactions. My impulses in music are always formed through free piano improvisation as well as an inner sensibility. Double Resonances was initially conceived as a duo for percussionist versed in the music of many cultures, Michael Atherton, and pianist Ian Munro. At the Aurora Festival 2006¹ (Hindson 2006), during an intercultural forum Michael and I spontaneously extemporised together on Filipino kulintang percussion and piano. The seeds of an idea were born: non-tempered Filipino gongs versus European tempered piano sounds within an avant-garde jazz sensibility. This short improvisation spawned into the approximately eighteen minute architecture of the composition Double Resonances which was premiered at the Aurora Festival 2008² (Hindson, 2008) by pianist Bernadette Balkus and percussionist Claire Edwardes. The work is structured as a set of parallelisms around a still centre. The
introductory section deploys slow, distilled half-resonances from prepared and altered piano techniques merged with Thai Temple gong and Korean *samul nori* metal resonances. This is followed by the first jazz-section with bass sounds in shifting, Filipino-inspired ostinato rhythms propelling the piece forward against sudden jazz intrusions based on dissonant interval-colours; these sounds reach a stormy climax punctuated by ringing crotales. The next section provides a still centre for the work and alternates bowed vibraphone with the gong-chime beauty of the Filipino kulintang. It places the sounds within a Chinese modality and uses their shimmering quality and spacing to evoke Australian bell-birds. A second jazz-section reuses the jazz-inspired intrusions and adds a repeated note driver that helps propel the work to its main climax—which includes moments of controlled improvisation. The work concludes with the distilled half-echoes of prepared piano and Thai temple gong sounds of the outset (Crossman, 2008 p. ii). This is illustrated later in this essay with musical examples of metal timbres and spiritual essences from the outset and close of the music, as well as static and architectural jazz excerpts from the second jazz-section, and bush and kulintang sounds from the still central section.

**Sounds of Place: Gong-Chimes and Natural Reverberations**

The connection to sounds of the Pacific basin in my music is a deliberate attempt to ground the music in the resonance of place—specifically my own Pacific locale. In this sense the *essence* of sound is literally drawn from Pacific culture. Maceda articulated the idea of having a Southeast Asian sonic identity through vibrating gong sounds in resonance with spiritual rituals (1986, p. 12) and as ethnomusicologist Michael Tenzer sees it, Maceda applied this to his own avant-garde music to give voice to the traditional values of the Philippines, whilst also liberating the avant-garde from a Western orientation (Tenzer, 2003, p. 100). In this amalgamation the materials are paramount; Southeast Asian bronze gongs reinvigorate the avant-garde and it in turn the Filipino cultural voice (pp. 100-101). Maceda ‘wrote layers of precise and intricate rhythmic patterns to produce timbral fields in which individual elements combine into regions of drifting color and drones’ (Tenzer, 2003, p. 102). In my own avant-garde music, following Maceda’s model, I seek to reinvigorate it through gong sounds of the Asia-Pacific as a geographical locating force within the textural fabric of the music but in a more eclectic way. The resonances in my music are drawn from freely vibrating metal sources in both East and Southeast Asia intersecting with a contemporary jazz impulse.

**Gong Resonances**

On the timbral level the bronze gong-chime resonance of the kulintang is a distinctive sound amongst the Muslim groups of the Southern Philippines. Islamic scholar, Isaac Donoso Jiménez, summing up scholarship on the matter, describes it as ‘an instrument as icon of the indigenous air—the *Kulintang*’ (Jiménez,
The *kulintang* standard is a set of eight pitched gongs, each with a ‘boss’, over a wooden frame played with soft wooden sticks (pp. 7-8) emitting a luminous gong-chime beauty from the freely vibrating bronze. In using this iconic Filipino sound as part of the fabric of my own music I was attempting to locate its sound within the Pacific; indeed these gentle undulating sounds weaving through my music transformed its European avant-garde impulse into a more luminous Pacific orientated voice (see Figure 2.1).

![Figure 2.1 Claire Edwardes with kulintang gong-chimes, Performance Space, University of Western Sydney, 5 April 2008. Photo: Ji Yun Lee.](image)

I designed *Double Resonances* around the specific tunings of Atherton’s *kulintang*—an instrument he brought back from the Philippines—and a free jazz extemporisation impulse. A borrowed kulintang scale fragment and alternating pattern from the work *Kuriri* by the Islamic Yakan people of the Southern Philippines (Santos, 1995, pp. 142-43, 145) also reverberates in the textures of my work. This excerpt was transcribed by Filipino ethnomusicologist Ramon Santos who notes that in traditional music of the Philippines the existing materials—motivic ideas—are extemporised on by the performer to give them a unique character to convey different emotions (pp. 144-145). Similarly in my own music I improvise on pre-existent scale and rhythmic fragments—in this case Yakan and Atherton kulintang fragments—to match them to a personally felt quirky jazz-infused sensibility. In *Resonances* this jazz-infused use of kulintang material includes syncopated ties and off-beat jabs. These fragments are overlaid by personalised avant-garde bluesy licks on piano that chromatically surge towards Korean *gayageum*-like (Hwang, 1993, Track 3) quick-note figures that energise emergent phrases. These modal phrases in turn form a quasi-counterpoint, a
heterophony-like evocation of the Chinese Shang-tiao (Lee, 1978, pp.42-43) mode that in itself is a transposed rotation of the Korean kyemyŏnjo mode. The mixture of Filipino, Chinese and Korean modes amongst an extemporised jazz sensibility is designed to evoke the Pacific locale and personality of the composer (see Example 2.1).

Example 2.1 Bruce Crossman, *Double Resonances* (Bars 109-111)—Kulintang Sonority and Chinese Heterophony

Pacific gong resonance is also deployed in a broader sense in *Double Resonances* with sonorities from East and Southeast Asia. The Korean enveloping boom of the ching and sharply struck high k’kwaenggwari gongs, merge with Chinese Peking Opera gong glissandi alongside the Filipino kulintang centre in *Resonances*. My use of these gong timbres draws on traditional Asian musical practice. The Korean ching, a medium-large flat gong struck with a soft mallet, is used in *Samul nori* percussion ensembles for its deep shimmering reverberating sounds as a type of long-pulse pedal that unifies the ensemble (Howard, 2002, p. 937). Against this soft-reverb, the small k’kwaenggwari gong is struck with a hard wooden striker emitting a harsher sound; the cutting timbre contrast on quick-notes thrusts its syncopations and accelerations into the air in an excited disparity (K.E.C.P.P. Ministry, 1985, side 1: Track 1). In *Double Resonances* there is a hint of this pulse-like drone with repeated ching strokes being used to merge the metallic vibrations of plucked piano strings into the gong-chime sounds of the kulintang (see Example 2.2). The piece revels in undampened vibrations—at once Confucian style single-tone entities and Maceda-described mysterious metallic free-vibrations born of the Pacific. A biting k’kwaenggwari sound emerges later in the work at momentary climactic peaks as free accelerating patterns whose harsh timbre heightens the climax. The Chinese Peking Opera gong, like the k’kwaenggwari, has the power to momentarily heighten phrases. In the earlier mentioned Aurora improvisation between Michael Atherton and myself, the Peking Opera gong was used to momentarily articulate syncopated piano phrases. Atherton in a reflective-process essay on his own performance practice notes the Asian single-entity character of this small gong in its ‘enhancement of a single note, in this case a distinct upward pitch glide’ (Atherton, 2006, ‘At the edge’ p. 84). Inspired by this
interaction, my explicitly notated *Resonances* at its outset uses Peking Opera gong bursts to articulate jazz-transformed kulintang rhythms in low rumbling phrases on piano. The approach is simultaneously a blues call and answer dialogue but with Asian rhythmic and *single-entity* sounds. West merges with East in buoyant gong gestures.

In using gong timbres within the chromatic sonority of an avant-garde idiom, my music follows the earlier mentioned example of José Maceda, who aimed to give voice to traditional Southeast Asian values within an avant-garde idiom by using timbres of the region (Tenzer, 2003, pp. 100-101) in the same way that I am attempting to give voice more generally to a Pacific culture within my music. Tenzer states: ‘Maceda came to envisage the language of Varèse and Xenakis as a vehicle that could be reharnessed to serve a different culture and way of life’ (p. 100). Specifically, Maceda saw that other densities of sound could be used within avant-garde music as a resonance of place. Maceda in correspondence with Tenzer, posits that:

Instead of densities in ‘clouds’ and a trigonometry of lines, other designs in a swirl of bamboos and gongs depict a tropical environment of rain, insects, people … The transformation of these instruments from their ritual functions in village Asia to one of physical density. (p. 101)

Whilst he acknowledges the universality of these sounds, Maceda saw Southeast Asian sounds and society as distinct from European dictates (Tenzer, p. 101). This differentiation of sound free from European doctrine is common to both our musical practices.

**Bush Cathedral**

Another form of Pacific place is the resonance, not only of Asia-Pacific cultures, but nature. Recently the cathedral-like echoes of antiphonal sounding bell-birds within the Australian bush spaces have quieted my ear to the beauty of the environment. The spacious ringing antiphony of bird sounds at the bottom of the Blue Mountains in Sydney provided the specific *eureka* moment
for *Double Resonances*. To create this cacophony of overlapping sounds I used the Chinese *Shang-tiao* mode in a type of heterophony-like counterpoint on pedalled piano in tandem with slow, organically evolving, bowed vibraphone phrases. The bowed vibraphone technique draws on Atherton’s performance vocabulary used in his work—*Jiriyai* (2006). The effect in *Resonances* is of an echoing voice gradually materialising amongst punctuating piano heterophony as an evocation of East coast Australian bush. A low, long-string piano resonance, metallic in nature through rubber-stopping, acts as a Southeast Asian-like drone under the cathedral-like sounds (see Example 2.3). This bush awareness is latent from my time studying composition with the Australian composer Ross Edwards. He describes this osmosis-like process where the environment shapes the music within his ‘sacred’ style whilst writing about his time at Pearl Beach in New South Wales. Edwards states about this process:

My working method was simple: it began with a morning walk on the fire trail followed by my confronting a blank piece of manuscript paper. I never tried to replicate the sound events I had just heard. Instead I allowed my subconscious mind to process what it had absorbed, to distil essential shape and patterns which were then consciously assessed. (Edwards, 2006, p.102)

This meditative saturation in the bush sounds of the Australian Eastern seaboard is based on a Buddhist-like contemplation of the environment for the isolated moment (Stanhope, 1994, p. 97). However, in my music the spiritual impetus behind the cathedral-like bush environment is a sense of ecstatic joy of an enveloping creator—a Judaic Christian belief.

*Example 2.3* Bruce Crossman, *Double Resonances* (Bars 128-135)—Bush Cathedral Sounds
Sounds of Personality: Jazz Extemporisation

Welling up within my musical being is the urge to improvise. In one sense I see this impulse as a type of ecstatic spiritual release and in another way it is the sonic signature of a jazz-orientated musical personality. It happens spontaneously and intuitively in the moment—as in the earlier mentioned Atherton-Crossman Aurora extemporisation—and yet generates the material for a more architectural exploration within notated composition. Danish jazz pianist Tord Gustavsen embodies both these approaches within extemporisation. In his thesis on the eroticism of improvisation he notes the intensity of the moment but also its architectural unfolding in time (Gustavsen, 1999, p. 12). This European focused approach is not satisfied with an organic moment orientated form but rather requires a musical architecture to make its detail effective. Gustavsen explains: ‘… improvised music that contains otherwise brilliant ideas and nice little ‘happenings’, can still be unsatisfactory if the overall flow is missing, and if the form at large isn't compelling’ (p. 9). On the other hand American extemporiser Brad Mehldau, in discussing the purposes of music, argues for its autonomy and that autonomous experience as interconnecting people (Mehldau, 2001, pp. 1 and 3). Philosophically, Mehldau's sees his goal as never arriving which thus locks him into the moment in his musical attitude. He puts it this way: ‘My claim at truth is posited into a yet unforeseeable future that never arrives, because there is always a better future that can be imagined’ (p. 1). Sonically speaking, this attitude develops into moments of suspended musical ecstasy—a point I will develop with regard to Mehldau. However, the point herein is that my own approach draws on both Mehldau and Gustavsen’s concepts within improvisation-inspired sections in Double Resonances. I use musical gestures caught up within an architectural design as well as suspended sonic moments which stem from the physicality of my own syncopated extemporisation practice. Resonances’s repeated note agitation that gradually accelerates and expands into blues-like chromatic licks and climactic punctuating voice-led fourths chords to demonstrate this designed-moment approach (see Example 2.4). In this sense it follows Gustavsen: it uses architecture to make the moment telling or climactic.

In his music—‘Curtains Aside’ (Gustavsen Trio, 2004, Track 4)—he makes pungent atonal chordal-stab moments telling through architectural placement within bluesy laced tonal phrases, whereas in my music, there is the interlacing of an avant-garde chromatic language with Filipino Yakan-inspired (Santos, 1995, p. 145) modal fragments, alternating quick-notes and kulintang timbre. In other words, my music is caught between two worlds—jazz extemporisation and Pacific located sound. In contrast to Gustavsen’s architectural approach, other moments of Resonances explore a suspended ecstatic moment approach to sound more akin to Mehldau’s music. Evocative whole-tone and fourths chord amalgamations on piano are allowed to settle in a freely repeated accelerating pattern overlaid by kulintang-derived³ (Brennan, 1984, Vol. 2: pp. 395-428) rhythmic patterning on skins with a punctuating Peking Opera gong glissando (see Example 2.5). This
free-time section allows for static fragments on piano and percussion to settle and build up dynamically as one unit. This static harmonic balm approach in my music was inspired by Mehldau’s improvisation in ‘Alone Together’ (Mehldau, 2001, disc 1: Track 4) where the pianist continually repeats the harmony whilst allowing the percussionist to build an independent architectural solo over the top of it. However, in the premiere of my work at Aurora 2008, the notational freedom of the score was used by pianist Bernadette Balkus and Claire Edwardes to build together as an explosive percussive unit instead of creating an independent sound. This unified utterance was not of a singular jazz language but of Asian-Pacific sounds in tandem with an extemporised vocabulary. The personality in the music is a double resonance of West and East within a physicality of sound.

Sounds of Spirit: Essence and Symbol

I consider that within the physicality of the musical gesture there is the spiritual essence of sound. At the outset of this essay I touched on Korean artistic essence, Chinese sensory-based artistic practice, and Judaic-Christian sonic-metaphor to explain my spiritual essence concept. Traditional music performer Hwang Byong-ki in explaining the essence of sound, talks about the concept

Example 2.4 Bruce Crossman, Double Resonances (Bars 148-153)—Architectural Jazz

Example 2.5 Bruce Crossman, Double Resonances (Bars 161-168)—Static Jazz
of môt in everyday Korean culture. He makes a spiritual connection between humanity and an object, positing that: ‘an object has môt…when we come in contact with the object, our spirit by some means seems to enter into the spiritual rhythm of the object’ (Hwang, 1978, p. 30). Hwang clarifies this joyous union on the deepest level in Korean artistic practice as songmôt—a type of ‘deep or inner môt’ (p. 31) that is an innate property of art (pp. 30-31). Continuing on this essence theme, Judaic-Christian thought uses a sonic metaphor from nature—the sound of waterfalls—to explain a presence coming from a higher source down to the earthly domain. The Psalmist puts it this way: ‘Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me’ (Barker, 1985, p. 828: Psalm 42:7). Some biblical commentators give this Judaic text a literal context of waters from Mount Herman rushing down to the upper Jordan but they also stress the metaphorical connotation of a divine deep pouring into an earthly deep below (pp. 828-829: Psalm 42:7 footnote). This image is then related to the book of Revelation as the source (p. 821: Psalm 36:8 footnote) of the Christian revelatory vision of heaven—‘the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing…’ (p.1950: Revelation 22:1). I consider that one way of interpreting this sonic metaphor of the deep, is that there is an innate quality in sound that speaks of spiritual outpouring. Coupled with this concept of spiritual essence in sound, is that this object has a felt sensory dimension. Chinese writer and painter Gao Xingjian in his novel Soul Mountain argues that philosophy is an intellectual construct that is ultimately empty whereas artistic practice based on sensory perception is organic and therefore related to life. He puts it this way: ‘Fiction is different from philosophy because it is the product of sensory perceptions…it is more interesting than games of the intellect. Furthermore it is the same as life…’ (Gao, 2004, p. 349). Even though Gao is not arguing for a knowledge of God (p. 348), nonetheless he argues for sensory perception of art which I consider senses the spiritual essence therein. To sum up, in my own artistic practice I consider that sound has a sensory felt-impact that comes from a spiritual essence embodied in the work. This essence works on two levels: the physicality of felt sensory perception and symbolic suggestion.

In Double Resonances the embodied essence is a colour resonance principle whilst free-ringing percussion sounds are intended symbolically. The closing moments of this work illustrate these issues. Colour resonance is present in whole-tone based fragments of soft major third and second intervals drawn from kulintang scales (Santos, 1995, p. 148; Atherton, 2006, ‘At the edge’, p. 84) juxtaposed against chromatic-based dissonance in the piano writing. The whole sonority creates a personalised interval-colour gesture. This resonance principle is also present through timbre transformations—especially of the piano through gong-like rubber stopped notes, finger dampered strings, and select undamped strings excited externally (see Example 2.6, Bars 182-190). Pianist Bernadette Balkus (see Figure 2.2) graduated the amount of pitch in the finger-dampered string by gradually sliding the dampering hand closer to the pin inside the piano to create a type of gradual revealing of the pitch within that sound. This Asian living colour adjustment to the score was suggested4 by Cambodian composer Chinary Ung to continue the colour life already present in the score. Surrounding
and merging with these sounds are the single strokes of communion bell-like crotales and Thai nipple gong resonances. The small bell-like crotales are intended to invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit as in Catholic communion whilst the Thai Temple gongs speak of a Southeast Asian spiritual resonance. José Maceda, as I mentioned earlier, speaks of the free vibrating systems that are characteristic of Southeast Asian ensembles whilst ethnomusicologist William Malm specifically links Thai knobbed gongs to Buddhist ritual (1996, p. 148). In *Resonances*, its musical heart is not in the jazz-infused climactic sections but the quiet moments of undampened resonances of Judaic-Christian and Southeast Asian sounds. Symbolic resonating metal sounds—Christian communion bell-like crotales merging with Thai Temple gongs—are quiet metaphors of the higher dimension of life (see Example 2.6).

This quieted ear towards spiritual expression is drawn from a meditative compositional process which involves ecstatic vocal and piano utterance into stillness leading to the creation of spirit-led music. The Judaic writers put it this way: ‘And after the fire, came a gentle whisper’ (Barker, 1985, p. 514: 1 Kings 19:12).

**Pacific-Located Spirit and Sensory Perception**

In conclusion, the philosophical approach to music within *Double Resonances* embraces both spiritual and sensory dimensions. On the physical level my personal locale is evoked through East and Southeast Asian gong resonances and Australian east-coast bird reverberations. The act of piano extemporisation within the compositional process creates physicality within the music which embodies a spiritual release. On the spiritual level, I consider that the sounds of
the work through colour embody an inner môt or Judaic-Christian spirit whilst also symbolically evoking the higher dimensions of life. These essences I see as evocative of an Asian-Pacific place and Judaic-Christian thought towards an Asia-Pacific cultural identity in sound—a double resonance.

Notes

1. Intercultural Forum, Parramatta Riverside Theatres, Western Sydney, Australia on 29 April, 2006 Aurora Festival: Living Music.
2. Double Resonances was premiered at the Music of the Spirit concert, Lennox Theatre, Parramatta Riverside Theatres on 19 April at 2008 Aurora Festival: Living Music.
3. This rhythmic fragment derives from a kulintang ensemble work entitled Sinulog.
4. Chinary Ung, Research Fellow at the University of Western Sydney in April 2008, suggested this approach to the author at his home in Glenmore Park, New South Wales during his tenure in Australia.

BRUCE CROSSMAN

Bruce studied with Ross Edwards, Andrew Schultz, David Blake and Jack Speirs and holds a Doctorate of Creative Arts from the University of Wollongong and master's degrees from York and Otago. His music has been featured at festivals including the Pacific Rim Music Festival in the United States, as well as at Asian contemporary music festivals in the Philippines, Japan and Korea. He is a senior lecturer in music at the University of Western Sydney.

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Toilets, Tears and Transcendence:
The Postmodern (Dis-)Placement of, and in, Two Water-Based Examples of Australian Sound Art

Linda Kouvaras, The University of Melbourne
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Abstract

Water has enjoyed an enduring place as subject matter in Western musical works for centuries. And what Douglas Kahn calls “discursive” water has streamed in ‘traditional’ musical works from Handel’s *Water Music* from 1717 through Romanticism, “albeit in the harmonic gushes that repulsed Cage”. In the ‘experimental’ genres, the early to middle parts of the twentieth century were splattered by various engagements with water and sound, with Percy Grainger’s Free Music innovations sparked by gazing at the waves in the Victorian waters of his childhood from as far back as the late nineteenth century. Water in Surrealist art of the mid-twentieth century often featured live women inhabiting large fish-tank/window displays of sound and water — but their own voices were silent. Kahn wonders whether water for the Surrealist men represented “the vaunted maternal voice proffered in certain psychoanalytic scenarios”. But as Kahn also comments, “since the early 1960s, innumerable artists have combined sound, fluidity and water in every way imaginable”. Two examples of postmodern Sound Art, “Tears”, from *Passion* (1998), by Andrée Greenwell and *The Gordon Assumption* (2004) by Wax Sound Media artists David Chesworth and Sonia Leber, have traversed a sizable slab of historico-cultural ground in their use of water (via toilets!) as a major component since mid-century modernism. Through select psychoanalytic theories, it is fascinating to witness how they grapple with the themes of water, woman’s voice and transcendence — “discursively”, with a re-examination of the notions and possibilities of “harmonic gushes”, as well as using modernist-based technology.
Introduction

I examine here two contemporary Australian Sound-Art works, *The Gordon Assumption* by Sonia Leber and David Chesworth (2004), a sound installation, and “Tears”, the final movement of Andrée Greenwell’s *Passion* (1993). They each feature emotion-inflected women’s voices and connote water as a facet of their subject matter, an aspect of which includes toilets, and through which the works present a postmodern take on transcendence.

Water has enjoyed an enduring place as subject matter in Western musical works for aeons. It has been partnered with sound in observational acoustics stemming from ancient times through to Chaucer and Helmholtz and beyond, when the noise of a stone smacking onto water produced a visual correspondence, which was in turn figured back onto the sound waves’ invisible movements (Kahn 1999: 246). And what Douglas Kahn calls ‘discursive’ water has streamed in ‘traditional’ musical works from Handel’s *Water Music* from 1717 through Romanticism, “albeit in the harmonic gushes that repulsed Cage” (1999: 246).

In the ‘experimental’ genres, the early to middle parts of the twentieth century were splattered by various engagements with water and sound, with Percy Grainger’s Free Music innovations sparked by gazing at the waves in the Victorian waters of his childhood from as far back as the late nineteenth century. In fact, as Kahn comments,

since the early 1960s, innumerable artists have combined sound, fluidity and water in every way imaginable, and they have done so concurrently with the rise of environmentalism, which politicised the naturalism and poetics of materiality already practiced within the arts, and the unfettering of the body. Many of these practices have become infused with sonic flows of semiosis that acknowledge that water is no longer an inert element (1999: 288).

For Australia, water is emphatically not an “inert element”: it is, rather, a highly emotively volatile element and has featured in countless Australian Western artworks across all genres since Settlement — with preoccupations ranging from the early explorers dying from the lack of it to present-day drought affecting so much of the country, and flooding other parts.

But the two Sound-Art works I wish to address here, *The Gordon Assumption* and “Tears”, do not tap into this pocket of the Australian psyche, the one shaped by these types of watery preoccupations. Rather than any geological-environmental focus, they address certain bodily iterations of liquid exudations within a musical context, presented by female voices: *The Gordon Assumption* was ‘performed’ at a disused toilet block, while “Tears” uses the flushing of a toilet as part of its sound composition. To situate the works, I need to return to the evolution of works-on-water throughout the twentieth century, and thence to tease out the other associations conjured by the works, namely, psychoanalytic associations that are mobilised by the displacement of their subject matter and musical components.
Accounts of psychoanalytic associations in woman’s voice

Water’s featuring in Surrealist art, and that of its forefather Raymond Roussel of the mid-twentieth century, “remarkably consistently” portrayed live women “immersed in a concurrence of sound and water — in window displays, no less” (Kahn 1999: 253–54).

When we move to the representation of women’s voices in these three instances of immersion [by Roussel, Breton, and Aragon], what we find is that the voices are absent, supplanted by sounds as if in song or silent altogether, with sounds accompanying a dance of their presence, if not their actions. These women, in other words, have had their say in the matter dramatically reduced, both as mental and physical creatures, as occurs in many Surrealist texts and images. They are creatures after all, contained in a water in which creatures live, a water that man can live beside or on or gaze on, especially when the side of the sea is exposed as a fish tank posing as a window display (ibid. 257).

Kahn wonders whether the Surrealist men here were gazing on and longing for their own former intrauterine immersion, their desire manifesting itself as nostalgia? […] Intrauterine sound itself […] would relate to the vaunted maternal voice proffered in certain psychoanalytic scenarios. The sound would be a hydrologically filtered mother’s voice promising the bliss of undifferentiation (Kahn 1999: 256–7).

Kahn is referring here, I would suggest, to such Kristevan-derived theories (1984: 1980) as those that have explored poetic language, abjection and the semiotic chora, as part of what she defines as an integral part of personality formation at the pre-lingual stage of infant development. Kristeva’s ideas have been addressed by Kaja Silverman, whose critique has especial significance for the Australian works I wish to examine, both of which feature women’s voices (many, for the Chesworth-Leber, one for the Greenwell). The voices in The Gordon Assumption sing on ‘ah’, the single voice in “Tears” sings ‘nonsense’ words: in each work, we are invited to focus on the female voice(s), rather than on any sung verbal meaning. Silverman discusses the “primal figure” (Dunn and Jones 1994: 11) of female vocality: primal because, according to what Silverman has called “a powerful cultural fantasy”, the maternal voice is the “first voice of love” (1988: 72). Reconstruction of this irrevocable infantile moment gives rise, according to Silverman, “to two opposing ‘fantasies’ of the female voice: the positive fantasy of blissful union, and the negative fantasy of entrapment” (1988: 72). “This potent dream of maternal presence — a presence that is embodied, literally, in the ‘bath of sounds’ created by the mother’s soothing, singing voice — has resonated in Western literature and music for centuries” (1988: 72). As Silverman points out,
both these negative and positive versions “equate the maternal voice with pure sonorousness” (Jones 1994: 48) (which, at the very least, distorts the mother’s real role as linguistic initiator to the child). 7

Ideas of Kristevan-informed psychoanalysis, the female voice and “pure sonorousness” are also explored in Michel Poizat’s book, *The Angel’s Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera* (1992). 8 The “pure cry”, the inarticulate explosion most absolutely represented at the death of Berg’s Lulu, is the apex of operatic expression for Poizat. At a remove from both notated music and from verbal text, this vocality is a sliver of unimpeded communication, a vocality imbued with base emotions that transcend language’s mediation. Its power derives from psychoanalytic accounts of early childhood, when the infant’s inarticulate cry is answered by the mother. The cry’s significance is due to its complete lack of signification; it is an unadulterated voiced manifestation of the child’s discomfort rather than of any precise need. This extreme of emotion is only possible prior to the acquisition of language, which will act to sift all desires through societal structures. Just as Lulu’s cry is too keen, too heightened, to be enclosed by musical notation, the child’s cry is too raw in the power of its exigency to even be imaginable in words. Because of this, that first cry can never be recovered: “as soon as it is interpreted and elicits a reaction [from the mother], its original ‘purity’ is lost forever, as it is now caught up within a system of signification” (Poizat 1992: 101). To put this another way, all cries after this moment will be specific in their asking, and will therefore no longer have the sensuous and purposeless vocality of the first utterance. The pursuit to recapture the cry is, for Poizat, the basis of the operaphile’s obsession, most intensely, of the pleasure — or, more accurately, the *jouissance* — that resides in great singers and especially their highest notes. This point will be shown to have acute resonance for *The Gordon Assumption* in particular.

Mary Ann Smart encapsulates Poizat’s arguments:

“The power of the cry is nearly all-encompassing for Poizat. It is also the point at which the composer’s impulse and the listener’s response meet, in a shared rejection of the ordered systems of music and language. Just as composer and singer embrace pure vocality at the moment of the cry, tears are the only adequate response on hearing the cry, as the listener him[/her]self is robbed of speech and language (1993: 117).

Tears imagery proliferates throughout *The Angel’s Cry*. The opera house is a matchless world where all, even men, may weep freely, without feeling the need to suppress their tears. The unfolding of opera’s narratives is wrought by a desire to hear high voices at extremes of expression.

Catherine Clément (1989) has drawn our attention to the fact that a staggering number of these plots are distinguished by heroine death (particularly
in nineteenth-century opera). Poizat sees a primary reason for this as opera’s aesthetic, which sees all aspects of opera as determined by the search for sensual moments of vocal pleasure:

> It is not because the dramatic logic of the libretto has led the female character to her death that she cries out at that moment; it is because the logic of vocal *jouissance* is at work and is driving the cry that the dramatic conditions necessary for its occurrence are created, demanding a death (1992: 145).

Clément’s (1989) claim, however, is that the deaths are necessary for narrative closure: the female characters, being potentially subversive ‘Other’, must be annihilated. Either way, the plight of the women is, to say the least, an unhappy one, just as it is for the silent Surrealist women subjects in their watery prisons.

**Mid-century modernist, emotion-free, watery forays**

I want now to jump across genres again, back to Cage’s experimentalist innovations in water sounds in the 1930s and 1940s, to develop my next area of discussion. Rather than being the purpose of the artwork to move the listener as in traditional opera, emotion in early-to-mid-twentieth century is confined to the nascent modernist sense of excitement and exhilaration on the part of the creators at being able to work with water and sound, to control its place in their art-making (albeit, of course, in a purposefully random, experimentalist way). The achievement here is the very first-principles basis for engaging with water in soundworks, appreciating the aesthetic potential of an unusual sound source relative to traditional Western art-music, and celebrating the passing of the mid-twentieth-century moment of, as Kahn puts it, “water, water everywhere in program music but nobody [getting] wet”: now, Cage was able to exclaim about his *Water Music* (1952) in a letter to Slonimsky, “unlike Handel’s, it really splashes” (cited in Kahn 1999: 245).

Of course, it was not only Cage who abhorred the “harmonic gushes” (Kahn 1999:246, quoted above) and expressions of emotions in general through music. Modernists from both experimentalism and ‘academic’ high modernism (or, as coined in New York, ‘uptown’ high modernist, score-based works and ‘downtown’ experimentalist ex-score-based works) purposefully shunned emotive connotations in their works. One of the most interesting points of departure for me at the historical juncture of modernism and postmodernism from about 1968 onwards is postmodernism’s willingness to re-visit the emotional realm: not, it must be stressed, in a wholesale return to Wagnerian, unproblematised, heart-on-sleeve harmonic effusiveness but in an ironic, detached manner with aesthetic ‘investigation’ as one of its key concerns; this is a point of focus for “tears”. The two works which I present can be perceived to deal with the place of water in music and woman’s voice through a postmodernist prism, raising issues of expressiveness, psychoanalysis, and transcendence.
The Gordon Assumption: critiquing the “bliss of undifferentiation”


From very early on I was always interested in problematising the engagement between the performer and the audience that is to say, making the audience slightly unsure of how they relate to the music [...] in order to make them think about what the piece is doing and about their relationship to the work (Chesworth 2007).

The Gordon Assumption is a work which certainly enacts this aim. It was a Sound Installation in the Subterranean Toilets, Gordon Reserve at Parliament Station, Melbourne, as part of the 2004 Melbourne International Arts Festival. The reference is to the bodily Assumption of Mary (her physical ascent into Heaven). Leber and Chesworth’s program note reads:

An incessant outpouring of female voices lures passers-by down the stairwell to the cave-like subterranean toilets. At the lower gates, they are confronted with an asynchronous chorus of female voices in infinitely rising pitch. The voices gather and thicken without respite, in upwards glissandi, constantly trailing upwards. Behind the locked gates, the luminous green chamber beckons as a single vertical slit of brilliant white light slowly scans the surfaces.

The subterranean setting reveals itself as a point of rupture in Melbourne’s everyday cityscape of workers, commuters and public transport. The voices recall the mythologies and mysteries of voices heard in caves, where the voices of spirits, sibyls and oracles are believed to announce predictions and warnings from the mouth of a cave. Above ground in Gordon Reserve, new arrivals gather in apprehensive huddles, prior to making their cautious descent into the upward trails of female voices (Leber and Chesworth 2004).

The Gordon Assumption engages in an acutely postmodern fashion with such notions, presenting them very tongue-in-cheek. The artists enjoyed the slight perturbation on the part of passers-by for these “trapped women”: Chesworth reports, “people were concerned for the wellbeing of the ladies in the toilet. Did they get tired? When did they eat? They thought there were 100 women down there” (in Scott-Norman 2007). On the one hand we have a ‘pure’ instance of high female voice “detached from signification”, a stark “rejection of the ordered systems of music and language” (Smart 1993: 117, quoted above): there is no ‘music’, per se, and no ‘text’. There is just the ascending, random glissandi of the
soprano voices. But the *jouissance* of experiencing the high voices is offset by the ‘discomfort’ in the projected interpretation of the women’s predicament and in the spectators’ own unseens of what to do about these screams. This is arguably counter-balanced by the conflicting, seductive, mythologised lure of sirens to depths unknown and potentially dangerous, indeed “entrapping”. And, from yet another perspective, unease is conjured, possibly, by the inopportuneness of being able to surrender to the psychoanalytic urge described by Poizat to tear-up — in a public space, not to mention the squeamishness associated with the realm of the toilet. The audience can find no place of comfort in which to ‘put’ their emotional reaction(s).

These voices that one might normally expect to hear in an operatic performance are utterly out of context, *displaced*, in this disused, non-functioning toilet block beside a major public transport node. They perform a feminist-postmodern answer/antidote to the Surrealists’ immersing of the women in water and giving them no ‘voice’, while they turn on its head the psychoanalytic “positive fantasy of blissful union, and the negative fantasy of entrapment” (Silverman 1988: 72, quoted above): rather than the subject, in other words, the fantasist, who desires to return to pre-Symbolic — pre-linguistic — “entrapped” infancy, *The Gordon Assumption* women *themselves* are the ones entrapped! Similarly, the “‘bath of sounds’ created by the mother’s soothing, singing voice” which has “resonated in Western literature and music for centuries” (ibid. 72) is displaced here with postmodern irony: the “bath” is a disused toilet. There is no lurid gazing on the part of the spectators at any female forms: the women’s voices lure the audience down into their space, their false-promise womb-space — there are no wombs attached to these recorded voices as they inexorably rise and rise and are unassailably heard.

Chesworth’s remarks, “the beauty of working with sound is [that] it’s very focusing and personal — people think that it’s just for them. And you can’t turn away from sound like you can from a painting” (in Scott-Norman 2007), have pointed resonance in this work with the psychoanalytic dimension associated with woman’s voice. *The Gordon Assumption* critiques the psychoanalytic promise through the mother’s voice of the “bliss of undifferentiation” (Kahn 1999: 256–7, quoted above) and the quest to “recover the first cry” (Poizat 1992: 101, quoted above). We do not know why the *Assumption* voices are pushed to extremes of expression, unlike the case of operatic plots that demand such heights. We are left only with the *sign* of the extreme, the trace of the operatic heroines pushed to their death by our *jouissant* desire. The transcendent moment is fixed in time: the glissandi actually go nowhere, to no other place (defined musical note), nor do they start from anywhere, from any particular place (defined musical note); the emotionally-charged, “gushing” moment is all there is. Left only to contemplate what might be the cause, and the fact that we expect there to be such a cause, the audience is in a position to apprehend the situation for these women from the toilets who burst the seams of their confinement, operating outside the boundaries of the ersatz-uterine wall, heard where they should not be, transgressing place.
"Tears": a postmodern Sound-Art expression of grief

The postmodern expression of water in music finds its way into “Tears”, the final movement of Australian composer Andrée Greenwell’s (b. 1964) Passion (1993) (for soprano, tenor, female voice, trumpet, baroque organ and cello; “Tears” uses voice, electronics, a pre-recorded cello track and baroque organ). Greenwell’s engagement here is with the Passion story, another religio-transcendent-themed catalyst, whose emotional impact has been elaborated, over the centuries, in Western-music religious works. “Tears” engages acutely — but with critical distance — with feeling in music, distilling an essence of lamentation: namely, the natural, bodily noise of grief, and strongly associated with the Passion story. Here, the mezzo soprano voice range does not reach into the “pure cry” coloratura heights, but, like The Gordon Assumption, which uses no distinguishable words, there is avoidance of signification: Greenwell sings made-up, quasi-ancient words (Kouvaras 1998).

As a large-scale postmodern grappling with emotional responses to music, Greenwell turns the song into a sonic code, just as do Sonia Leber and David Chesworth with their jouissant chorus. The first third of this track comprises the sounding of what is usually silent: tears — here magnified, into a New-Ageian, veritable Flood of tears, pouring forth — wept over the ages, but obviously sampled, treated, unnatural; produced by the recording of the flushing of a toilet (Kouvaras 1998) they have paradoxically become an acculturated event here. Creating a further postmodern tension between engaging with and distancing from her material, Greenwell employs sampled sobbing (her own) on “Tears” (Kouvaras 1998). The sobbing borders the guttural emission/voice divide — at what could be called the pre-“pure” cry moment, comprised only of sharp, gasping intakes of breath treated in such a way that one can indeed recognise it as sobbing — and woman’s, not infant’s, sobbing at that. But the technology makes for examination of the sobbing rather than wholesale acceptance of it. The looped repetition renders the sobbing mantra-like, beyond emotion. The listener can simply concentrate on it and observe it, rather than empathise with it. There is no pretence of ‘naturalness’: the listener is aware of the tape-loop and cannot engage on a purely unmediated emotional level. Greenwell’s postmodern treatment of, and choice of source for, the sounds of grief, points out the contrivances.

The voice in “Tears” emerges from this flood, accompanied by neo-tonal ‘music’, jarring with high modernism’s (both ‘up’- and ‘downtown’) over-riding banishment of tonality and its ideal of a coherent soundworld/emotions. It comprises mostly triadic harmonies, although the postmodern progressions are not functional: g# min to G Maj; E Maj; b min; g min (with the note C# appearing on the final beat in the voice, making a g dim triad); D Maj; then the cycle repeats, ending up in the ‘tonic’ of g# min only to elide subtly into E Maj with a shift in the inner voice of the organ from D# to E. The melodic and harmonic rhythm are irregular, with changes occurring not-quite-predictably,
within an overall basic slow 4/4 meter, replete with an extended passage for a vocal semi-cadenza on the second cycle over the G Maj section — giving an overall quasi-improvisatory effect. The minor/major mixture of the harmonic progression is, appositely, highly affective, and the intimacy of one voice and only organ accompaniment in this movement adds to the personalised, poignant, subjective effect of the movement, much as an aria from Bach’s *St Matthew Passion* does (the baroque organ here making this association pointed).

Also featured are glissandi, as in *The Gordon Assumption*. But here they are (post-Bach) Sculthorpean ‘seagull/whale’ effects, produced by rapid, irregular downward-moving glissandi on the cello, sounding in this context as though they, too, are in grief, which, in tandem with the harmonic treatment, gives way to suggestions of flight and transcendence. But these, like the sobbing and the tears-gush, are contrived, recorded and treated with echo and overlap, and in turn point to the similarly manipulative quality of (the) affective music. Aesthetic ‘transportation’ or religious ‘transcendence’ mixes here with the foregrounding of artifice — we feel carried away by the flood of water, of emotion… we are helpless in its wake. The connotation of tears, the sobbing sounds, voices, even the whale/seagull noises, naturally evoke the bodily. But the distorted treatment of the ‘natural’ sobbing noises — using amplification, echo, overlapping and overlaying, not to mention the extreme length of the duration of the two sounds — gives rise to a sense of disembodiment, a postmodern departure from the ‘natural’. The sounds in “Tears” refer to their own production rather than signifying proceedings or conduct of which they are the sounding result.

One reading from this surreal flood could be an invitation to focus on the way Western music (“harmonic gushes”) has been used throughout the centuries, to evoke and manipulate emotional responses, perhaps to invite scepticism of the truthfulness of emotion paraded in the Passion tale and indeed other socio-cultural contexts. This has perhaps been never more pertinent a consideration than at the present time: interminably advancing computer technology has provided the modernist-dream means at an instant to catch, control and contrive virtually any sound imaginable. But the postmodern sound manipulation in “Tears” and *The Gordon Assumption* is a far cry on from modernism’s early joy in primitive recording ventures and watery soundscapes.

**Conclusion: Sound Art’s postmodern displaced “transcendence”**

Despite the movement of the attendant glissandi in each of the Australian works discussed here (rising voices in the Leber and Chesworth work, descending cello in the Greenwell), emotion is a frozen element, going no place, repeating over and over like the crying-out of women’s voices over the aeons that should have been heard but were not — and forming an antidote to modernism’s squeamishness about emotion. Performing a latter-day, newly aestheticised take on Duchamp’s *Fountain* of 1917 which made a urinal a piece of art just by calling it such, the works reassert the notion that art can take place anywhere
now, and that art has an under-belly: the ethereal voices and the transcendent religious grief-sobbing are firmly conjoined to their bodily housing — the most ethereal voice has to have a functioning, toilet-using corporeal reality, a fact not made much of in works from modernist or pre-modernist eras. But in a sublimely twisted postmodern move, here, with the wonders of technology, this is actually not the case — there are no bodies, the voices actually are ethereal, and the auditor/spectator cannot shut them out. This is palpably unlike the case for the mid-century modernist Surrealists’ voiceless women in their watery confines, whose voices never were audible. It is similarly unlike that for the traditional operatic female characters, whose fatalities were pre-ordained — whether due to “the logic of vocal jouissance” (Poizat 1992:145, quoted above) or to the exigency of narrative closure’s obliteraton of the threatening ‘Other’ (Clément 1989). The female characters in both instances deserve a meta-cry such as that offered by The Gordon Assumption wailing voices or by the protracted sobbing in “Tears”.

These two works thus offer a broader-stance commentary on significant aspects of high art over the past couple of hundred years and experimentalist culture since mid-last century. They simultaneously interrogate our collective sense of psychic and bodily place, of inside-ness (ranging from the protected, blissful, watery, foetal environment, to the enclosed, private, watery space of the toilet) and outside-ness (where such spaces are re-positioned and no longer belong to the inner realm), throwing up the issue of inappropriateness (which is essentially, after all, something occurring in the place that it normally should not).

The starkly confronting Gordon Assumption females screaming from the subterranean depths, the Passion tears-flood produced from the very receptacle for our bodily wastes, are anathema to high art: they show us our base-est selves, and firmly plug for the insertion of the mundane into high art. And in their engagements with music, sound, woman’s voice, tears and toilets, the postmodern message, the reality-check, for the psyche — which neither traditional opera nor surrealism nor modernism offer — is this: one can never return to that pre-Symbolic state of infantile bliss: there is no more such transcendent moment to be had. Perhaps, therefore, in a final, sublime postmodernist spiral, the offer here is of the true, postmodern sonic utopia, that is, the place that is no place.

Bibliography


Clément, C (1989) Opera, or, the Undoing of Women. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.


Notes


2. Water-with-sound endeavours continued on the part of such innovators as Futurist Luigi Russolo with his gurgler from the second decade of the twentieth century, Henry Cowell and his “8 Rice Bowls” tuned to no definite pitch using water for Ostinato Pianissimo (for Percussion Band) (1934) (Kahn 1999: 248). Eric Satie’s wet percussion (that is, percussion tuned by water) in Parade (1918), Harold Davidson with his water-tuned musical tumblers early 1930s (ibid. 249). William Russel’s, Harry Partch’s and Ray Green’s respective water-tuned musical tumblers and bottles works of the early 1930s, John Cage, whose first official use of water was in his collaboration with Lou Harrison, Double Music (1941) which required a Chinese gong being raised or lowered into a tub of water after striking it (ibid. 249). Cage’s first mention of using water in music was in his “The Future of Music Credo” (1937), where the sounds or rain could be “captured and controlled” by film phonographs etc (Cage, 1937/2004, cited in Kahn 1999:249). There are also George Brecht’s and Fluxus’s respective late 1950s–early 1960s dripping-works; in Yoko Ono’s and Mieko Shiomi’s early 1960s water-themed pieces; and in Annea Lockwood’s river recordings from 1966 onwards. (See, for example, Kahn 1999). Lockwood’s River Archive wants to record every river in the world (ibid. 288).

3. The environmentalism noted by Kahn (above) finds its application in Australia in (at time of writing, 1 May 2008) the most recent episode of the ABC TV series, Catalyst, which investigates the fire/water synergy in the much-threatened Murray-Darling River (Willis 2008), as does the latest presentation (4 May) of Channel Nine’s Sixty Minutes (Wooley 2008). Water’s precariousness is of course not only felt in Australia: recent acknowledgement of global warming calls attention to it across the world. But among Western-culture countries, we are highly branded by weather extremes and their consequences. Indeed, so significant is water for the national consciousness that historian and broadcaster Michael Cathcart believes that how Australians live and think has been shaped by water—“or rather by the lack of it”, as reported in an article on him entitled “Shaping and Shaped by a Dry Heart” (Smith 2008). He paints a picture of the dry interior coming into the national psyche “as a ‘troubling desolate silence’ with aridity at its heart. Because of that, during the nineteenth century, an awareness of lethargy and death arose that seemed to capture the spirit of the ‘silent land’” (Smith 2008). He accounts for the mythologising of Burke and Wills as being due to the “arid heart” having taken their lives: “They were received into the mystery that lies at the heart of Australia, and we became fascinated by that” (quoted in Smith 2008).
4. Also see Flinn 1986 and Flinn 1992 for further discussions of the psychoanalytic construction of the maternal voice.

5. The phrase ‘first voice of love’ is Hélène Cixous’s (Cixous and Clément 1986: 93).


7. Silverman observes that the phallic model fails to take into account the crucial role that the mother plays in the child’s early history of subjectivity. “Not only is her face the visual mirror in which the child first sees itself, but her voice is the acoustic mirror in which it first hears itself” (Silverman 1988:150). Indeed, the mother’s voice is notoriously absent in psychoanalytic tales. I have also discussed these critiques in another context (Kouvaras 2002).

8. I wish to thank Jenny Shaw for alerting me to Poizat’s book.

9. “Water was no longer contained in the instrument, but now the instrument was contained in the water” (Kahn 1999: 250). Similarly, George Brecht delighted in the fact that “out of all the people who heard water dripping, I’m the first person to make a score out of it, so in a way the score calls attention to the fact that water dripping can be very beautiful—many people find a dripping faucet very annoying, they get very nervous” (cited ibid. 282). For these people, the sound of water is out of place in a musical or artistic context.

10. While the work was only ‘live’ during the Festival, a sizable portion of it is still accessible online (Leber and Chesworth 2004).

11. But as Peter King in the Program catalogue avers, “the ‘assuming’ is ongoing and provisional: a thickening exhumation of protocols of [un?]imaginably primal music and sound: upward glissandi, Shepard’s Tones...No madrigals for Mary” (King 2004).

12. *Passion* was commissioned by the Sydney Front Theatre Company, and the disc was launched by Winsome McCaughey at the Composing Women’s Festival at Melbourne’s Malthouse Theatre complex in June 1994.

13. *The Gordon Assumption* forms a grander-scale association with the shameful predicament of detainees in our refugee camps, and recently the Austrian “incest victims” in their subterranean prison (Schwab 2008).

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**DR LINDA KOUVARAS**

Linda is a musicologist, composer, pianist and Senior Lecturer in Musicology at the University of Melbourne. She publishes on contemporary music, both classical and popular, focusing especially on Australian music, postmodernism and gender issues in music. Her composition practice explores various postmodern approaches, including incorporating popular-music styles, minimalism and neo-tonal/modal structures. Extra-musical impetus ranges from humour to the tragic, kitsch to the high-order contemplative – all with the human condition as focal point.

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Here and there:
Observing eddies and currents in the flow of compositional concern on both sides of the Tasman

Presented by Glenda Keam at the CANZ Composers Conference, 27 September 2008

The composing ‘scene’ in New Zealand is mutating quickly. Here—as elsewhere—composers have a widening array of relationships to ‘academia’, the music industry is undergoing major reformations, new technology developments are accelerating and offer an increasingly diverse range of compositional tools, and the position of art music in the lives of the wider population has moved significantly. The current state of New Zealand’s post-colonial condition, its sense of identity and role in the world, also affects composerly concerns and approaches. This paper considers some ways in which New Zealand composers have responded to the changing environment here, and contemplates similarities and differences between these and some approaches taken by Australian composers.

Composers in New Zealand and also in Australia have for many decades grappled with issues of musical identity. Concerns with national identity are strong because of the relatively short time since both countries were colonised, and in the case of New Zealand these concerns are also exacerbated by this being a small country.

New Zealand is a typical ‘young’ New World country, with its small population dominated by a broad band of literate middle-class inhabitants, and so concerns regarding cultural character and heritage are prevalent in the wider community. Australia is also part of the New World and relatively recently colonised, although the European roots of its heritage bear a few distinctive differences from New Zealand. The waves of convicts sent to Australia, along with the related and prolonged military presence in some cities, the harshness of many of that country’s natural environments, and its tumultuous race relations, set Australia apart from New Zealand. On the other hand, waves of South Pacific Island nationals which
came (into Auckland in particular) through the latter part of the 20th century have presented new race relations challenges in New Zealand, alongside those challenges that were already involved in trying to be an inclusive nation yet mindful of its responsibilities and debts to its first peoples.

Aboriginal Australians have populated their country for over 50 thousand years, which is in another league altogether from the depth of history of the Maori people in New Zealand (there is some debate about when exactly Polynesian settlement of New Zealand occurred, but it is generally thought to be approximately one thousand years ago).

It is significant that nature, rather than culture, plays the significant role in giving New Zealanders a means of identifying themselves with where and who they are. Landscape remains strongly present in all of New Zealand’s art forms. This is also largely true of Australian art. References to the harsh New Zealand light, and its effects on the nation’s visual artists, may be aligned with such statements as one made recently by Fiona Richards (a British musicologist with an interest in Australian musical landscapes) in which she referred to ‘Australia’s brilliant, undiffused light [casting] its beams over the music’ (Richards 2006, 1).

The intense search for New Zealand musical style may be traced back to Douglas Lilburn (1915-2001), whose music and thinking have strongly influenced the New Zealand compositional scene. When Lilburn presented his talk (later named A Search for Tradition) at the first Cambridge Summer School in 1946, he precipitated a widespread desire amongst local composers to find a way in which their music could be relevant to New Zealand society. Like the vanguard New Zealand poets and painters of the period with whom he identified, he saw this project as the construction of a local ‘tradition,’ with the distinctive natural environment as one of the key starting-points.

Lilburn had studied with Ralph Vaughan Williams in London from 1937 until 1940, a sojourn made possible by Lilburn’s winning of the Grainger Prize in 1936. This prize resulted from a visit by Percy Grainger (1882-1961) to New Zealand in 1935, during which time he spoke to the nation on the radio, suggesting that ‘...New Zealand composers will bring some quite strange and special beauty into music through the influence of the New Zealand scenery...,’ amplifying this suggestion with references to the “spiritual beauty” of artistic output “particularly from countries that have beautiful mountain scenery—countries such as India, Norway, Switzerland and Scotland...” (Grainger 1935).

Grainger’s pronouncements parallel—to some extent—statements made earlier in Australia by the English composer Fritz Hart. Hart, who together with Alfred Hill in 1913 established the short-lived Australian Opera League in an attempt to create an Australian operatic tradition, stated in 1914 that the spirit of Australia, ‘its bushland, its hills, its delicate shades in landscape, colour, life, everything...’ would affect the composer and the composition and lead to a distinctively Australian musical style (Hudson 1914).

Grainger had been born in Melbourne, but from the age of 12 didn’t spend much
time in Australia. However he did return for occasional tours and visits, and remained actively conscious of being an Australian. As Roger Covell pointed out in his (now 40-year-old book) *Australia's music: Themes of a new society*, ‘Grainger’s theories on national affinities in music are sometimes neither plausible nor particularly rational, though that does not make them less interesting as the credo of a remarkable musician; but the consistency of his concern with an Australian contribution to music is unmistakable and so is the fact that this concern, if anything, grew even more extensive during the last years of his life’ (Covell 1967, 89).

Grainger’s thoughts about landscape influencing music may also be compared to statements by the Melbourne-based composer Henry Tate who, in the 1920s—40s, was advocating the development of an ‘Australian vocabulary of sounds related to the sounds of the bush, the natural noises of rustling bark and wind-stirred eucalypts, and, in particular, to the distinctive calls of bush birds’ (Covell 1967, 104). He even went so far as to suggest that a musical scale should be extracted from the musical language of the butcher bird, although it appears that his own attempts to achieve this were relatively inaccurate, apparently producing—quite conveniently—an organised and easily integrated musical mode.

The 1930s in Australia, as in New Zealand, saw a rise of nationalism amongst the nation’s artists and writers, and in Australian literature this became apparent in such developments as the “Jindyworobak” movement. Named after an Australian Aboriginal word meaning annexing, or joining, it sought to identify more closely with the Australian landscape through Aboriginal traditions and—to some extent—borrowing from Aboriginal languages. In the 1960s, this was viewed by Covell as an attempt at short-cutting ‘to cultural maturity and national identity’ [and to] ‘take advantage of the experience of the Aboriginal inhabitants of Australia and their uniquely close relationship with the country.’ (Covell 1967, 65)

In mid-1960s New Zealand, Lilburn moved away from his earlier focus on instrumental writing, and turned instead to electroacoustic music, establishing in 1966 what was purported to be the first Electronic Music Studio in Australasia, here at Victoria University in Wellington. From then until the late 1970s he worked almost exclusively in the electroacoustic medium, something which greatly surprised many of this nation’s musicians as not only was it a significant departure, but also because the new techniques did not come naturally to him.

What Lilburn was striving for was an authentic New Zealand musical voice, and as he was increasingly drawn to the belief that it was through environmental sounds that such a voice could be formed, then the possibilities of literally building the landscape into the sound world was clearly a way of addressing that challenge. By choosing to make music from what limited resources he had in the studio, Lilburn was forced to reconsider the essential musical materials from which his work could be made, rather than trying to devise a new musical vocabulary for which traditional acoustic instruments might be used. Indeed, it appears that some of the more experimental instrumental music from Europe which he heard (initially by reputation and the occasional recording, but then
later first-hand) was a far cry from where he thought his music should be heading. This contributed to a tension in some of his pronouncements to the creative artists around him, as may be observed in his speech *A Search for a Language* (an open lecture given at Otago University in 1969) in which he continued to advocate for the creation of some sort of common-ground composing tradition in New Zealand, warning against ‘internationalism’ and of the dangers of trying to keep up ‘with the Darmstadt Joneses’ (Lilburn 1969, 18).

Lilburn’s innovative approaches to the essential materials of music might be compared to Grainger’s experiments (from the mid-1940s until his death in 1961) with technological developments which—as pointed out by Warren Burt—proved to foreshadow in a highly individual way many of today’s music technologies. Some of Grainger’s works thus ‘invented’, interestingly bore titles with landscape connections, such as *Lonely Desert Man* and *Voice with Hills and Dales*. However it appears that Grainger’s motives sprang more from a preoccupation with finding new essential musical molecules with which to build, whereas Lilburn’s main drive was towards methods for positioning music in New Zealand.

Lilburn’s concerns may perhaps be more valuably aligned with the desire by Peter Sculthorpe for a true Australianness in his music. He has probably been the most prominent figure on the ‘landscape’ of Australian music. Sculthorpe has also at times been a significant advocate for Australia’s musicians acknowledging and responding musically to Australia’s relative proximity to Asia, as opposed to Europe. This approach is something which we have seen in New Zealand for many years, championed particularly by Jack Body and the work he has done while based at this Victoria University of Wellington.

Australia is a very large land mass, and its major cities sit dotted around the edge of the country. The relative geographical isolation of each city suggests that there is little to be gained by looking for straightforward ‘Australian’ artistic trends across the nation. To a much greater extent than in New Zealand, there are distinct artistic and musical ‘scenes’ active in each major Australian city. In ‘art music’ some performers are regularly exchanged between centres, but composers are quite likely to stay in their home region rather than roam around between Australian cities. This was brought home to me a few years ago at the (09)03 Contemporary Music Festival in Auckland, when John Davis (CEO of the Australian Music Centre), said to me that he was intrigued and delighted by the extent of debate and collegial exchange between composers here, something which he had not seen on such a widespread scale in Australia, and which he didn’t believe could take place in the same way there because of the nature of Australian composing ‘scenes’.

There are advantages to being in a larger country with a slightly more complex range of opportunities, funding opportunities included. Australia offers a system in which musicians can apply for Federal funding but also in many cases for State funding. It does depend on which State one is in, but certainly the State of Queensland has over the years offered contemporary ensembles such as ELISION,
and more recently the performing and improvising duo Clocked Out, sufficient funds to afford part-time administrative assistance and a strengthened base from which to work. Such funding does require that the ensemble undertakes to reflect and serve the State to which it is attached, and in the case of an internationally successful ensemble such as ELISION this can become difficult to sustain. Nevertheless, from a New Zealand perspective there are some opportunities over the Tasman that do not currently exist here.

The Australian writer Deborah Bird Rose, having considered the effects of European settlement on Australian Aboriginal peoples, has voiced concerns over what she calls the ‘egocentric quality of standard European and American-derived concepts of wilderness’ (Rose 1996, 17). She claims that these ‘concepts of wilderness’ are so inadequate that if signs of occupation are not immediately apparent in the land then it is in danger of being mistakenly perceived as ‘natural’ or empty of culture. The Australian settler concept of *terra nullius* (land which was not owned) was a misinterpretation of the state of the land, and parallels the New Zealand situation in which early settlers sought potentially productive land, giving English names to rivers and mountains, ignoring their cultural significance to Maori and overwriting their original Maori names (Bell 1996, 33). Mount Taranaki, for example, was for more than a century re-named Mount Egmont, its original Maori name only reinstated during the Maori Renaissance of the 1980s.

I would suggest that the position of Maori in New Zealand society at large tends to be more integrated, more frequently debated, more respected and certainly more visible, than the position of Indigenous people in Australian society. There are some very articulate Maori voices at the centre of the political arena ensuring there are widely recognised and accepted cautions regarding artistic and cultural appropriation.

There is still much to be done to deepen understandings between cultural groupings, but much is being done to enhance and instil respect for the cultural practices of this country’s first peoples, institutionally and in the public arena. In music, some vital exchanges have been taking place for some time. Last week when Richard Nunns performed on *Taonga Puoro* alongside the improvising New York pianist Marilyn Crispell and other New Zealand improvisers, the resulting concert by all accounts drew out a fundamental shared approach to the shaping of sound. This is musically and culturally a very different project from a concert I saw advertised in Brisbane just three years ago, of *Beethoven with Didjeridus*.

There is a widely-held belief that New Zealand musical space is qualitatively and quantitatively different from that in other countries, and this appears to have been accepted without question by the wider community. Landscape is sometimes associated with the use of birdsong, which is considered significant in both countries because the Indigenous birdsong of each is unique. However, aside from electroacoustic music, where actual recordings of birdsong may be incorporated, the use of birdsong in much of this instrumental and vocal music is often non-specific, and such works as John Rimmer’s *For the Kokako* (1987) and
Kakapo Reborn (2002) are rare examples of a composer explicitly portraying the unique characteristics of New Zealand birds. Likewise, Sculthorpe’s Mangrove, for example, depicts the calls of birds—yet these too do not sound like specific birds with identifiable birdsong, but rather a generic screeching portrayed by high glissandi in staggered blocks of string writing.

I mentioned earlier Henry Tate’s attempts to incorporate the butcher bird’s pitch material into a musical mode which could be employed in composition. Other Australian composers who have used birdsong in various ways include Nigel Butterley, and David Lumsdaine who makes recordings of Australian birdsong and bush sounds for the ‘sound stages’ depicted in his electroacoustic compositions.

Another way of responding to the landscape is to make music ‘in’ it. New Zealand composers who might perhaps be labelled sonic artists or sound sculptors, such as John Cousins and Chris Cree Brown, have made sonic objects which live in the landscape, and indeed at times John Cousins has been the landscape of his own works. Likewise, Australians Alan Lamb and Jon Rose (to name but two) have created wire music and played fences in some relatively hostile environments.

Also in Australia, projects are appearing where composers and artists are working towards greater understanding of the country’s cultural heritage, such as in composer Liza Lim’s and the Indigenous installation artist Judy Watson’s collaboration glass house mountains which set out to trace the layers of historical residue—Indigenous and colonial—that lie on the Glass House Mountains just north of Brisbane, Queensland (Lim 2006, 13-14).

Of course we can’t really talk about New Zealand and Australia as if they are insulated from each other; there are plenty of examples of cultural exchanges, where artists and notions travel between New Zealand and Australia, and these exchanges are at times clear and obvious but at other times not so. Gillian Whitehead is very conscious of her Maori heritage, but also having spent much time living in Sydney she is also considered an Australian composer, which is how she could be President of the Composers Association of New Zealand a few years ago while simultaneously featuring on the Australian Music Centre’s composer calendar. Likewise the two countries have been obliged to share Split Enz and Crowded House, amongst others.

Sometimes the extent of cultural sharing is not widely acknowledged: when Tim Finn used the line ‘Tyranny of Distance’ in Split Enz’ song Six Months in a Leaky Boat it was not widely recognised by New Zealanders as a quote from one of Australia’s finest historians. Similarly, I was curious to note that when in 1993 Jon Fitzgerald reviewed Rebecca Coyle’s collection of articles about Contemporary Australian Film Music he referred to The Piano as an Australian film. (Fitzgerald 1999, 87).

Composers, and indeed citizens at large, will continue to discover for themselves how they actually respond to a remote or relatively unpopulated landscape which they had only heard about, when they take an opportunity to
visit it. The Australian composer Robin Fox wrote a blog article last year in which he explained that he had often ‘felt mildly annoyed about’ what he described as ‘the overused trope of the Australian outback landscape as a defining feature of the Australian psycho-geographic map’ as it had led to ‘endless conversations world-wide explaining the absence of kangaroos in [his] backyard and the fact that [he] doesn’t engage regularly in crocodile wrestling or come face to face with deadly reptiles at every turn.’ However, a chance to attend the opening event for the Sounds Unusual Festival in Alice Springs really did acquaint him with the ‘rubbery nature of time in the Territory’ and the reality of nature’s harshness there, not to mention the striking fact that over a hundred audience members were prepared to make their way to Alice Springs for a concert of experimental sound.

One could argue that environmentally, if not musically aesthetically, this experience of listening to music in the Great Outdoors is not so dissimilar to such New Zealand festivals as Phat08, the fourth Drum and Bass New Years Eve Party that heralded the year at Inangahua on the South Island’s West Coast. Offering five days of music free from cellphone coverage, eftpos, and petrol stations, urging ‘self-sufficiency’ and denying free re-entry if for any reason you feel the urge to leave, this festival appears to be targeting Southern Man (and his Southern Families) who believe they are prepared to face whatever the elements bring.

On the subject of aesthetic differences, let’s be honest about the extent to which public tastes have shifted. Over the nearly 70 years since Lilburn was a student in London, musical styles have proliferated, and the power and influence of the recording industry has risen (and is now falling). Informally surveying general classes of first year tertiary students I find that less than 20% of the class will have heard of Lilburn, (the ‘father’ of New Zealand composition), while they will nearly all recognise Split Enz songs and know something about Fat Freddy’s Drop. Students who recently studied music at school will be familiar with such ‘star’ New Zealand composers as Psathas and Farr, but the wider community is still generally unaware. Ladyhawke commands a bigger audience than Lilburn ever did, which is not a comment on relative musical quality, but rather a comment on what the recording industry, international travel, social trends and globalised popular cultures have made ‘accessible’ (in the true sense of the word).

There is a waning interest in ‘art music’, and a need to continue protecting these less popular but valuable areas of musical endeavour and output. There are real dangers if market forces are the only decision-makers. We (and the future generations of New Zealand) need Creative New Zealand to continue protecting the diversity of New Zealand’s artistic output, even as the New Zealand Music Commission works on developing the export market by fostering the more marketable and commodifiable efforts of New Zealand’s more popular-style musicians and songwriters. The ‘industry’ is changing very fast, there is more power in the hands of the performers and the composers, less in the hands of record company executives. Some very important debates are raging over the changes that the internet has visited upon the commercial format of the music.
industry. This is universal, of course, not exclusive to New Zealand, but perhaps very significant here because of the way it shrinks the gap between this country and the rest of the world. Our geographical isolation needs to play less of a part than ever before.

Quite a few New Zealand composers hold teaching positions in tertiary education institutions, a situation which has existed to some extent since Lilburn’s appointment to the University of Victoria in Wellington 61 years ago. However the tertiary climate is very different. There is enormous pressure on Universities and Polytechnics—financial, and other pressures—and not surprisingly the range of music being studied has broadened (one could argue: perhaps a little belatedly in some cases) to reflect the range of musics being listened to. The number of Universities here has increased just a little, but the number of other tertiary providers has proliferated, and potential students of any post-school-leaving age from any educational background can now find some way of gaining access to tertiary education. This has enormous potential to improve the educational foundations of the nation, although it does carry some risks. However that is a subject for another day).

For composers who can’t survive solely on income from commissions (and they are by far the majority of New Zealand composers), if tertiary teaching is not an option then what are the other options? I don’t know of anyone in this country who currently exists in the way that Australia-based composer Andrew Ford does. Ford has published a number of useful books about contemporary music, he has a fairly continuous string of commissions, and presents a radio show every Saturday morning for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Commuting once or twice per week between Robertson and Sydney must take its toll but it does seem to offer some sort of balance between the time and space to compose, and an engagement with the wider listening community, while offering some sort of regular part-time income.

The rise of new technologies has not only changed the world of composers through global market forces and the proliferation of musical styles, it has also changed what the work of a composer actually is. Few composers of notated music have their own copyists, they use computers and software notation packages. Most composers produce their own parts. We can hear our computers play back vaguely realistic impressions of how our work sounds. We can send MIDI versions of an as-yet-unperformed work to an ensemble, produce professional-looking (desktop-)published scores, make our electroacoustic works at home and burn as many CD copies or email as many mp3s of them as we wish. The essential skills-set that a composer now needs has fundamentally and irreversibly changed, as have the commercial and professional pressures and expectations brought to bear on composers.

In New Zealand, styles and themes totally unrelated to landscape are becoming more common. At the same time, however, there is still much debate about how New Zealand can maintain its own musical ‘voice’ as there is ongoing concern
that the country’s relatively brief tradition is at risk of being swamped by global influences.

This is not an unreasonable concern; it is startling, when one really looks carefully, to see how quickly and to what extent our manufacturing industries have been replaced with substantial importing mechanisms. Shops called “factory shops” here are no longer likely to be the shop attached to a local factory, but rather a low-rent type of outlet for even more imported goods, most often from China. Most of our large shopping malls are owned by Australian companies, and are increasingly tenanted by Australian-owned shops selling goods made in China. It has happened very quickly, but reversing it—were we to try—would take a lot of time and effort.

One of the challenges we now face is to protect our cultural identities (and I use the plural with intent). Less than a year ago the New Zealand government ratified the Unesco Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Within the same short timeframe they have also enthusiastically entered or continued negotiations with a number of heavy-weight countries seeking Free Trade agreements and other bilateral exchanges. What our fragile creative industries and artistic communities need is to be protected from the possibility of being flooded with so much ‘spare’ output from elsewhere, and the unavoidable alliances that attach to that. There are still too many New Zealand films that don’t have New Zealand soundtracks, for example.

The challenge will continue to be how, as individuals, we manage a balance between living our lives, being creators, carrying financial and social responsibilities, and staying relatively up-to-date with the way our musical world is changing. And as a composing community, we need to remain networked, aware, sceptical, optimistic, invigorated by wide listening, invigorated by focused listening, open-minded and visionary. It’s quite a list, let’s get on with it...

References


Notes

1. It should be pointed out, however, that during his time in Adelaide as early as 1962, the composer-scientist Henk Badings gave performances and presentations of musique concrète and recordings of electronic works that he had composed in his studio in Utrecht – see http://music.adelaide.edu.au/emu/history/

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**GLENDA KEAM**

Glenda is a composer and musicologist working and living in New Zealand. She is President of CANZ (Composers Association of New Zealand), closely connected with MENZA (Music Education New Zealand Aotearoa), represents CANZ on the committee of CCUG (Coalition of Cultural Unions and Guilds), and is a trustee for the Audio Foundation. She was the producer of the (09)03 Contemporary Music Festival held in Auckland in 2003.

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New Australian compositions for chamber choir

Paul Stanhope

Since taking over as musical director of Sydney Chamber Choir in 2006, one of my chief aims has been to commission, perform and compose new and existing Australian works. The trick, as always, is for these pieces to work within the context of a program as a whole, and many of these works have been commissioned especially to fit within the framework of a particular concert.

In this article I intend to briefly introduce a number of these new choral pieces to which Sydney Chamber Choir has helped give voice. The choir has been very fortunate to receive financial support from a number of individuals, including Father Arthur Bridge for Ars Musica Australis and some very generous anonymous donors, in order to commission these composers new works. It is hoped that other choirs – both in Australia and abroad – might now take these pieces and give them further performance opportunities.

Nigel Butterley *Beni Avshalom* (2007)

One of Australia’s senior and most skilled composers for the vocal ensembles, Nigel Butterley was commissioned in 2007 to compose a new work on the theme of the Old Testament lament of King David over the death of his son Absalom. This commission forms an accompanying piece to the polyphonic masterworks by Weelkes and Tomkins and was performed in a program of works based on various settings of (and around) the same text. Butterley uses both a new translation of the text in English by Robert Alter, as well as refrains from the original Hebrew.

This new piece was expertly brought to life by guest conductor Roland Peelman and Sydney Chamber Choir. It is a work suitable only for highly-skilled or at least quite brave ensembles and makes use of the unique sound of a high male-voice trio in addition to a variety of clever choral textures. The use of clear tonal sections in the midst of a richer harmonic world (timed exquisitely) works extremely well. A very engaging work.
Ann Boyd Cum Rex Gloriae (2009)

Written as a companion piece to her much-loved As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams, this piece is also a work for triple choir (12 vocal parts in three groups of four). Beginning with small snippets of sound in single syllables, musical phrases gradually expand into larger sections of a liturgical (Latin) text for Easter Saturday. Christ has descended into hell in order to conquer death, and the illustration of this murky descent is evoked imaginatively. The piece ends with an English cathedral-style festive “Alleluia”. There are plenty of technical challenges in the work – not the least having choristers able to hold to their parts in the triple-choir format – however the piece is a rewarding one and an excellent addition to Easter repertoire.

Dan Walker To a Child (2008)

On a more secular note, this piece was written for a collaborative venture between Sydney Chamber Choir and Match Percussion in a New Music Network concert in 2008. There are a growing number of works written for the attractive combination of choir and percussion, and this one would suit a broader range of choirs than the works described above. Written in three clear sections, there is a use of longer homophonic sections using a relatively open harmonic language. The percussion parts – a combination of vibes, marimba and a few non-pitched hand drums – ensure that the piece chunters along at an excellent clip. Walker adds to this hand-chimes for members of the choir to play, further adding to this fascinating sound-world.

Andrew Schultz Magnificat (2009)

This unaccompanied Magnificat setting, commissioned as a piece to contrast with the Bach Magnificat, is written in a simple and unadorned style. Although composed in up to 8 parts, it should be a suitable standard for a large number of amateur choirs and will work equally well for a symphonic chorus as it would a chamber choir. It is a welcome addition to the repertoire.
Gerard Brophy *Berceuse* (2001/09)

This is actually not a completely new piece – rather Sydney Chamber Choir commissioned Brophy to re-work his piece in a new version for the unusual combination of choir and guitar. “Choir and guitar?” I hear you say – well believe it or not, there is another piece for this combination, the *Romancero Gitano* by the Italian-born composer Castelnuovo-Tedesco. The new version of *Berceuse* was written to make use of the extraordinary abilities of guitarist Slava Grigoryan with a series of cadenza sections. The choral parts are beautifully conceived as a series of small groups with one or two voices per part, contrasting later with more homophonic sections. Characteristically sparse in texture, the piece is really best for small-scale groups who have individual voices able to hold a part.

Gordon Kerry *Et in carnatus est* (2010)

Kerry wrote this piece on my suggestion (and thanks to financial support from the Ian Potter Cultural Trust) as a complementary work to the Britten *Ceremony of Carols*. Written for men’s voices and harp, this four movement work sets pieces by Australian poets Kevin Hart, Peter Steele, Weary Dunlop and John Kinsella. With a surprisingly varied set of textures for voice including solo, unison and multi-part textures, the warmth and rich sonorities of men’s voices offset by a sparkling, intricate harp part, are able to shine. Kerry revels in his setting of different texts, all reflecting in some ways with the miraculous revelation of the divine in sometimes humble contexts. It is a worthy addition to a Christmas program which gives the men plenty to get their teeth stuck into!


The composition of the liturgical *Mass* was once the bread and butter of composers, but these days the comparative disdain of many churches for their historic relics means the composition of a new *Mass* is a relatively rare thing. Although these two compositions are not Sydney Chamber Choir commissions, both these composers have had long associations with the choir extending over many years, and hence these pieces are worth mentioning.

As a one-time chorister and later a frequent collaborator with the choir over the years, New Zealand born Clare Maclean’s output is almost exclusively choral. Sydney Chamber Choir is about to release its 2nd all-Maclean CD in 2011 which will feature as its major work her large-scale *Osanna Mass* written especially with her former chorister-colleagues in mind. Coming in at over 30 minutes in duration and with (at times) densely polyphonic passages of poly-modal material, this Mass is one of the largest and most involved new compositions the choir has ever tackled. And far from being a liturgical Mass setting, it is more abstract in nature, drawing upon threads of Hewish traditions throughout but especially in the darkly-beautiful Ligeti-inspired Sanctus. Plainchant melodies, bell tones
and layered ostinato patterns feature in the rest of the work. The choir has only performed two movements in concert while the rest of the work was rehearsed especially for the recording. The stamina involved in a live performance of such a demanding work in its complete form would be enormous. However, smaller sections of this Mass, such as the Gloria, stand alone beautifully; this is a testament to the ability of this unassuming yet immensely gifted composer.

Ross Edwards has a knack for composing music that can be exhilarating to listen to and rewarding to sing. It is also the product of a unique and authentic compositional voice. His three-movement *Mountain Chant* was featured at the 2010 Aurora Festival closing concert; it is a piece which Sydney Chamber Choir has performed numerous times, including on a tour through northern Spain. It is one of the staples of our repertoire. In contrast to the Maclean Mass, the Edwards is extremely concise (and about half the duration of the Maclean). Commissioned by St John’s Cathedral in Brisbane, it is obvious that Edwards has the liturgical context in mind, yet the piece also works well in a more abstract concert setting. It is a piece choirs in both church and concert settings will find immensely appealing.

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**PAUL STANHOPE**

Paul is an experienced composer and conductor who has been musical director of Sydney Chamber Choir since 2006. He was Musica Viva’s featured composer in 2010. His new choral cantata *Exile Lamentations* will be performed by Sydney Chamber Choir on 17 April 2011 at the Great Hall, University of Sydney.

I: www.paulstanhope.com

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Creativity and crisis: some thoughts on self-management

Andrew Schultz

The following article by Andrew Schultz is an edited version of an introductory paper presented at the postgraduate Symposium ‘Crisis – tension, transition, transformation’ at the University of New South Wales, School of English, Media and Performing Arts in October 2009.

In providing an introduction to this conference I have chosen the topic *Creativity and crisis: some thoughts on self-management*. The list of topics and their disciplines represented in the papers we will hear over the next few days is quite wide and I doubt that there is a single line that draws them all together. Neither should there be – until the day comes when we all don white coats and form empirical teams to count the commas in Keats or the C sharps in Chopin, we are simply following in the tradition of independence of enquiry that is one of the tenets of the humanities. It is desirable that we have unique areas of study if we are serious about pursuing excellence but that shouldn’t stop us looking for the common ground.

In talking about ‘crisis’ I realise that there is a real danger of slipping into platitudes of the Nietzschean variety: ‘whatever doesn’t destroy me may make me stronger’. But that’s no consolation if a crisis actually does destroy you. And the truth is that crises, external and internal, do regularly destroy people even when they are not physically killed by the experience. It is desirable to have some ideas of what to do when faced with one.

Likewise, when I talk about ‘creativity and crisis’ I am not thinking in narrow terms about creative artists only – artists tend to be creative, although not all are;
but creativity, as is now more widely acknowledged, is an attribute that many successful people bring to their work regardless of what the field actually is. For me, creativity is not just about making art but also about qualities such as imagination or the quality of thinking about something in a different way, resourcefulness, or the ability to make something of not much, vision, or the refusal to let go of an idea or obsession, and self-reflection, or the experience of having a rich inner life. Artists are a good resource for studying creativity because they deal with its perils and potential on a daily basis; they face one of the rawest of inner crises every time that they start something new – namely, the horror and the infinite potential of the blank page.

My experience is that, in universities, as in education generally, we talk a lot about technique and mastering ideas and skills within disciplines but very little about one thing we have in common across disciplines: how to get the best out of ourselves. How to persist. How to be imaginative. How to survive against the odds. And then, how to thrive. So, I feel justified in talking briefly about some things I have experienced or read on this topic and I hope that it may be useful to this group at this time.

My focus is on what might be called ‘risk management of the self’. I hasten to add that I have a loathing of ‘management speak’ and have used the term ‘risk management’ with reluctance. Perhaps I’ve been damaged by attending too many professional development workshops and seminars of the sort that universities seem to regularly inflict on their staff, especially those in senior positions. Indeed I have heard some terrible phrases and bits of verbal nonsense in some of these seminars. None perhaps worse than the one where the guru (sorry, facilitator) wrote the word ASSUME on a whiteboard. He then drew a red vertical line before and after the U and said we must never assume because to assume makes an ASS out of U and ME.

Still, in spite of that, I find the language and literature of management quite interesting and every now and then will admit that something slips across from being in the domain of mumbo jumbo to being in the domain of a good thing. And that’s what I would say about risk management as a concept. We need to do more of it, not just in the material world but also in terms of our individual mental and physical well-being. For that reason, discussing the creative process is something I am now more likely to do in the classroom than the conventional teaching of skills and knowledge as I feel most of the latter is obtainable from reading, analysis and studying and is already the focus of most of what is taught. What goes on in the head is much more difficult to pin down, but without some control and self-awareness, technique and ability are easily undermined.
Crises come in all shapes and sizes and would seem to exist on a continuum where we might say that Armageddon ranks a 10 on the scale but stubbing your toe on the way to the kitchen barely gets a 1. The GEC or Global Economic Crisis looked like an 8 or 9 at first but may only be a 4 or 5 in which case it may better called a WFC, a Widespread Financial Crisis.

Most crises exist somewhere in the middle but there is no absolute scale, only a personal scale. That is, two people faced with the same set of events will react quite differently and we need to ask why is that the case. Why was Mahler able to turn personal tragedy into the stuff of amazing symphonies? Why was Shostakovich able to turn the massive destruction of Stalingrad in World War II into equally amazing music? By contrast, why was Sibelius, a national treasure, so paralysed by success that he was unable to compose for so much of the second half of his life?

Why do some survive terrible tragedy and others crumple at relatively minor problems? Simon Leys, in his *The Wreck of the Batavia & Prosper* (Melbourne: Black Inc. Publishing, 2005), I think asks this same question in the book’s two stories. The first is an account of the Batavia shipwreck off the West Australian coast in 1629 - an event that gave rise to appalling atrocities amongst the survivors of the wreck, all of whom eventually perished, largely at each others’ hands. Faced with what must have seemed the impossible task of making their way to the Dutch East Indies they despaired and destroyed each other. (Although groups of people have endured far worse hardship and survived more difficult journeys; think of William Bligh, for example in sailing over 6,000 km in an open boat after the Bounty mutiny in 1789.) In the second part of the book, Leys contrasts the Batavia story with an incident from his own youth as a sailor in Brittany on a fishing vessel, the Prosper. When faced with a serious storm, all members of the crew pulled together under the clear authority of an experienced captain and made their way to safety without any tragedy or even much trauma. It’s a story of risk managed if you like. The juxtaposition of the two stories has the moral force of a pair of fables.

Survival is a fascinating field of research for me, and one that provides some answers to what can seem to be an ineffable problem. The mystery of survival is not entirely a mystery at all but relates strongly not just to luck but also to personal qualities; most notably a capacity to adapt quickly to a new set of circumstances – to deal with a new reality, however unwelcome it may be. Laurence Gonzales has studied this and written a very readable and popular study of the topic in *Deep Survival* (London: Norton, 2003). He profiles why some individuals survive and others give up, seemingly without a struggle. For example, he discusses a skier who died of exposure, apparently lost, but in reality only a few hundred meters from a busy ski run. Or the member of a yacht’s crew who cries out after only a few minutes in a rescue dinghy during a storm, ‘We’re all going to die’. Indeed, he did die but some of the others in the crew survived. Gonzales makes the point in this and a number of other of similar cases that the eventual survivors’ chances improved considerably when the panic-stricken crew member was drowned.
Apart from luck and preparation, the key to survival is adaptability and an open mind. For example he cites the experience commonly reported amongst survivors from hiking expeditions gone wrong who, although in an apparently terrible and inescapable position, ‘forget’ to experience despair but instead notice the beauty of their surrounds. They seem to be able to live in the present, to sublimate fear and develop a capacity to deal realistically with what is in front of them. They have a capacity to experience something positive even in a dreadful and frightening situation.

By contrast, the desire to return as quickly as possible to the safe and known world can be a liability in a crisis, as it may lead to taking undue risks. Here he cites the example of numerous pilots who have died conducting routine landings of aircraft on military ships. They are safe so long as they’re in the air but attempting to land too soon in bad conditions can be deadly. The desire to return home is so strong and overwhelming that, even in spite of strict training, unnecessary risks can be taken on because of an inner turmoil seeking repose. Acting against instinct is sometimes a great survival strategy. Think of the recent deaths of pilots and crew on military ships in the Pacific, or the 2007 Garuda Airlines crash where the pilot apparently resisted the opportunity ‘go around again’. Gonzales cites a statistic that is telling here: many more mountaineers die coming down a mountain than going up it. Part of dealing with crisis seems to be allowing it to happen – that is, accepting that things are not always perfect and making do.

Making do can be a real achievement. That point was bought home painfully to me some years ago when I was Chair of the Board of Directors of a medium-sized arts organisation. I was quite young at the time – in my twenties – and had not yet had much experience of the many ways things can go wrong in an organisation. In short, some questionable decisions by a funding body had led to a massive funding cut and resultant churn in senior staff. I was new to the role and I suspect that there were some people who hoped I would fail to pull things together. But a group of staff and Directors did pull things together and some of the organisation’s current relative health came from some tough steps taken then – especially tough is the issue of getting a group of people to accept a new reality and to move on constructively.

I mention it now because at one point an experienced auditor from a large firm of accountants said something memorable to me – the organisation of which I was Chair was in a bad state in money terms, hence the audit. I had said that I was determined to find a way to put things on a secure footing. His observation was that that might never be possible but that an interminable process of struggle may be the best that can be aspired to. A challenging idea for a young and idealistic perfectionist, I will admit, but he was right. I no longer lose sleep when things go wrong – I know we can at least survive if we’re clever enough. I also learnt the hard way that one cannot do everything and that conserving oneself is part of being successful. I resigned from the Board once things were in a sufficiently healthy state for me to know it was not going to go under.
Whereas Gonzales is concerned with surviving extreme hazards in the physical world, his book shows how often it is the inner resources that determine success in such a situation. Physical health and stamina, preparation and experience contribute but are nothing without mental resources to match. That is fine so long as the crisis or event is actually survivable – of course, some events are neither survivable nor predictable. But it is also remarkable how many things that derail people actually are predictable.

For example, I predict that ¾ of those who complete a PhD here will face some sort of intense personal crisis before or after they submit the thesis. I say that because it has happened to friends, family and many students. Knowing that this crisis will happen will not stop it from occurring, although it does help to be prepared and to know that this sort of crisis is ‘normal’. The crisis is in fact very often necessary and comes from the extreme obsession with an idea or topic as well as anticipation of possible negative outcome. It comes as one reaches the final stages of the work and faces the inevitable scrutiny that ends the process. I see it as a creative process but it is important not to let it derail you – it can do so. Likewise, I know that starting a large-scale new piece and completing a first draft will leave me completely drained, and I think quite a few other composers experience the same thing. But I’ve no doubt it’s a necessary pain if I’m to do something ambitious and worthwhile.

A few years ago I had knee reconstruction and the physiotherapist mentioned to me after the operation that at some point in the next few months I would experience a dreadful pain when the scar tissue from the hamstring graft separates from the hamstring. One day in the garden I almost stood on a large lizard – instead, I took a little leap and bang the scar tissue separated and yes it was extremely painful. Knowing what it was immediately calmed me down though and I could even take consolation that things were progressing normally.

Nassim Taleb’s recent book, The Black Swan, The Impact of the Highly Improbable (New York: Random House, 2007) is quite relevant to this, not least for those of us in the academic and artistic worlds. His argument is that many things are predictable but that some things are unpredictable and random and that we need to know the difference, or end up in a mess. Unpredictable and random events defy normal risk management approaches precisely by their nature. Taleb gives numerous examples of the concept; for example, the black swan that gives its name to the book is something that was unexpected when the first black swans were found in West Australia - up till then a swan was only ever white. Likewise, he cites a hypothetical example of the turkey being fattened for Christmas. Up until the day it is slaughtered, the turkey, he suggests, thinks life is pretty good - plenty to eat and not much to do. It would take a sage turkey (pardon the pun) to predict that it is too good to be true. His ideas seem to have sprung partly from the experience of growing up in the Levant in the 1950s and 1960s - a place and time of prosperity and racial tolerance that was swept away by a completely unpredicted event: a civil war. He goes further and argues that randomness affects
artistic and academic success – he points out that two writers of similar value can have completely different levels of success. One can be hugely popular and wealthy whilst another, of at least comparable ability, can be completely ignored. No doubt he’s right, but it is fascinating to have someone do the maths to show it to be so.

I feel that there are parallels between the discussion of unpredictability in Taleb’s book and the way the creative process functions. Taleb gives the example of the invention of the wheel as an event that could not have been predicted but which had vast consequences. He refers to many inventions and discoveries which were not the planned outcome, but an unexpected by-product. A hypothetical, strategic plan, written the year before the invention of the wheel, would have been useless unless it predicted the invention of the wheel – yet to predict it would actually constitute making the invention itself. This paradox exists in creative work where planning and spontaneity do, at times, battle. In music, one might think of both serialism and minimalism as examples of strategic plans and, sometimes, alas, just as dull. It seems to me that a fully creative consciousness needs to simultaneously exist in a prudent state of planning and in a risky state of heightened awareness and spontaneity.

Finally, let me provide one other example of a crisis that is unpredictable but tantalises with the possibility that it may be predictable. Many years ago, as a student in Philadelphia, I read an article in the New Yorker, and I’m afraid I’ve forgotten who wrote it, possibly Susan Sontag, but nonetheless one image has stuck with me. The image is of a writer or artist sitting in their study at work when a bird flies into a closed window. The bird’s wing is broken and the bird thrashes around on the ground outside the study. The train of thought is lost and replaced with a consciousness of the bird’s distress. What does one do? - ignore the bird; take it to the vet; kill it? It’s an ethical dilemma but it serves as a great metaphor especially for the creative process. I have found that, every now and then, all of the planning and good intentions that one may pour into the creation of a new work are disrupted by something unexpected but amazing coming out the creative process. An unbidden idea, like a bird flies into the window of consciousness. What does one do - ignore it and stick to the plan; deal with it and go back to the beginning? It is an imponderable issue for an artist or a scholar but, whilst it is unpredictable and a crisis, I now feel it is, in a sense, a gift. If it happens, and it rarely does, it’s best to savour it and use it and not dispose of it. Crises, I feel, can be very creative things.

Andrew Schultz
Andrew is Professor of Music and Head, School of English, Media and Performing Arts at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. I: www.andrewschultz.net
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Absence down under

The presence and absence of sound and performance poetry in Australia

Jelle Dierickx

In the 20th and 21st centuries, the link for many Western poets between their bodies and their poetry has become more pronounced than ever before. Sound poetry, performance poetry, action poetry and body poetry are only a few of the names with which poets value the body as a producer of poetry. Tristan Tzara’s 1922 truism, *La pensée se fait dans la bouche*, became the motto of many of these poets. In a search that led away from the almighty Word and linear poetry, the body had to change back from a channel to a source and delta. In Australia, too, performance poetry has a long tradition. There is of course a direct link with oral Aboriginal culture which, thanks to the Jindyworobak movement in the middle of the 20th century and poets such as Oodgeroo Noonuccal, for example, has returned to the foreground. But Australia has already won its spurs in English or in the field of sound poetry as well. Chris Mansell, Jas Duke, Pi O, Jayne Fenton Keane, Amanda Stewart and Les Wicks are only a few of the poets who have given shape to this part of the poetry community in Australia. It is not the intention of this essay to offer a historical overview of this evolution. Too much research into sound and performance poetry gets bogged down at that level. This essay is an attempt to analyse Amanda Stewart’s poem *absence* as a metaphor for the wealth that Australia has to offer in terms of poetry and the poverty Australia often demonstrates in experiencing this poetry. The scene in itself is very lively, but is often completely missing from academic and organisational discourse. In other words, how presence can be a striking absence.
Amanda Stewart’s *absence* (1995)

*I compose with language.* (Stewart 2002)

Amanda Stewart belongs among the names that crop up – with Jas Duke, Ania Walwicz, Chris Mann and so on – when people talk about Australian performance poets. Which is not to say that her poetry can be reduced to the performance aspect alone.

Her collection *I/T. Selected Poems* (1980-1996) consists of 28 visual representations of poems and 21 sound versions. It is from this collection that we have taken the poem *absence,* which concludes the collection, for the purposes of this essay. Many of the elements from which the collection is constructed return in this poem in condensed form.

*absence* for voice and two microphones is deliberately construed as an entity with many facets. There is a written version of it, an ‘official’ sound version on CD and various live recordings. Moreover, on the CD *Talk is cheap* by the multimedia group Machine for making sense, *absence* forms the starting point for *Scene 4.* The group on the CD consists of Rik Rue, Jim Denley, Chris Mann, Stevie Wishart and of course Amanda Stewart. In working together they are trying to investigate artistically the relationships between linguistics, poetry, language, music and notions of sound, science and politics.

In our Machine performances, distinctions between text and speech, improvisation and composition, speech and music are blurred. No one element can ever be assumed to be accompanying another; rather we run parallel to each other, inhabiting and forming a shared space with totally different reference points. (Stewart 1993:76)

This creates a momentary aspect: no two shows are the same. Not that that should come as much of a surprise, since the primacy of the moment is one of the major features of ‘performance.’ What is important to Stewart is that her performance is not an implementation of the written word:

In some pieces I use a number of parallel scores so that it is not possible to perform ‘the whole piece.’ ‘The work’, the work of a process of engagement with overlapping fields of notation. (…) The vocalist must generate her/his performance from a multi-paradigmatic reference field of notations and implied utterances. Many of these potential utterances remain unarticulated, so that the pieces are as much about what is not uttered as what is. (Stewart 2002:2)
It goes without saying that this equivocality also needs to be emphasised in an analysis of these performances. Poems simply are ‘undecided.’ It is more a question of an array of meanings and the listener or reader jumping from one to the other. (Smith 1994:223)

Indeed Amanda Stewart very deliberately creates a field of meanings in which the subject-object relationship (I/IT) is not clear. ‘Knowing’ in the narrow sense is not relevant. Opinions and standpoints undermine themselves constantly. Grammar is tripped up. The language of power is seen without its clothes on. There is no direct line from form to expression. This is also the case in absence.

absence grew partly from reading a text that Amanda Stewart received from her fellow poet Chris Mann. It was Toward the Other from Emmanuel Levinas’ Nine Talmudic Readings. Among other things, Levinas points out here that speaking is an explicit act of shaping society and that a responsibility is involved. It is not a harmless game with the other, but an engagement. (Stewart 2000:306-307)

The poem takes this idea as a starting point in order to place psychoanalytical, scientific and mythological standpoints concerning ‘being’ above, alongside, beneath and through each other.

In psychoanalytical terms absence refers to Freud’s “fort-da,” Kristeva’s theory of how children acquire phonemes and Lacan’s ideas on language and lack and his notion of “l’hommelette.”

In La Révolution du Langage Poétique, Julia Kristeva came via the theories of Sigmund Freud to the conclusion that the non-language aspects of literature originate in the pre-oedipal development phase, where the child does not yet symbolise. Jacques Lacan believes that once that does happen, there is no way back and that we can then speak of a confused state (“l’hommelette”), but Kristeva sees art as a means of returning virtually to this ‘continent of the mother’ (Van der Poel 2002:324). It is no coincidence that she refers to Lautréamont and Mallarmé to support this theory, two poets who played a major role in the development of poésie sonore. In her later work, the dichotomy between the semiotic and the symbolic has less significance, but she continues to indicate the way in which language is anchored in both body and mind. A concept that Stewart can identify with. In that context she tries to intervene deliberately in the domain of the symbolic.

In absence, however, even more elements are present, giving the poem the appearance of a mini-universe:

The mythological cosmic egg, the Big Bang theory, the quest for a Grand Unified Theory, from splitting the atom to the uncertainty principle, from dissection to genetic manipulation and then back to the Babylonian myth of Tiamat who was torn to pieces by her great-grandchild Marduk to create the earth and the sky.
A tracing of different framings of western subjectivity leads back into our farthest imagined past, so intimately present. These chipped ruins and reforming architectures of ritual. These shards of language and the remnants of forms, “the telling in the signs that already speak us … under the tongue, through the breath.” (Stewart 2000:306-307)

How is absence constructed as an “aural collage” (Smith 1994:234)

Stewart is consciously in search of sudden breaks in terms of form and rhythm, and consequently her poetry looks like an amalgam of “linguistic residues.” To achieve this, she uses techniques such as aposiopesis (suddenly breaking off a line), ellipsis (deliberately omitting words that would clarify the meaning), abbreviations, amphibolia (ambiguities), combinations of word games, nouns that are split up or stuck together, and Australian dialects.

The visual representation shows that the poem can be split into eight parts with horizontality and verticality as visual criteria.

During the evocation in the first part of acquiring phonemes à la Kristeva, or a ‘Big Bang’ if you prefer, Stewart uses all the letter sounds of the modern Western alphabet, except c, h, j, n, q, w, x and y. The m, s, r and v are used in a particularly long-drawn out form. These elements are not written out phonetically.

Of course this makes the CD recording particularly exciting. The spatial play is immediately striking right from the opening [m]. The sound hums in the ear from the left channel, through the centre to the right channel. Moreover, clear use is made of many plosives (cf the Big Bang) and the breathing is emphatic, which symbolises the exhausting aspect of the sound game. Likewise in parts six and eight, the space is used fully (e.g. ‘and there’ – on the left – ‘an other of a place’ – on the right – and the three columns on paper correspond to left, centre and right in the aural register).

The final ‘us’ is heard in the centre, neutrally, like the other parts of the poem which are ‘spoken normally’.

In the recording with Machine for making sense, absence is recorded in a sound continuum. Other fragments of text are inserted by Chris Mann and random sounds are taken up by other members of the group. Stewart herself places even more emphasis on the sound qualities of the poem (plosives, fricatives) than on the lexical and semantic parts.

On the DVD with the recording of a live version of absence at the Bobeobi Festival in Berlin (28 April 1996), Stewart clearly checks the distance between the two microphones at the beginning. This distance is just wide enough to avoid interference, but that is enough to make her body perform a considerable dance in order to get her mouth into the right position at all times. In part one, we are directly confronted in the internal space with a constant switch between the left and right channel. Just as in the CD version, there are numerous spatial games (e.g. ‘and there’ – on the left, ‘an other of a place and no distinction’ – fast switch between left and right). So much for absence.
The presence of _absence_

In itself, it need be no problem that performance and sound poetry such as _absence_, for example, are a show held far from many people's backyard. What is important is recognising the notion of 'poetry' in such works. They are based in language, in this case often linguistic micro-particles, and attempt to avoid the 'in-order-to perspective' of language (Rodenko 1956:16). The narrowing-down of words, phonemes and micro-particles is, after all, used as a counterweight to the everyday use of language. Works like these are often polyphonic and conceived in multiple layers, or make use of technological gadgets. That is not really significant; electronics are a means to arrive at poetry just as, for example, ink is. Which is not to say that the means has no decisive impact on the final, polymorphous thing. For example, Henri Chopin always remarks that Blériot's aircraft cannot be compared to a supersonic aeroplane like Concorde (which has since disappeared). In that sense, phenomena such as his poetry cannot be compared with the first experiments by the Dada poets (Zurbrugg 2000:4).

The phenomenon of performance poetry still remains to be discussed. It is not because the poet is literally standing on a stage that the poetry itself becomes unproblematic. “In fact performance by the poet foregrounds the highly problematic and ambiguous relationship between self and text. (…). A creative tension can be created between the three different voices: the I that writes, the I that speaks and the I that performs and all three voices are themselves potentially multiple.” (Smith 1994:225)

Conversely, the use of tape or CD can provide a centrifugal force away from the body. It is no coincidence that the radio play made by Amanda Stewart and Ruby Block for ABC Sydney in 1989 is called _Disembodiment_. It features a fictive interview with a woman. The voice of the woman on the tape does not correspond to the concept that the woman has of her voice. The recorded voice sounds Australian, but the voice in her head has a Viennese accent. Once again using Kristeva's theories as one of its starting points, _Disembodiment_ deals with the literal disembodiment that a radio interview can entail. This also applies to recordings on CD or tape. It is no coincidence that many people have difficulty with a purely electronic concert: they literally miss the physicality of the performer(s). Many performance poets know this and try to avoid this discomfort. After all, Stewart’s work supports the following claim by Nicholas Zurbrugg:

As becomes evident once one examines the century-long tensions between ‘anti-auratic’ media theory and auratic multimedia practices (discussed here in terms of the increasingly apocalyptic hypotheses of Walter Benjamin, Jean Baudrillard and Paul Virilio, and in terms of the increasingly sophisticated research of artists such as Marinetti, Henri Chopin and Stelarc), the most momentous postmodern technological mutations of the body devastatingly discredit the myth of postmodern multimedia culture’s supposedly post-auratic register. (Zurbrugg 1999:93-94)
The body no longer functions as an object, but as a co-constituting, thinking given. This poetry points out to us, at least in its intention, the fact that we are our (communicating) bodies. There is no ‘world out there somewhere.’ Even the absent is present.

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Jelle Dierickx
Jelle holds a doctor of arts (i.e. Musicology) and from 2000 to 2006 he was research assistant at the Institute for Psychoacoustics and Electronic Music (Instituut voor Psychoacustica en Elektronische Muziek), department of Musicology at the University of Ghent. Currently he is artistic coordinator of the Gent Festival van Vlaanderen and of the Rotterdam Philharmonic Gergiev Festival. He has also been coordinator of the International Krikri Festival which concentrates on polypoetry and new music (2001-2011) and he is Vice-President of ISCM Flanders 2012 World New Music Days.
Translation: Helen White
Living Songs: Music, Law and Culture in Aboriginal Australia

Jo Dyer

A strong, starkly haunting note vibrates through the air, slipping amongst those gathered with gravity and majesty. It is the opening note of a welcome song, a song which resonates through the years and the earth to evoke a warm welcome onto land which is proudly and resolutely owned by the Munyarryun Clan. The music provides a link right back to the beginning of time and through to the core of the Earth, revealing the bright spectra and molten heart they possess. Whereas white Australians might prepare a few words - a suitable representative knocks off a quick speech - indigenous Australians have a song for the occasion, made ready in the Dreaming and still alive despite impossible odds.

Hearing an Aboriginal song from the Dreaming consistently evokes a strong response from its listeners, regardless of whether the audience is Australian or from further afield. At the Edinburgh International Festival of the Arts in August 1997, Bangarra Dance Theatre premiered its new work, Fish. After the well-received performance, the British Council hosted supper for the company. When the meal was over and the wine was drunk, Djakapurra Munyarryun - principal dancer and cultural consultant with Bangarra - called everyone out to the back garden. There, he proceeded to perform a song and dance of thanks. The atmosphere was electric, with both company members and English and Scottish hosts completely transfixed. As one, the gathering was completely overwhelmed by Djakapurra's performance. The Scots could do no more than break into an almost embarrassed rendition of 'Auld Lang Syne'. With Aboriginal song, as the music permeates, one gets a sense of timelessness, of connectedness, of a collective spirituality encompassing both humanity and nature - a powerful religiosity that incorporates humanity into nature. Like the chants of the yogi from India, the strength of traditional song in Aboriginal ceremony flows into and draws from the power of nature, meshing human song with the world around it. In contemporary
life, many are eager to develop a greater or higher understanding of their place within the natural world, and often it is through creativity that people feel closest with their environments. This is particularly true of musical expression: people 'get' it when they hear it, even if they can't say why.

Just as hymns and prayer are ritualised expressions of spirituality in the Christian faith, music and dance in Aboriginal Australia are key means of communicating and experiencing spirituality. Their performance becomes a form of collective self-actualisation—it is in and through the singing of ancient, sacred songs and the performance of the dance that accompanies them that deference and respect to the land and country is demonstrated and lived out, and one’s own place within them and as part of them acknowledged and joyfully experienced.

In Aboriginal society, there is no strict demarcation between the law and culture, between religious and legal institutions. Whereas in white Australian society, the separation of powers is constitutionally entrenched, the system of governance in Aboriginal communities concentrates spiritual wisdom in the hands of the Elders, who become the custodians of law. An Elder knows the laws one must observe, where they come from, why they are important, and how they are to be followed. Each legal system has jurisdiction over its own familiar territory, and it is expected that the laws of each territory will be respected by visiting outsiders. Law is enshrined and observed because it is respectful of culture and tradition, not because of any additional or external values deemed important. These laws have built up over thousands of years: they are traced back to the Dreamtime, that temporal and actual world before time began when the land was formed and the spirits roamed free. All are orally passed down from generation to generation,
often through performance. Thus, in Aboriginal culture, song and dance become the means of the transmission of history, allowing a complex system of laws and identities to be passed through generations, and thus to survive.

Aboriginal communities contain hierarchies of knowledge and access to knowledge that are governed by strict protocols. Elders from a community are custodians of both secret and sacred knowledge. This knowledge will be passed on to the next generation of a clan’s leaders at an appropriate time; it is often only as an Elder feels death approaching that he or she may communicate all the songs or stories which their predecessors entrusted to them. Knowledge must be earned—it is accumulated and passed on over a lifetime. It is this reality white Australia found so difficult to grasp during the debate over the Hindmarsh Island bridge. Trying to play a numbers game, supporters of the bridge believed that if they could muster a critical mass of Ngarrindjeri women who had not heard of the Secret Women’s Business associated with Goolwa and Hindmarsh Island, the Elders who spoke of the area’s critical importance to female fertility matters must be lying. It is quite normal for pivotal information on sacred issues such as reproduction to be restricted to the leading women of a clan. To think otherwise is analogous to believing a Cabinet-in-Confidence document or other highly classified information would be known by a local parliamentary member, or even a city councillor.

Djakapurra Munyardyun is a member of the Munyardyun Clan based in Dhulinbouy, Arnhemland. The Munyardyuns are one of the strongest families in the area, in a region which has produced many of Aboriginal Australia’s artistic and political leaders. Yothu Yindi was formed in Arnhemland; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) Chair Gatjil Djerkerra is also from the area. Djakapurra himself is a principal dancer with Bangarra Dance Theatre, and it is his family who provide the traditional injection which Bangarra has fused with contemporary dance and music with such success. He has been chosen to be a Song-Man with his community, which charges him with the responsibility of acting as custodian of the songs, dances, and country that have been part of his clan since the Dreaming began.

The songs that are part of any particular clan’s culture form a kind of musical landscape—they are part of, inform and describe the surrounding country, just as the great works from the Aboriginal visual artist Emily Kngwarreye are monuments to her beloved country in Alhalkere, Utopia, all portraying the same small area where she grew up and lived out her life. As an individual learns more of his or her landscape, they are undergoing a process of acquiring ritual knowledge, extending the song-map. Despite being in the middle of Bangarra’s touring programme, Djakapurra is to return to Arnhemland in June, to take part in a learning session at which more secret knowledge is to be passed to him and his brothers. His father and uncle are growing old and tired, and thus Djakapurra’s generation of Elders’ learning processes—their acquisition of ritual knowledge—is being accelerated. Djakapurra and his brothers will be taken to one of their clan’s sacred sites and learn more of the songs and the stories that have ruled their extended family since the days of the Dreaming.
These songs form the 'songlines' of a community—songs as title to land. At the various sites that dot a landscape, a particular community will have songs to describe them and their natural inhabitants. Djakapurra has a song for the crane and the kingfisher, both totems of his clan. A song will tell the story of a place, and why it has a position of cultural importance in the life of the clan. The meaning with which the place is then imbued provides the impetus and the responsibility to protect the country. The land lives with the Dreaming, it coexists. It must be preserved and respected, not allowed to be destroyed out of greed, or the ability and desire of a few very rich people to make a lot of money out of it. The quiet resistance presented by people such as Yvonne Maragula, the acknowledged senior Elder of the Mirrar people, traditional owners of Jabiru, in the face of the Federal Government and CRA's determination to proceed with mining of uranium is born not only of a personal desire to save her country, but because she is the custodian of it for all future generations, and for all generations past.

Despite their significance, selections of a particular clan's songs can be sung all over Australia in front of large, diverse audiences. Members of another clan can only perform such songs with the strict permission of the owner-clan as a whole. Because of personal creative partnerships between the Artistic Director of Bangarra Dance Theatre, Stephen Page, and his creative collaborator (and brother), David Page, much of Bangarra's recent work has derived its traditional cultural identity from the Munyarryun Clan. Bangarra has entered into a contractual arrangement with the Munyarryun Clan, allowing the company to use traditional song and dance from the Clan's areas in Arnhemland in its contemporary performances, which are then performed all over the world. Djakapurra and his sister Guypunura taught the other Bangarra dancers the Munyarryun songs and dances, monitoring
the integrity and accuracy of the contexts and standards of presentation. Bangarra pays a fee and royalties for the continuing permission to perform Munyarryun songs. This is a unique and ground-breaking arrangement within the performing arts, which is seeking to avoid the visual arts' experience of ad hoc development of intellectual property law spawned from conflict and the common law, and instead construct frameworks in which companies and communities can negotiate amicably and equitably.

Other songs remain completely exclusive, and cannot be sung even with permission from a clan member. Still others can only be sung 'on-site'. The Song of the Caterpillar, for example, might be sung only at the site of the rock formation made when the Caterpillar left his earthly body, and then be performed only by those initiated into Caterpillar Dreaming. Clan members who allow illegal performances of sacred songs are targeted for some form of 'payback' on their return to their country. Punishments range in their degree of seriousness, and payback is more often levied through the use of black magic and aimed at unsettling or dislocating an individual than anything so direct as a spear through the leg.

Djakapurra’s family is a coming-together of the Munyarryun Clan on his father’s side, and the Doya Clan on his mother’s. Neither may sing the other’s songs, although they do dance alongside as the other sings. Often there will be significant ritualised occasions when the families come together. Sometimes it is more than two families, and at such times great celebrations or ceremonies are held, involving clans who all find a particular area of significance. These areas can be places of great beauty, or regions that to the ignorant eye appear as barren or hostile terrain. Like the intersection of a Venn diagram, families and/or communities converge on the sacred sites and each demonstrates their connection to the land through unique melodic links: they will sing their songs of identification and celebration.

The integral part the on-site ceremonies play in the maintenance and the rejuvenation of Aboriginal society explains the great threat posed by the communities’ enforced removal from their land by white Australia. Communities were herded onto missions, and fences erected to keep trespassers off the vast areas of land now claimed by pastoralists. These past practices have been part of the ongoing debate surrounding native title. Under the terms of the Native Title Act, Aboriginal people are required to demonstrate they have a continuing connection with the land they are claiming. Many Aboriginal people argue that they are unable to meet this requirement as they were literally locked off their land.

The complete disenfranchisement of Aboriginal people from land they occupied for thousands of years so traumatised communities that many were unable to continue to sing their songs of celebration: they had nowhere to sing them. More than this, in areas of high contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, there were active efforts to eradicate all vestiges of Aboriginal culture by both law and force.
The strength of the communities from which Djakapurra comes is in no small part due to their success at preserving their traditional culture. They still practice the old ways. The remote area which his people inhabit, the vast tracts of often inhospitable land acted as a moat over which white invaders could and dared not pass. This is in stark contrast to many communities who lived in coastal or other accessible regions. Singer Archie Roach describes how deliberate policies of eradicating customs and culture were pursued by sometimes misguided, sometimes malicious white people: ‘The songs, the stories, were all lost, even before I was taken, because when they rounded us up and put us on reserves the old people weren’t allowed to speak the language, it was against the law. The old fellas used to take the kids into the bush secretly, behind the overseer’s back, and teach them secretly language and dance and everything, but when they got wind of it that was when they started taking the children away, so they couldn’t be taught.’

These policies and practices have been rendered infamous by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission’s Stolen Generation Report. Less attention has been devoted to those who remained behind, but who have been in environments characterised by hopelessness and despair. In his report on the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Commissioner Elliot Johnston wrote of a ‘culture of malaise’ present within many Aboriginal communities; there is a poisoned generation who cannot try to heal. It is a tragic irony that today’s technology, allowing easy access to all corners of the country, threatens to destroy the morale and the magic of communities that have remained intact for many years. In the Environmental Assessment that took place before the Jabiluka mine was given the go-ahead, Pat Dodson spoke of the way the Ranger mine had both degraded the natural environment in which the local Aboriginal people lived, and—with the huge influx of mining capital infrastructure-caused cultural
dislocation, division between communities and ultimately great dependencies on drugs and alcohol.

Djakapurra speaks of the strength and discipline his father instilled in him and his brothers to enable them to resist the temptation of the 'white man's poisons' of alcohol, petrol and drugs. 'After getting caught out being violent to other kids and sometimes the teacher at school, my dad was furious, and tied me to a tree for a night.' The sometimes brutal punishments caused Djakapurra to reflect upon the locus of power, and from where strength was derived. The pride and power he experienced in and through his own culture inspired him to serve it and preserve it as best he could. Aware there are many Aboriginal people who have not had ongoing access to their own culture and people, he is proud to be able to give such a high-profile insight into his own clan’s strength through the medium of Bangarra. 'It’s called sharing', he says simply.

The protection of cultural practice impacts on Aboriginal people in two separate and critical ways, as do the attempts to destroy it. Firstly, the culture of Aboriginal communities acts as an important source of strength and pride—a deep wellspring of identity on which community members draw. The destruction of it was therefore a crippling blow to Aboriginal people; it broke the Dreaming. Secondly, the dance and song themselves contain the stories, teachings and laws of a particular community. They are both the maps and the ordinances governing a clan’s country, and the practices the country demands of them. Celebration and legislation in one artistic form. Losing them, then, evokes chaos-anarchistic confusion in which people literally lose their way, spiritually, culturally, physically.

Despite their importance in capturing history, the songs and dances in Aboriginal societies are not static. Aboriginal culture is not frozen but evolves constantly, and today’s leaders develop new songs to tell the contemporary stories of our time. Art-forms are not demarcated in the same way as in Western society. Clans forge their own creative links: the Story-Teller dreams in the night, tells his stories to the dancer, who paints up, and dances to the music created by the Song-Man. The resilience, the strength of Aboriginal people can be heard in their music. It communicates the deep energy of the earth, and as the hot wind and musical calls blow across our land, resonating to its very core, it shows that core to be Aboriginal.

Notes

JO DYER
Jo began her career in the performing arts and continues to act as Executive Manager of Sydney Theatre and Major Projects Manager of Sydney Theatre Company. She is also the former General Manager of Bangarra Dance Theatre.

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Rosemary Joy and the sound world in miniature

Anni Heino

In this interview, Joy talks about her exquisite, wooden miniature instruments, about the people who play them and the people who get involved by observing and listening.

‘There is something about the intimacy of the audience sitting so close that kind of strips bare the performer. There is no anonymity or hiding behind a huge drama, it’s just completely exposed.’

Rosemary Joy’s art revolves around exquisite sculptures – percussive instruments on a miniature scale. In her project, Beauty Boxes for Ensemble Offspring’s percussionists Claire Edwardes and Bree van Reyk, Joy’s precious, handmade instruments take the familiar form of a beautifully crafted, wooden box, opening up a whole, new world of sound to both performers and the audience. How did someone with a training in visual arts end up fascinated about sound, collaborating with leading percussionists and voluntarily restricting her audiences to just a handful of people at any one time? It turns out Joy had some formative musical experiences that lacked subtlety and had to do with big and loud audiences.

‘I have a visual arts background, but I also spent a number of years playing in a rock band, an all-girl band. It was fun at the time, but I became increasingly frustrated with the idea of just cranking out these songs over and over again. What I am doing now is almost like a reaction to that experience of performing very loud music to a mass of drunken people – one extreme in my past – compared to now creating subtle sounds for a very small number of people. There’s a kind of
preciousness to the experience that the audience has with the miniature percussion – everything is handmade and unique as opposed to mass-produced.'

Many of the projects Joy has been involved with have been collaborations involving herself and the composer David Young, under the umbrella of the Melbourne-based Aphids organisation. Her first projects with Aphids had to do with creating sculptural scores – the next step was a collaboration with percussionist Vanessa Tomlinson, sculptures that were not just scores but also instruments.

'Initially they were all devised with a particular percussionist in mind: they were custom-built for a specific person, to create sounds that would delight that person. It was almost an idea that the instrument would be only played by that person, in that particular event, and once the event had happened, it wouldn’t happen any more’, Joy explains.

Beauty Boxes grew out of a miniature percussion project called Underground that she and David Young created in 2007. The Dutch percussion ensemble Slagwerkgroep Den Haag performed the work. The Australian percussionist Claire Edwardes was one of the performers and started to talk to Rosemary Joy about a new project. The idea started to take form while Joy was watching the performances in The Hague.

'A new work can start with an initial conversation with the percussionist about their favourite sounds, or I work from the architecture of the space that the work will be performed in. Then I’ll go off and create the instrument and later take it back to the musician and composer. Each project is different, though, and I’m interested in working in different ways. To begin with, I was quite rigid, I only wanted to work in the same way, starting with the musician's favourite sounds, and the work would only be performed once. It has become more and more flexible.'
This has meant that a work like *Underground* has been picked up by different people in different countries. It has already been performed by musicians in The Netherlands, in Mexico, in Italy and in Japan. The size of the audience for *Underground* varied, too – in Belgium there was an audience of four at a time. The performances in Japan an unusually large audience for Joy – all 20 of them.

'One of the smallest audiences would have been for the *Schallmachine 06* project with an audience of three and a solo percussionist. That was a collaboration between the Swiss percussionist Fritz Hauser, architect Boa Baumann, Aphids and Speak Percussion that took place underneath Federation Square during the Melbourne Festival 2006. *Schallmaschine 07:klein* was a further development of the work in Basel in 2007. I've had the enormous privilege to see my instruments being performed by many, many different percussionists.'

Rosemary Joy is usually not particularly involved with the rehearsal process. She sits and observes and might take on the practical role of an usher during the performance. Her interest lies in the meeting of the percussionist and the audience, through the wooden sound sculpture.

'There is something about the intimacy of the audience sitting so close that kind of strips bare the performer. There is no anonymity or hiding behind a huge drum, they are just completely exposed. Most of the people I’ve worked with have found it really refreshing. I think there’s been one or two that have been a little bit confronted and a bit daunted by it. And often, after the performance, the audience will stay and talk and have this real engagement with the musicians. There's no waiting until you get out into the foyer.'

'And just as it can be a challenge for the musician to have the proximity, it also demands more from the audience. They can't not be attentive to what is happening because they are so close. The musicians can tell if they are drifting off or looking at their program, they can't do all that.'

Rosemary Joy started off by working with fabrics (she devised a musical ball gown instrument for the percussionist Vanessa Tomlinson), but soon her attention turned to wooden miniature instruments. They have proved to be the perfect way of exploring the link between sculpture and music.

'For many years, I've been interested in that link. To work with Aphids has created an incredible forum in which to explore a range of ideas within the context of cross-artform collaborations. It has been really inspiring to work with composer David Young on many occasions. I have always been fascinated by percussion, the incredible
flexibility of it – that anything can be played. I find percussionists have that openness to leap into the unknown. I think a lot of percussionists also like the idea of playing these very small objects, rather than lugging massive gear around and then spending three hours trying to set it up, and then pack up again in the end. That’s been a thing they really enjoy, just having a very small box with everything in it. And that’s the show.’

*Beauty Boxes* gives the two percussionists relatively free hands to improvise, based on instructions provided by Joy.

‘I had quite a clear idea in my mind of how I wanted the boxes to be approached, so I developed a list of instructions for the musicians – for a structured improvisation. I always make the instruments with a clear idea of the possibilities there. Many times I’ve been surprised and delighted by what the musicians and David have discovered. In this case, I was interested to make the instrument with a sense of the score in my mind, rather than making them and handing them over.’

‘These boxes are relatively simple compared to some others that have been quite complex. It’s basically two, identical boxes with three drawers in each, a little bit reminiscent of a jewellery box, or a box of precious objects. The boxes themselves can be played – I’ve used African rosewood that’s very resonant and has a beautiful sound quality – and there are also found objects inside the drawers that can be played.’

There are some obvious challenges in organising a concert with both big pieces for normal audiences and intimate pieces for a strictly limited audience.
Beauty Boxes formed part of a larger concert program, giving the first 50 audience members – in groups of ten – the opportunity to experience it.

'It was basically set up like a dinner party, with two musicians on one side and the audience on the other side. And was staged in the dressing rooms at the back of the Performance Space at Carriageworks, so that the audience had a little journey in order to get into this place. It’s interesting to see the way that the audience’s journey leading into the space actually prepares them and opens their ears to what they are about to hear. I find that quite intriguing: sometimes they have gone and heard one of these pieces, and then when they come out, they are much more tuned to the ambient sounds around them. They can hear the coffee cup hitting the saucer and the key going into the lock, and these sorts of sounds which mostly we are not really sensitised to.'

Joy’s instruments are beautiful objects as such and have sometimes been exhibited as conventional sculptures.

'That was okay, but it is the sound that I am really interested in. I’m interested in the way that the sculpture, and being close to it and looking inside it, affects people’s experience of the sound.'

The space in which the performance happens is also important, and some of her works are very site-specific.

'Some of the instruments have been inspired by the architecture of the venue in which the performances were held. In 2009, I worked on a big project with Aphids, called System Building. It toured internationally to a number of different venues, and the work itself was a version of the tour in miniature, the musicians move from instrument to instrument, and each instrument is inspired by one of the buildings in which it was played. The architecture of the building was mirrored in the instrument in some way.'

'In 2010, Aphids toured the Yakumo Honjin project which was a collaboration between myself, David Young, film artist Peter Humble and four musicians – it was inspired by a 280-year-old samurai hotel in Far West Japan – an incredibly beautiful, tranquil space, tiny little rooms, lots of corridors, tatami mats and shoji screens.'

Could working in tranquil spaces, producing mostly quiet and subtle sounds have the side effect of making a person intolerant of big sounds, big pieces, and noise?

'I must say my preference is for sounds that are more at the quieter end of the spectrum. I find I switch off a bit when I’m listening to music that is quite loud. I disengage somehow, I find that when I’m listening to more subtle sounds, my ears open out and I listen more carefully.'

ANNI HEINO

Anni is a Finnish-born journalist and musicologist, and editor of Resonate magazine.
Rosemary Joy’s work Beauty Boxes was premiered at a concert in 2008 by Ensemble Offspring. This article was first published in Resonate magazine: www.australianmusiccentre.com.au/resonate.
Eulogy of Richard Meale

Andrew Ford

This eulogy, written by Andrew Ford, was read at Richard Meale's funeral in Sydney on Friday 27 November 2009 by Brett Cottle, CEO of the Australiasian Performing Right Association (APRA).

In Richard Meale we have lost a bold and passionate musical imagination, a curious, penetrating, original intellect, a profoundly caring conscience and a mordant wit. Richard was a generous colleague, a shrewd judge of music – and of people – and an honest and considerate friend.

Music really mattered to Richard. It was important. Not some deluxe item, not a fashion accessory, not an entertainment (or not simply an entertainment). Music might be playful, it should certainly be alluring, but at heart it was intensely serious.

Richard’s creative life was driven by several paradoxes. He was, without a doubt, the most cosmopolitan Australian composer of his generation. For a start, he was supremely well read – poetry, plays and novels, but also – and particularly – philosophy. His ears were open to all sorts of music; his mind was open to everything. And it was in his mind that he first began to travel, through European music and literature, through Asian art. His imagination took him round the world, even before the Ford Foundation Scholarship did.

When he got to California, at UCLA, he studied Indian music, Balinese and Javanese gamelan and Japanese gagaku. He didn’t just read about them or listen to them, he played them. And these experiences emerged, somewhat later, in his own music, not as quotations or borrowings or as the trappings of Orientalism, but fully absorbed. When you listen to Clouds now and then or Images (Nagauta), you are hearing pure Meale. No quotations, no musical dress-up. And yet you sense a stillness, a timelessess that you feel can only have come from a genuine engagement with these other cultures.
It was the same with Spain. Richard drank in the language, the poetry, the painting and the music. But the works that sprang from this - *Las Alboradas, Homage to Garcia Lorca, Very High Kings* and (let’s not forget) the *Three Miró Pieces*: they are Richard, through and through. They are intense, passionate and intricate. They are also, it seems to me, Australian.

So here’s the first paradox. For when he actually went to Spain, Richard was surprised to discover that the light there reminded him of Australia; and that he wanted to come home.

He would continue to steep himself in European culture, but he felt the need to be apart from it. He would love Lorca and Rimbaud, Bach and Bruckner, Monteverdi and Messiaen, but he would love them from afar.

In a way, I think it was the same with his friends. He loved his friends, too, but he came to feel the need to distance himself from us. This was behind his faintly quixotic move to Mullumbimby at the start of the 1990s. From then on, most of his friendships – most of the time – were conducted on the telephone.

One of the last times I saw Richard – it was in 2007 – we ended up talking about God. It wasn’t a long conversation: neither of us believed in Him. I said to Richard something stupid along the lines of it being essentially liberating that we didn’t have a deity. We were responsible for our lives and our world, so we just had to try to be nice to one another. Richard gave me one of his more withering looks and growled, 'But I don’t *wanna* be nice to people!'

Now this wasn’t strictly true. In fact it’s another paradox. Part of him craved company. When he lived in Julie Simonds’s granny flat in the first part of this decade, Julie’s children, Matt and Caitlin, would try to get out of taking Richard his mail. Because they knew they’d never get away. There was no chance of just handing the letters in at the door, they’d have to stay for a chat and the chat would turn into a harmony lesson. The whole thing might easily take an hour. And yet, they came to regard Richard as their grandfather, and, when they were out together, Richard took to introducing them as his grandchildren, enjoying the confusion this caused on the faces of his old friends.

At the end of his life, Richard moved in with his niece Amanda, and he found, I think, a true kindred spirit, someone with whom he could be as quiet or as gregarious as he liked. Someone who simply understood him.

A good example of the gregarious Richard was the National Music Camp at Monash University in 2005. The artistic director Richard Mills invited Richard to be the composition tutor. It was a brilliant idea, but on Day One the signs weren’t good. When Richard walked into the staff bar that first night, he looked crestfallen and said he wasn’t really drinking any more. His doctor had told him he had to cut it out, and it was the same with the cigarettes. To be social, though, he’d have a glass of red and just sort of sit on it all night.

The plan lasted nearly three-quarters of an hour. He ended up having quite a few glasses of red, and before the night was out, he was in the doorway lighting up his fags.
On the morning of Day Three, I bumped into Richard’s composition students. They were looking bleary-eyed, and, in one case, actually ill. It turned out that the night before they’d gone for a drink with Richard. (The innocence of youth!) They’d finally got to bed around 5 am. Richard himself showed no ill-effects. He was having a ball.

The students came to love him during those two weeks. And so did the instrumental tutors. It was touching to see how much respect they had for him and how happy they were in his company. By the end of the fortnight, Richard had committed himself to writing five of them concertos. There was to be a harp concerto for Marshall McGuire, a clarinet concerto for Frank Celata - these of course were Richard’s own instruments - as well as concertos for horn, cello and (I think) flute. I don’t know whether the players truly believed these pieces would be composed, or whether Richard himself did. I doubt it. I think, perhaps, they were all engaged in a kind of communal euphoria, brought on by Richard’s presence and his good spirits. There’s no now point in regretting that these fantasies came to nothing ... but I can’t help thinking that horn concerto would have been something.

As the Music Camp proved, Richard was a very good teacher. But he wasn’t a born teacher; he had learnt on the job. Those who first studied with him at Adelaide in the early 1970s report that he could be doctrinaire and forbidding. Classes might be inspirational but occasionally also terrifying. Richard felt that everyone else should be as fascinated and informed as he was when it came to the music of Stockhausen, the poetry of Mallarmé and the philosophical writings of Wittgenstein. At the very least, they should want to be fascinated and informed. One suspects not many of his students measured up.

But here’s another paradox. As Richard began to think more about writing his first opera, Voss, his musical style changed, tonality finding its way back into his work first in Viridian, then more boldly in the second string quartet. As his music mellowed, the composer began to experience doubt. For someone who had been as adamant about the modernist shibboleth as Richard, this was perhaps inevitable. One of the things he doubted was whether he should stand in front of his students any more and tell them how to write music. He lacked certainty and felt, I suppose, that this was a weakness in a teacher. But it wasn’t. It was a great strength. And there’s a generation of students will testify to that.

When it was finally premiered on the opening night of the 1986 Adelaide Festival, Voss, with its inspiring libretto by David Malouf, was a turning point for Richard, for his music and for opera in this country. It was daring, rich, experimental and lyrical. Brought vividly to the stage in Jim Sharman’s production, it told Patrick White’s story with fidelity, while adding layers of meaning and resonance. And it continues to resonate.

Before this year’s ‘Voss Journey’ (the four-day symposium about the novel and the opera organised by the National Film and Sound Archive and the National Library), I listened to the opera for the first time in years. I was moved and
impressed all over again, but I was also amazed to discover that I seemed to know every note of the piece. I suspect that Mer de glace, Richard and David’s second collaboration, might be an even better opera, but Voss has a demonstrated capacity to speak to a wide audience and to insinuate itself in our memories. What better place to start building an Australian operatic repertory?

Time changes our perceptions of art. Art seems to keep working on us even when we’re not looking at it or listening to it or thinking about it. Today, when I hear Richard’s great orchestral works of the 1960s, they don’t seem especially atonal. And Viridian, which caused such a shock when first performed, doesn’t seem so tonal. The stylistic fracture appears to have healed. Or maybe we’ve grown up. On the CD of Richard’s music conducted by his friend and supporter Richard Mills, Lumen (from 1998) is followed by Clouds now and then from 30 years before. They are evidently the work of the same man, the man whom Wolfgang Fink calls ‘one of the few Very High Composers of our time’.

It would be hard, truthfully, to overstate Richard Meale’s importance to Australian music. But alas, it’s proved all too easy to underestimate it.

Our mass media prefer people whose ideas will fit neatly into the boxes they’ve already constructed. Richard’s ideas were too big to fit. To make matters worse, he wasn’t interested in giving interviews. In fact he hated all that: ‘You always end up saying something stupid,’ he told me. Unguarded, more like.

In a way, it’s a shame he didn’t give more interviews, because at his most cantankerous he’d have made fabulous copy. Sometimes, I suspect, he would drop a contentious remark into a conversation just to see what would happen. But I don’t think he ever spoke meretriciously. When Richard said something outrageous, he meant it. He spoke his mind, even when he spoke it too bluntly.

In the popular press, though, Richard held his peace. So they forgot about him. When a reporter rang me for a comment on the day he died, she wasn’t even sure how to pronounce his name. ‘Is it Meal’, she said, ‘or Mealy?’

It’s ironic. In the late 1960s and 70s, the newspapers were interested enough in Richard Meale and Peter Sculthorpe to create a rift between them. It wasn’t a real rift, more a beat up, but how extraordinary it seems, from here, that the press should have cared that much about concert music! Now half the time you can’t even get your concert reviewed.

It was a beat up, but if newspapers are writing about a rift between you and someone else – a friend, a colleague ... a competitor – well it becomes hard not to get caught up in it. And Richard grew wary of Peter. At least on the surface.

But I’d like to finish by telling you a Richard Meale story. Anyone who met Richard has a story about him. Most of you here will have dozens of stories. Still you probably won’t know this one.

One day in 1993, Richard rang up. For many years he had served assiduously on the board of APRA – the performing right association – and now it had fallen to him, at the forthcoming APRA awards night, to present an award to Peter Sculthorpe. It was the Ted Albert Memorial Award – for a lifetime of achievement
– and as Peter’s colleague, contemporary and the only classical composer on the board, Richard was clearly the man for the job.

Well he didn’t want to do it. He told me he hadn’t followed Peter’s career, he didn’t know his music and he couldn’t imagine what he might have to say. Would I do it?

I said, ‘No, Richard. You must do it. It would be a good thing for Australian music.’

He wasn’t buying this, of course. So eventually I agreed to write a speech for Richard to read.

As I wrote, I came to feel I was engaged in some great purpose. Working for the general good. I praised Peter’s qualities and those of his music, and I praised them from what I took to be Richard’s perspective. Single-handedly, it seemed to me, I was healing that rift, bringing our two most famous composers back together, uniting Australian music and musicians.

I sent the speech to Richard. And I printed out a second copy to take to the dinner in my jacket pocket. I just had a bad feeling that, come the big moment, Richard might have locked himself in the toilet.

But no. There he was. On stage. Speech in hand.

And so he began to speak. And they were not my words. They were better than my words. They were his words. Personal words. Whatever he might have felt about Peter and about the rift, he couldn’t help but stand there and speak the truth, honouring another composer’s work and another composer’s uniqueness.

I began by saying that Richard Meale was caring and generous, and that he was shrewd and honest. I think all those qualities shone out of his speech that night in 1993.

They shine out of his music too. And as long as his music is played, those qualities will continue to shine and to transmit themselves to anyone with the time, imagination and ears to hear.

And so now it’s up to us to honour Richard Meale’s work and Richard Meale’s uniqueness.

We do this, very simply, by playing his music. As well as we can. Again and again.

ANDREW FORD

Andrew is a composer, writer and broadcaster. I: www.andrewford.net.au
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When it comes to experimental music, Brisbane is said to be one of the most fertile cities on the planet (Farrell, interview 28 September 2010). Yet Brisbane’s willingness to embrace fresh and challenging musical concepts is a phenomenon born of repression. Danielle Bentley examines Brisbane’s evolving music community through the relationships between political history, locality and funding.

A Subtropical Experiment

New York-based media artist Nora Farrell lists Brisbane as one of the most fertile places for experimental music on the planet, alongside Japan. Fellow New Yorker Bill Duckworth, an experimental musician, agrees with her – to the point where they are relocating permanently to the Queensland capital. Nor are they the only ones to think so. Writing in London’s modern music magazine, The Wire, critic Jon Dale described the Brisbane scene as “bolstered by a surprisingly supportive community that I’ve not encountered in such a form, and at such a level of intensity, in any other Australian city” (Dale, 2008:16). Similarly Andrew Tuttle, long a stalwart of the Brisbane experimental music, sees Brisbane as one of “Australia’s leading communities for creating, facilitating and attending sound art and experimental music” (2009; para. 23).

Given Brisbane’s previous reputation as a cultural backwater, this level of support is somewhat surprising. It can only be understood in the light of the State’s political history, especially during the extended reign of Premier Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen (1968–1987) – an era characterised by repression, corruption, police misconduct and media manipulation. Under Bjelke-Petersen’s rule, any cultural activity considered by his government to be “subversive” was crushed. He also encouraged wide-scale demolition of culturally significant heritage
buildings, often accomplished under cover of night to thwart demonstrators. Police squashed protest marches against his Draconian rule with an enthusiasm bordering on the brutal. His excesses gained national press coverage which created the impression of Queensland as a “banana republic” under the thrall of an ill-educated hayseed. Culture vultures in Melbourne and Sydney, who regarded themselves as Australia’s cultural elite, thus obtained ammunition to deride Brisbane as a cultural wasteland. Ironically, the Bjelke-Petersen government contributed handsomely, as least in an architectural sense, to Brisbane’s cultural community. Though widely perceived as a cabal of philistines, Bjelke-Petersen’s government provided infrastructure for the State’s subsequent cultural renaissance with the construction of the Queensland Cultural Centre. Comprising the Queensland Performing Arts Centre, the Queensland Museum, the State Library and the Queensland Art Gallery, the complex provided a magnificent monument to the arts, even if the beneficiaries would be mainly international performers and artists, and State-funded mainstream and heritage entities such as the Queensland Symphony, Opera Queensland and The Queensland Ballet.

The 1982 Commonwealth Games and Expo 88 helped Brisbane to reinvent itself as an Australian “events capital”. Since 1989 successive arts-friendly Labor State governments and culturally-minded Lord Mayors have overseen the renovation of cultural spaces in the South Bank precinct and the opening of contemporary arts venues including the Gallery of Modern Art, the Brisbane Powerhouse and the Judith Wright Centre. Brisbane hosts a large number of arts festivals from experimental to mainstream. Brisbane’s profile as a “creative city” has taken a further boost through the current State government’s funding of such significant international shows as the Paris Opera Ballet, the Cuban Ballet, and the Valentino and the American Impression and Realism exhibitions. All of the last-mentioned were exclusive to Brisbane – a final retort to anyone who still maintained that Queensland was culturally bereft. These initiatives and others stimulated exponential growth in Brisbane arts participation and cultural tourism (Gill 2010).

What distinguishes Brisbane from its Southern counterparts is the newness of its creative impulse. In Melbourne and Sydney, the arts have long been deeply imbedded in the historical fibre but Brisbane’s culture is that of a contemporary
and fast evolving city. This vigour finds expression as much in the arts as in the development of road infrastructure, apartment blocks and office buildings. According to the Queensland Department of Public Works, more than 1500 people relocate to South East Queensland every week (2010). Not all of these newcomers are culturally inclined but at least a proportion of them bring fresh input to the cultural fabric. The burgeoning complexity of roads, bridges and skyscrapers that marks modern Brisbane could be seen as a metaphor for the city's cultural awakening. A unique mix of population growth, government-funded opportunity and openness to ideas has made Brisbane fertile ground for the experimental arts.

Some History of the Brisbane Experimental Music Scene

In Melbourne during the late '70s and early '80s, an underground scene emerged which cross-fertilised experimental music drawn from jazz and classical traditions, global experimental art scenes, and punk and post-punk (Zuvela 2009:37). This heralded the appearance of artist-run underground initiatives in Brisbane, often in the form of cabarets and variety programmes. Brisbane's unhappy political situation under a repressive right-wing government imbued these 'happenings' with an atmosphere of political resistance. Prominent Brisbane experimental artist Danni Zuvela forwards the view that in a state where political surveillance had become the norm and the right to public assembly had been prohibited, rebellious gatherings of the artistically minded were sure to attract attention from the state's notorious Special Branch squad (2009:37). In consequence Brisbane art forms tended to be “collaborative, transitory and savagely antagonistic” (Szulakowska 1987:14).

Ursula Szulakowska, a prominent artist of the time, reflected that the Brisbane experimental arts scene during the '70s and '80s was analogous to the iconoclastic Dada aesthetic - an anti-authoritarian movement that was prevalent in post World War I Europe. According to Szulakowska “the amount of collaborative interaction among the young artists in Brisbane is a similar response to [a] destructive political situation and the inheritance of a stagnant culture” (1987:14). Examples include the O'Flate group, which in 1982 established a studio and performance space within Red Comb House, a disused chicken factory in central Brisbane.
The illegal venue was used for art shows, musical and multimedia events. O’Flate went on to run a number of underground events including One Flat Exhibition in South Brisbane, which was host to “…numerous ephemeral, collaborative, sonic, multi-media exhibits” (Zuvela 2009:37). One of the group’s main purposes was to highlight the lack of support for local artists offered by state-run and commercial institutions. (Szulakowska 1987:16).

The transgressive and communal qualities of the ’80s Brisbane Dada movement were inherited by subsequent DIY events. The Audiopollen Social Club, which flourished in West End during the late 2000s, was typical of the “wild, performative, unpredictable, interdisciplinary” at Brisbane Dada happenings (Zuvela: 37-38). Further, according to Gerald Keaney – philosopher, poet and punk musician – Audiopollen encouraged a sense of revolution and experimentation, guided by feminist and gender politics (interview October 22 2010). When Audiopollen was evicted from its headquarters, its founder, experimental musician Joel Stern established a monthly event called Disembraining Machine. Stern’s stated aim was to “connect the dots between different modes of experimentation: between electronic, rock, improvisation, and more broadly, with poetry, text-based and visual work”.

Small Black Box was another important experimental music collective active from 2001-2005. Held at the Institute for Modern Art, the event focused on the “…aesthetics of noise, silence, drone, glitch, instrument building, digital processing and improvisation” (Small Black Box 2005). As a marker of the city’s growing cultural maturity, Small Black Box was staged in a Council-run venue with the aid of a government subsidy.

A diversity of underground and experimental ventures now enliven the Brisbane scene. Burst City, a DIY venue in South Bank, regularly hosts underground and experimental music events. Other venues include the Lofty Hangar – an ex-tyre factory in Red Hill, the Tribal Theatre in the CBD, and Browning Street Studios in West End. Brisbane supports a strong backyard and house show culture, particularly in the inner city suburbs of Red Hill, Woolloongabba and West End. These scenes defy easy categorisation. Musicians from such diverse disciplines as noise and sound art, metal, punk, rock, jazz, classical, electronica, poetry, visual media and performance art come together for the collective experience.

Brisbane Sounds

Whilst there is no specific Brisbane art style, Szulakowska explains that there are “contextual peculiarities of art production” (1987:14). These include creative responses to a politically repressive past, and Brisbane’s steamy locality and climate. Craig Spann, of SugarRush Records, believes that Brisbane music is typified by the “‘smashing together’ of genres, producing a unique fusion of Brisbane sounds” (quoted in Moore 2010). The Mute Canary Project which performs monthly at the Judith Wright Centre embodies this spirit of cross-fertilisation: “It’s all sound,
it’s all energy,” says Brisbane saxophonist and barrister Elliott Dalgleish, “It’s nice to get people to come together from different perspectives: sound, noise and video artists, classical and jazz improvisers.”

In a similar vein of cross-genre collaboration, the recently formed Soundslikebrisbane collective currently represents over 93 artists and 16 record labels, ranging from sound art and experimental music through to blues, rock and indie pop. The sense of mutual support within the broader Brisbane musical community leads, in turn, to a cross-fertilisation of ideas and genres. This idea has its genesis in the ’80s when Brisbane’s nascent experimental movement inspired iconoclastic artists and musicians to reinvigorate what they perceived as a “stagnant culture” (Szulakowska 1987:14).

A strong sense of the struggle between urban banality and creativity persists in Brisbane. For Joel Stern, Danni Zuvela, and Gerald Keaney, the underground scene presents a challenge to the city’s unwelcoming, modern architecture. Keaney explains:

Brisbane is a joyless workhouse made of glass tile partitions, touched up in peach pink and decorated by the occasional sad palm tree … DIY is a weapon against this urban boredom. (quoted in Zuvela, 2009:36).

As Stern sees it, underground artists mock alienating and insensitive architecture by creating nonsensical and transgressive art forms. He says reactionary and confrontational art is a natural response to an environment where beautiful and historical buildings have been removed. Stern also notes that the pungent odours of decomposition and fecundity that characterise Brisbane’s subtropical environment are in stark contrast to the glassy towers of mammon in the CBD. He says the subtropics encourage a certain aesthetic in art-making, recalling the aromas of decaying vegetal matter that permeated Audiopollen gatherings during events at the Forest Café warehouse.

Brisbane-based collective Otherfilm explored the effects of climate in their recent show Psycho Subtropics. The event examines the influence of climate, specifically subtropical climate, on the artistic psyche. In the subtropics, says Stern, “things rot, they’re sticky, they melt, they burn. Perhaps
there is a kind of heat to Brisbane art that is more embodied and physical and intuitive. People feel differently here to how they feel down South” (interview 24 September 2010).

For Nora Farrell, the Brisbane scene offers a refreshing change from the culturally saturated environment of her native New York. Farrell, who has been staging collaborative work with Bill Duckworth in Brisbane for the past eight years, likes the city for its “openness, fluidity and willingness to try new things” (Farrell, interview 28 September 2010).

The sounds of Brisbane are what provide inspiration for Lawrence English – sound artist and curator of Room40 Records. His recently released book and CD package Site-Learning: Brisbane provides a field guide to Brisbane’s aural landscape. English defines site-listening as: “The act of attentive listening in any chosen location, privileging the auditory environment as the focus of awareness” (Room40, 2010). The book features three essays by Brisbane authors canvassing relationships with sound, and provides a guide to “listening locations”. English intends this publication to be the first of a series exploring the sounds of different cities throughout the world. English has been an ambitious protagonist in delivering Brisbane experimental music and sound art interstate and overseas, as well as bringing artists to Brisbane.

**Funding and Support**

English explains Brisbane’s enthusiasm for experimental music in terms of the city’s steady cultural growth and generous funding opportunities. Financially, the Brisbane experimental music scene relies on a combination of DIY principles, government funding, private donations and in-kind assistance. Government-run venues such as the Judith Wright Centre and Brisbane Powerhouse provide many projects with free or discounted venue space. City Council offers numerous opportunities for contemporary arts, such as the Creative Laneway Activation programme, which seeks to enliven the city’s backstreets through development of multimedia Brisbane-themed experimental works.

This said, low budget events face major challenges: strict liquor licensing regulations, the wariness of many venues to take the “risk” of programming experimental music, and difficulty in obtaining ongoing government funding. This situation has led to the emergence of a strong and supportive
underground music culture. Stern and Dalgleish speak of the creative freedom which comes with a disregard for commercial gain. Stern believes that no-budget DIY events such as Disembraining Machine, are typified by an inclusive and collaborative atmosphere which stimulates experimentation. Similarly, Dalgleish views self-funding as a means of not being “beholden to the system” (interview 21 October 2010). Dalgleish supports The Mute Canary Project – a new music ensemble combining jazz and classical streams with sonic improvisation - with income derived from his career as a barrister. For Dalgleish, accessibility is a key objective. Rather than adopt strategies to minimise his own financial investment, Dalgleish prefers to keep ticket prices down and to stage concerts in a public, central venue: currently the Judith Wright Centre. Through this approach, and by touring regularly to Melbourne and Sydney, he aims to increase The Mute Canary’s exposure to broader audiences.

English’s Room40 aims to achieve the best of both worlds. English seeks assistance from government-run organisations while maintaining his underground credentials. This approach is typical of the Brisbane scene, with many practitioners supplementing self-funded projects with grants and in-kind assistance. Performers often collaborate, creating a vibrant creative ecology that moves between genres and performance contexts. Thus Brisbane’s refutation of its “cultural backwater” tag has led to increased funding, arts infrastructure, confluence between formerly disparate areas of artistic practice, and a zest for the city’s creative identity.

Conclusion

The transgressive and collaborative Brisbane underground scene which emerged during the Bjelke-Petersen regime has underpinned the development of the city’s cultural identity. In recent times, the proliferation of co-operative DIY, self-funded and government subsidised experimental music scenes has fostered a unique musical ecology that connects DIY practitioners to major Council-
funded public activities. In constant flux architecturally and culturally, Brisbane is securing its place in the mainstream and underground arts. Whilst there are still pertinent issues to be addressed in terms of funding opportunities and available venues, this situation has provided optimum circumstances for the creation of an increasingly eclectic and supportive experimental music scene.

References

Danielle Bentley
Danielle is a cellist, writer, researcher and festival curator with an excessive interest in experimental cross-genre and multi-artform collaborative performance.
Conversations at Sandy Creek

Graeme Skinner chats with Gordon Kerry, author of *New Classical Music: Composing Australia*

Graeme Skinner

Outside these magazine pages, the argument that our best classical composers deserve a place at ‘the creative heart of the nation’ is carried on, at best, sotto voce. Yet it’s this argument that Gordon Kerry has taken on at full volume in his just released book *New Classical Music: Composing Australia* (UNSW Press 2009).

Fellow composers will, of course, be extremely interested to read what Gordon has said – and what he hasn’t! But it’s worth remembering that composers will not be his primary readership. He writes simply and directly for a non-specialist readership. Obviously, secondary and tertiary music students will read the book, and some seasoned enthusiasts. And, we can only hope, so too might practitioners and consumers in other art forms, whose awareness of their musical opposite numbers of late seems to have been sadly cursory.

As a non-composer myself, it struck me how very generously Gordon puts the case for a diverse selection of works by an equally diverse selection of his distinguished mid-generation and senior composing colleagues. Having overheard some of the terrible things composers say about each other behind their backs, it
seems doubly generous of Gordon not to indulge in venting his opinions of work that he thinks falls short of the mark. Instead – characteristically, I think – he chooses to talk about (as he says) ‘music I genuinely love’.

Graeme Skinner: Gordon, you’re a composer, yourself, and most readers would expect you to be included in such a book, had it been written by anyone else. Yet, I guess understandably, you had to pass up the opportunity to talk about your own music. But you’re far from being a passive narrator. I got an exciting sense that this is a story that you are very much part of.

Gordon Kerry: It was inevitable – if not a conscious decision on my part – that the thematic streams I identified in the book would reflect many of my concerns as an artist. So, I could have discussed myself in several places. I’ve written music about certain types of Australian landscapes, including the one in which I actually live in, here at Sandy Creek in rural north-eastern Victoria. I’ve worked with Indigenous music and musicians, composed pieces with ‘spiritual’ content both for concert and ritual use. And I’ve been fortunate to have been asked to compose music for virtuoso soloists, my first opera, Medea, on a mythic subject and so on.

GS: You describe some of your colleagues’ music as being at the ‘pointy (modernist) end’ of new music, in contrast to the softer, blunter (anti-modernist) end. But you don’t seem to me to belong, or ever have belonged, to either of these extremes.

GK: No, I don’t regard myself as ‘belonging’ to a school or group. But I can count composers of very different styles and musics as friends and colleagues. It’s been a long time since I’ve had a hard line on anything stylistic … which is probably why I was genuinely able to be enthusiastic about such a diverse range of music that I discussed.

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GS: No one not deeply immersed in the contemporary music scene for many years could have experienced such a wide cross-section of music as you write about. Your contents page singles out, by my count, 24 composers, either by name or by work, and at least as many more are discussed in detail in the text itself. Very few of the people you included come as a surprise to me (indeed, several other possible writers of such a book that I can think of would have produced much the same list). But the real focus of the book is not ‘composers’, but ‘compositions’. So how did you go about choosing the music to discuss?

GK: The pieces I chose as ‘case studies’ (in those sections of the book where I focus on one composer’s work in some detail) were in most cases works I had heard in live performances (often premieres), or broadcasts, and had been excited by what I heard. Apart from some historical background, the book concentrates on music written since 1979, partly to fill a gap in the literature.

“I was pleasantly nonplussed when the publishers approached me because they wanted ‘a journalist rather than an academic!’”
GS: Yes. Historically, it must be the first attempt at a general critical overview of Australian concert music towards the end of the twentieth century, a much needed continuation of the coverage of the 1960s and 1970s in Roger Covell’s *Australia’s Music* (1967), James Murdoch’s *Australia’s Contemporary Composers* (1972), and Frank Callaway and David Tunley’s somewhat premature *Australian Composition in the Twentieth Century* (1978).

“...contrary to the view of the marketing people in some organisations, Australian audiences, too, are now much more open to new work by Australian composers.”

GK: I began at 1979 also – now I come to think of it – because it was the year I started at Melbourne University, when I had access to music and composers that I hadn't so much before. Barry Conyngham, Brian Howard and Peter Tahourdin taught at Melbourne; nearby LaTrobe still had a music department headed by Keith Humble; I had friends at the VCA …

GS: In the introduction, you take care to stipulate that this is a book about 'notated western art music for acoustic instruments', what your title calls 'New Classical Music'.

GK: Yes. The book was commissioned as part of a series of three on contemporary music in Australia, published by the University of NSW Press with support from the Australia Council. The other two are John Shand's *Jazz: the Australian accent*, and a symposium edited by Gail Priest, *Experimental music: audio explorations in Australia*. So I didn't feel that I needed to wade into those areas. I was pleasantly nonplussed when the publishers approached me because they wanted 'a journalist rather than an academic'!

GS: A timely reminder that not all our musical intellectuals are on the university payroll, any more so than our composers! But why was this book thought to be necessary now?

GK: The documentation of Australian composition during the 1960s and 1970s is reasonably good. But, probably because the whole profession grew so quickly from that point on, there came to be less general writing about the music. There were a number of specialist books, by Brenton Broadstock and John Jenkins, for instance. There are several important books, but they tend to be more tightly focused on style or genre than mine, and some on occasion preach to the choir.

GS: But until recently, perhaps, it was only the choir who read such books! When I was at school and Melbourne University in the 1970s and 80s, at the same time as you, probably only composers, or would-be composers, read books on Australian music. Now it's a general subject at secondary and tertiary levels.

GK: That’s right – and contrary to the view of the marketing people in some organisations, Australian audiences, too, are now much more open to new work by Australian composers. I hope the book might make even more people interested in exploring what’s out there.
GS: And you mentioned that, around 1979 when your book starts, the sheer amount of composition taking place in Australia seemed to explode.

GK: Half a dozen, or so, composers came to maturity in the 1960s, and most of those proved to be inspiring teachers. So you have an exponentially larger number in the 1970s educated by that generation, augmented by the immigration or return of other important figures, they then teach/mentor and so on.

GS: It's fashionable for some musicologists – especially those interested in rehabilitating our earlier composers – to want to play down the importance of the 1960s to the present healthy state of Australian composition. But in her autobiography, Miriam Hyde remembered the 1950s, for instance, as a decade when composers had to get by on the off-chance of winning a tiny cash prize in the occasional competition. But things really did start to get better in the 1960s, and it wasn't just all thanks to composers was it?

GK: No. Organisations like the ABC and Musica Viva started to take commissioning seriously in the 1960s. The idea of state subsidy for music gained ground in the late 1960s under Prime Ministers Harold Holt and John Gorton. There was the publication of the government-funded Andrew McCredie *Survey of Musical Composition in Australia* in 1969. And then with the Whitlam election in 1972 there was the move to establish the Australia Council in its present form. And the AMC was established soon after, and so on. So by 1979, the climate was very different from what it had been in 1960.

GS: And there was also a sort of stylistic sea change in the music of several of leading composers around this time.

GK: Yes – I think the most surprising conversion was that of Richard Meale who – at the time – seemed to be turning his back on the European-style modernism of *Nocturnes* and *Clouds now and then* in favour of diatonic harmony and melody in pieces like the *Second String Quartet* and *Viridian*. He wasn't alone – Colin Brumby's reappraisal of tonality dates from around then. There's a new 'tone' in Sculthorpe's 1979 piece *Mangrove*. And younger composers, like Carl Vine, were shifting stylistic ground as well.

GS: All of which was followed up in the early 1980s by key 'events' like the appearance of Graeme Koehne's *Rain Forest* on the one hand, and the emergence of the Brophy, Smetanin and Formosa 'school' on the other.

GK: Indeed. Koehne staked his claim to be an anti-modernist with *Rain Forest*, and has held to that position resolutely ever since. And that group of composers taught by Richard Toop at the Sydney Conservatorium round the same time cultivated a high modernist aesthetic. Not that it had ever gone away. Brian Howard was writing orchestral scores in an 'advanced' idiom in the late 1970s, and rightly winning international recognition.
GS: I remember reading Murdoch’s book on the bus on the way to school in 1977, and thinking how exciting it was that Australia could produce the 33 composers he profiled. The book still strikes me as an inspired, even seminal, piece of publicity for the cause. Does your book fit into the same category? You certainly argue positively on behalf of the composers and music you write about.

GK: I wouldn’t like to think I’m writing marketing copy for particular composers. But having a pretty tight word limit, I resolved not to waste time and words on music that I don’t care for. It might have been tempting to give an Olympian view of what’s good and bad in Australian music, but I chose to look at what is interesting, enjoyable, stimulating, and try to give a sense via the written word of how some of this music sounds, and why you might want to seek it out. It’s not definitive or encyclopedic – there are several composers and works that I’d like to have included, but didn’t. It’s not the Last Word. But it is intended to be a serious contribution to an ongoing conversation.

GS: Your subtitle, ‘composing Australia’ is especially telling … a sort of reminder, even an exhortation to composers that they are not working in a vacuum. Roger Covell’s book was the first real attempt at a social history of Australian composition up to the mid 1960s. Do you try to fill in some of the broader Australian story since then?

“What I try to demonstrate is that there is no one way of writing Australian music about landscape, or Asia, or spirituality.”

GK: There’s some social history in my book. I needed to provide some background to readers who weren’t brought up on Covell, Murdoch and the like. And I needed to deal with issues like, for instance, the changing ways in which non-Indigenous composers have related to Indigenous culture: Margaret Sutherland’s The Young Kabbalri is no less well-meaning, but very different in its understanding of Aboriginal music from Liza Lim’s The Compass.

GS: Sometimes I get a sense of you trying to bring about, almost, some sort of reconciliation. Certainly, you suggest themes whereby some strange bedfellows are shown to have something in common – Peter Sculthorpe and David Lumsdaine, for instance. And, on top of what you have to say about individuals, you also give, at times a quite candid, analysis of the expanding composer community itself.

GK: We’ve talked about the geometrical progression in numbers of composers but there was also a proliferation of styles. What I try to demonstrate is that there is no one way of writing Australian music about landscape, or Asia, or spirituality. And, also assisting in that expansion, to those structural changes we discussed I might add the foundation of tertiary music schools in the 1970s …

GS: Which not only trained student composers, but employed established composers in relatively high-paying permanent positions.

GK: And then there was the coming of FM radio stations, a much more proactive ABC, and the general feeling that we’d achieved a critical mass of
composing activity that would be self-sustaining. It’s also fair to say the composer community reflects the way that the makeup of Australian society has changed over that time, and the way it looks at itself.

GS: Women composers seemed to have been, if anything, over-represented in Australia before the 1960s, but probably for a wrong reason, namely that composing classical music was not the sort of thing that your average Australian male would want to be caught doing in the 1940s and 1950s. Of course, in the 1960s and 1970s, the men took over.

GK: Yes, but even though there isn’t yet parity, I think it says good things about this country again that it is no longer remarkable that some of our most important composers are women. And that some of our composers are of non-English speaking background, like Julian Yu, Liza Lim, Elena Kats-Chernin and Constantine Koukias. We can all just get on with it.

GS: And, as you seem to be saying, to co-exist. Still, composers have to deal with their baggage. And, as you say at one point in the book, regarding relations within the composer community, ‘It all got pretty ugly around 1990’.

GK: Put simply, in the early 1990s there was a debate about the relative merits of modernism as against ‘traditional’ musical language. At first the debate raged, if that’s the word I want, in the pages of Sounds Australian (forerunner of Resonate magazine printed by the Australian Music Centre) and, for my money, created a simplistic opposition which was then, on occasions, cast in nasty, personal terms. It spilled over into a campaign against the policies of the then management of ABC Concerts – by people who held up the Australia Council as a model of propriety, and then predictably went on to attack the Australia Council.

GS: You also mention Larry Sitsky’s famous dialectical division of the Australian scene between ‘composers’ and ‘anti-composers’. Larry’s ‘composers’ are the one who battle away, usually unacknowledged and unappreciated producing the difficult music that needs to be written, rather than what audiences think they want to hear.

GK: Yes, and ‘anti-composers’ write short, simple pieces, and get their pictures in the papers. But, ultimately, I don’t know that the style wars achieved anything much, except to show up the dangers – as if we needed the lesson – of absolutism and monoculture.

GS: But do you think anyone really wanted a monoculture?

GK: I think there probably are – or were – composers who hold to the line of people like Adorno, that art in late capitalist society has a moral duty to reflect the alienation of the subject and espouse a general pessimism. There are also people in the ‘tonal’ camp who regard much modernist music as meaningless. I think that modernism has largely jettisoned its political program, and, as Auden said: poetry makes nothing happen! It’s hard to argue that any particular style has inherent moral superiority. I saw Henry James quoted recently saying that all a novel had to do was to ‘be interesting’. Which is not to say that it can’t be ‘life-changing’; but not to expect it to be ‘world-changing’.
GS: Boulez famously objected to musical relativism producing a supermarket culture, a rather mean view, from one of the grumpy old men of the now very much rear guard. But even those of us pleased, on the whole, that there’s lots on the shelves, want to know whether the product is worth buying? Buying recordings and going to concerts is expensive, and listening to new music, properly, demands a significant expenditure of time, compared with the 3-minute grabs of pop culture.

GK: That conversation between Boulez, and Foucault by the way, gets trotted out a lot, recently in David Bennett’s new book on Australian music, *Sounding Postmodernism*. I guess someone who’s routinely conducted Wagner at Bayreuth has never had to step inside a supermarket, but to me it sounds like no one so much as the Holy Father railing against the ‘evils of Relativism’. Still, I’d like to think that my book is slightly more upmarket than a Coles catalogue. But if it encourages people to try new music, I don’t really care.

GS: Which I think it does, very convincingly. Still, we should come back to the question of selection. The Australian Music Centre has about 500 composers on its books. Probably at least 400 of them are alive and kicking. So how many are in your book?

GK: I couldn’t say for sure, but with a word limit of about 50,000 it’s certainly not in the hundreds. I admit it – I’m an elitist, and so I wanted to choose a representative sample of well made works that I consider worth hearing, and, let me stress this, that I enjoy.

GS: Roger Covell’s book is criticised by some who’d, retrospectively, like it to be more the sort of history of Australian composition that could be written today. That’s a little unfair I think, not to say unrealistic. But by the same token, maybe we wouldn’t apply the same evaluative criteria today. Some figures, especially in the pre-1960s generation of composers – and I think of people like Miriam Hyde and Roy Agnew – seem mentioned by Covell only to be written out of his main argument. ‘Originality’ was what seemed most important to many in the 1960s. But your mention of ‘well-made works’ suggests that ‘quality’ might now be more important.

GK: I’ve heard the argument that ‘the idea of quality is a nineteenth-century construct’ and I simply don’t agree. This is where I start to sound like the Holy Father railing against the ‘evils of Relativism’, I know. But I do believe there is much to be said for a well-developed compositional craft. I have publicly criticised works for not being well crafted, and in turn I have been accused of sexism, or whatever. But I don’t have much time for special pleading. And people are free to disagree with my choices and conclusions, as I’m sure they will.

GS: Your remit was to concentrate on traditional concert hall and opera composers, leaving out jazz and experimental music. Still, was there any area that you’d like to have given more space?

GK: Certainly, if I had more room, I’d have written about theatre, dance and film music, too, because that’s where several major talents are working principally.
I’ve talked about concert-hall composers who have worked outside that square, but there are people like Iain Grandage, Alan John, Lisa Gerrard doing interesting work that I wasn’t able to cover.

GS: Despite your generally positive take, you hint occasionally that things could be better for composers right now.

GK: We have an abundance of talented composers, but this is not necessarily matched by an interest from the major performing organisations. Some of the state orchestras, partly a result of the devolution from the ABC, partly the economic climate, and partly due to personnel, have dropped the ball on new work, even though the audience-building strategies in some cities have been successful over previous years. I caricature a certain kind of new music concert in the first page of my introduction, but I’ve also been at premieres of new works (some of them mine) in major concert halls, with full houses, which received rapturous responses. Let’s not forget that it’s the people who don’t like something (new music, food, politics, other composers) who are inclined to get vocal. I think listening to them too much is causing an artificial climate of fear.

GS: For almost its entire existence ABC Classic FM has come in for particular criticism from composers for not adequately supporting Australian music. Of course, 'Australian Music Presented' is a welcome development. But it seems to coexist with a constant stream of 'top 100' audience surveys which only seem to confirm statistically that its listeners don’t want to hear Australian music.

GK: I’m not sure that Classic FM has the mix right as far as Australian music goes. As you say, in 2001 in its Classics 100 there wasn’t a single Australian composition. But, as you also say, 'Australian Music Presented' is a great web-based initiative. With any luck, narrowcasting will reach a new and differently constituted audience to the Schubert set. At the same time, the statistical thing can be confusing: if an audience is fed a constant diet of Mozart, Tchaikovsky and Beethoven then, of course, that’s what they’ll want to hear.

GS: And there is quite a lot of anecdotal evidence circulating that certain less experienced orchestra managements have used such statistics to limit their live programming.

GK: But in my experience, even 'conservative' audiences can be engaged with, to the point that they appreciate what living composers are trying to do.

GS: In your last chapter, you mentioned a history of music that your mother had as a girl, written right at the start of the twentieth century, that gave only a single mention of Brahms, who’d then already been dead several years. Could there be a sleeping Australian Brahms still out there?

GK: People who might have been ignored in the more distant past, like Margaret Sutherland and Roy Agnew, may well stage a full and welcome comeback. But, as we saw in the baroque music revival a few years ago, posterity does often get it right. And given the nature of technology in the last 20 years, it seems less likely that anyone, these days, can be completely ignored. Just about anyone can put themselves out there, and do, and increasingly it’s going to be easier.
GS: Harder, though, for a composer’s music to strike anybody else, as you say, as ‘life-changing’. Still, it seems to me that the composers you talk about do have as good a chance of making a difference, especially to your younger readers, who will use your book in the senior years of secondary school as part of the curriculum. Thinking back to your own years as a student, was there any Australian who inspired you to persevere with becoming a composer?

GK: I started composing in the relative isolation of secondary school years, long before composition became integral to the curriculum. But I was aware of Sculthorpe, Butterley, Dreyfus, Boyd, Gifford and Williamson, either through going to concerts, listening to the ABC – which had some great programs on new music then – or occasionally performing their work at school.

GS: Australian composers don’t seem to have made much of an impact on the Western music generally so far. To take just a handful of recent examples, Percy Grainger is the only Australian who got a mention in Richard Taruskin’s massive 6-volume Oxford History of Western Music. Grainger, Sculthorpe and Meale are mentioned in Nicholas Cook’s Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Music. And in his recent review for the Sydney Morning Herald, the literary critic and well-known music lover, Andrew Reimer, sounded to me quite disappointed that only Grainger and Sculthorpe, again, got even honorary mentions in Alex Ross’s otherwise splendid book, The Rest is Noise. Do you think that will change in the twenty-first century?

GK: I think it is changing. It’s now routine that Brett Dean, Gerard Brophy, Elena Kats-Chernin, and Liza Lim have works performed around the world with no special pleading required. For the best composers, the world is now their oyster, and their Australian-ness is no longer going to hamper them. I’d like to think that that the Taruskin and Ross oversights merely prove that documentation can lag behind reality.

GS: Still, Gerry Brophy recently told me that he overheard some English orchestra players, during rehearsals for one of his pieces in there, complaining about having to play Australian rubbish, with the emphasis on the Australian.

GK: In a couple of bad reviews I’ve had in Europe, the critic can’t resist a dig at my nationality. In Berlin’s Tagespiegel (that’s Daily Mirror in German!) my opera Medea (based on an ancient Western myth) was dismissed as being of ‘ethnomusicological interest’. In London, John Amis reviewed my piano piece, Figured in the drift of stars and said it sounded like a ‘meander to the nearest billabong’.

Now, if he hadn’t known I was Australian, he might well have said it was boring, or had insufficient structural interest – which may well be true. But he had to make what would amount to a racist jab, had I been Israeli (a meander to the nearest hilltop village) or Chinese (a meander to the nearest rice paddy). I’m sure that attitude to Australian music will change though.

If Australian music has not yet made the impact we wanted, it may be largely for external reasons. Composers from the Baltic ‘captive nations’ enjoyed a vogue
after the fall of communism. But apart from trading on aboriginality or our geographical position it’s hard to see how Australian music can exploit our history as marketing. Perhaps, for many of us, it’s better we don’t, and succeed on our own terms.

**GS:** Getting back to the distinction between the composers at the pointy end of music, and the softer more user-friendly ones: we’ve had a few maximalists, though most of them seem to have drifted slowly toward the middle market, and a few minimalists, though none of them so minimal as the New Yorkers. Why do you think this is? Could it be a reflection of Australia?

**GK:** I hope that the book makes clear that such distinctions are relatively superficial compared to the common purpose we all have in writing music. But, in an interview in *Resonate* with Mark Coughlan, Roger Smalley pointed out that coming from London to Perth he found that instead of being in a community of special interests – like the specialist early music or contemporary music audiences he was used to in London – the Perth audience goes to everything.

I think we can say the same of Australia, generally. We have a different sort of audience, a more generalist audience, and that inevitably shapes the way we compose. If we lived in Berlin, New York or London, any of us might have developed differently. I don’t think it’s a bad thing, necessarily. I like writing for Sydney Symphony’s ‘Meet the Music’ concerts and knowing that there will be 2000 school kids listening to my piece, or having pieces commissioned by Wigmore Hall, or doing things for local musicians in country Victoria and NSW.

**GS:** We don’t say much about the commercial side of things. But getting your picture in the paper is important for composers. And so, still, is commercial publishing. There’s a story, possibly apocryphal, though maybe not, that the London publisher Boosey & Hawkes had the money to take on Benjamin Britten largely thanks to the profits it made from Australian popular song composer May Brahe’s *Bless this House.* Britten later left Boosey’s for Faber Music, started with funds supplied by T. S. Eliot specifically to print Britten’s music. And the fact that Peter Sculthorpe, and more recently Carl Vine and Matthew Hindson should also become house composers at Faber (which has made its money, more recently, out of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *Cats*) is maybe a sort of indirect repayment of Britten’s debt to Brahe! Do you have any good commercial advice for a young composer reading your book, just starting out?

**GK:** I’m almost tempted to say, on strictly economic grounds: Don’t do it!! But seriously, I do believe that you’re more likely to do well if you know your craft. So, listen as widely as you can, write as much as you can to develop technique. Learn what performers can and can’t be expected to do ... It’s more about the quality of your work, than who you are.

**GS:** And as we said before, in your book we learn less about the composers’ biographies, though a great deal about their concerns and their music. If you had been forced to write yourself into the book, what would you say about yourself, and what pieces would you recommend for listening?
GK: As a full-time artist I have what many other people would consider a very uneventful life, so there’s not much to say there. As to my concerns … well, I hope the book says something about them. And, as to my music: I’m quite fond of the orchestral piece I wrote in 1999 about Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, commissioned by Symphony Australia for the Sydney Symphony, and dedicated to Markus Stenz, called *Such sweet thunder*.

GS: Which is, reading your program note to the piece, a line about the amazing sound of barking of hounds on a hunt, that seemed to take over all their surroundings, so that:

> The skies, the fountains, every region near
> Seemed all one mutual cry. I never heard
> So musical a discord, such sweet thunder …

GK: Which goes to show, as I also said in my note, as Theseus puts it elsewhere in the play, 'The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse if imagination amend them'.

GS: It sounds to me like a warning for those lucky enough to be included in your book, as well as some consolation for those who are not.

GK: Yes, and the idea of 'such sweet thunder' being 'our mutual cry' seemed to me to point up the idea of convergence with other composers. Of course, Shakespeare’s play is also the starting point for works by Henze (the Eighth Symphony) and Britten (the eponymous opera), and Mendelssohn, whose scurrying string writing …

GS: Much beloved of the ABC Classic FM demographic … !

GK: Yes … but which I also imitate at one point! So it seemed an appropriate title.

GS: And a reminder, just as in your book, that we’re all in this together.

GK: Yes, indeed, a reminder of that.

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**GRAEME SKINNER**

Graeme is a Sydney-based musicologist and writer. Gordon Kerry’s *New Classical Music: Composing Australia* and Graeme Skinner’s *Peter Sculthorpe: The Making of an Australian Composer* are both published by the University of NSW Press.

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Ways of listening – an incomplete catalogue

Warren Burt

'Yer stuffed. Not 'cause you're wrong, but 'cause you're looking in the wrong direction.' (Chris Mann, *The Rationales*, 1986)

This quote from the Australian poet and composer Chris Mann sums up a crucial problem in perception – the ability to ask the right question. In the sciences and mathematics, it has long been known that the ability to come up with the right question is as important as the ability to solve problems. Similarly, it has long seemed to me that, in listening, it’s as important to be able to listen 'in the right direction' – that is, to concentrate one’s attention in the right way for the given circumstances – as it is to be able to distinguish the various sonic objects one is listening to.

I’ve noticed negative reactions to various sounding things, and often, it has occurred to me that the negative reaction was caused by the person wrongly applying a set of rules or expectations to a particular sound. That is, of all the ways of listening there are, the wrong one was chosen (consciously or unconsciously) for that sound. This led me to wonder how many ways of listening – how many ways of concentrating the attention on sound – could I list? In a 1981 essay 'Musical Perception and Exploratory Music', I speculated that the brain divided incoming sound into three categories: music, language, and environmental sound, and said that many of the musics which most interested me were those that lived 'between the categories'. While still accepting this broad-brush categorisation of sound by the brain, I now think that, in fact, there are probably a number of other ways the brain deals with sound. Here, I wish to enumerate some ways of listening that may cut across these divisions, as well as ways of listening that may be specific to only one kind of sound.

1. Tibetan Buddhist listening meditation

Starting, perhaps, from 'listening degree zero', this way of listening is one of the most esoteric. It is described by the late Lobsang Phuntsok Lhalungpa as 'becoming listening itself'. In this meditation, one tries to become as clear a vessel for listening as possible. One tries to switch off all verbal labels for sound,
and all emotional reactions to them, simply being aware of each sound as it occurs. It’s a very difficult exercise for some, and some even vehemently oppose it, saying that turning off one’s emotional reactions, even temporarily, even for the purpose of an exercise, is to deny one’s basic humanity. Quite simply, I feel these objectors are wrong. Being able to understand one’s emotional reactions, and move with and beyond them, is one of the essences of meditative technique. And if one can approach sound in this way, within the controlled space of meditation, one can gain a new appreciation of sound in its functioning, and its effect on our consciousness. When the American composer John Cage talks about ‘letting sounds be themselves’, I feel he’s talking about this kind of listening, and, in fact, I find that listening in this way to many of his pieces, from the quiet sparse world of his String Quartet in Four Parts to the crowded, noisy worlds of Cartridge Music and HPSCHD, allows them to really come alive.

2. Scientific listening

This is an outward-directed, labelling-oriented kind of listening. Every birdwatcher does this. On a recent Australian TV show, an ornithologist said, ‘80% of birdwatching is done with the ears. It should be called ‘bird-listening’, and anyone who has observed birds knows this well. To understand the source of each sound, and how that sound works, and the contexts it fits into, is the aim of this kind of listening.

3. 'Reduced listening'

This term was coined by the French composer and music technology pioneer Pierre Schaeffer. It means listening to the technical qualities of each sound, regardless of its origin and regardless of its emotional meaning or implication. When I’ve been teaching young recording engineers, teaching this skill has often been a crucial part of the training. To take just one example from their work with commercial music: it’s only when they can temporarily ignore the funk, and the groove, of, say, a particular bass line, and become aware of what frequencies the bass is made of, and how those frequencies come in and out (the sound’s envelope), that they can begin to shape the sound effectively, so that the sound can have more ‘bite’ and fit into a mix well. Once they can do that, they have learned the means by which that bass line can have its funk and groove enhanced. This kind of listening is essential when one is learning about treating sound – filtering, equalising, granulating, stretching, transposing, etc.

4. Defensive listening

This is a kind of listening that mostly occurs outside of the world of the recording studio – it’s essential for survival in the ‘real world’. To take an archaic example (archaic everywhere except in rural southern Africa today, or in zoos, that is), hearing the lion’s roar behind you, or, even more critically, the soft sound of a lion’s paws padding behind you (!) is an essential survival skill! In more urban
societies, the ability to hear a motor vehicle, and avoid it, is an example of this kind of listening.

5. Semiotic listening

This is a kind of listening that is being developed more and more in our highly equipment-mediated society. A quick and practical example: hearing the ring tone of my cell phone from among all the others. A more elaborate example: the *Bellenorgel* or bell organ, of the Belgian composer Godfried-Willem Raes. This is a device, built in the early 1970s, in which doorbells, telephone bells, and sonic warning devices of various kinds were mounted on a large wooden board and set to be played automatically, in unpredictable rhythms, controlled by a series of surplus telephone relay switches. Although it sounds like fun in theory, in practice the device proved extremely annoying to listen to. This was evident almost immediately upon its being turned on. As Raes explained, the problem was that all the devices were warning devices, each one indicating, if not danger, at least the presence of the unknown. Who is at the door, on the phone? Friend or foe? Good news or bad? And so, even with the best will in the world, listening to this device, made exclusively of sonic warning devices, in almost any other way, proved extremely difficult, if not impossible.

6. Analytic listening – and a subset: harmonic listening

This aspect of listening is concentrated almost wholly on music, although it can be heard elsewhere. It involves concentrating on aspects of the sounds of music and their interrelationships. In Western classical music, this might involve the ability to name and label certain combinations of sounds – chords – and say how they fit into the overall progression of sounds. In Indian classical music, it might involve the ability to identify correctly the tones and glides of a given *raga*, and being able to tell if the performer is using them correctly or not. Other music-related analytical skills would involve being able to identify and transcribe rhythms, identify tone-colours and instrumental techniques, analyse how an electronic sound was made, etc.

7. Deep listening

This is a technique developed by composer Pauline Oliveros and taught by her. Mastery of it takes considerable work, but basically it involves being aware of all sounds coming from all directions at all times. It’s related to the Tibetan Buddhist listening meditation, but goes in many other directions from there. More information consult the *Deep Listening* website http://deeplisten.org/site/

8. Directed, composed listening

The only example I know of this is American composer David Dunn’s composition, *Purposeful Listening in Complex States of Time* (1997-98). This is
a composition for listeners - fully notated with an elaborate notation that has to be learned before it can be performed properly. The instructions tell the listener what kind of sound to listen for, in a particular direction, at a particular time. So, for example, one might be told to listen for a sound at 'sky level', to the right, and close to the listener's body, for a very brief time - followed by listening to a moderately distant sound at 'body level', to the lower right, for a slightly longer period of time, etc.

If one thought that the Tibetan listening exercise was difficult, this is a virtuoso exercise in consciousness control. I've made it through a page or two of this score, but never have been able to do more than that. Still, from the small amounts I've done, I can already tell that this is one of the most powerful consciousness-training, and consciousness-altering exercises in sound I've ever experienced. (David Dunn has kindly allowed me to make this score available on my website www.warrenburt.com/storage/ways_of_listening/Plicsot.pdf)

9. Normal 'musical' listening

This is where a member of a culture listens to music from that culture without concentrating on it too hard, or trying to analyse it in any conscious way. The rules of the music may vary from culture to culture (the harmony of jazz, for example, as different from the concentration on melody in classical Persian music), and there may be certain musical 'universals' that do not vary from culture to culture (the frequency range of sounds considered 'musical', the range of musical speeds considered 'rhythmic', etc.), but this kind of listening is extremely prevalent, and is usually 'culture-specific'. That is, the listeners have consciously or unconsciously absorbed the rules of their own music, and listen to that music with the template of those rules (mostly unconsciously) in their minds. It can be very aware, as in concentrating on a piece of music you admire, or it can be a background activity, as in having music on in the background while you read.

10. Cinematic listening

How we sink into the conventions of the normal narrative film soundtrack, and how we relate the sound to what is happening on the screen is the focus of this kind of listening. French critic and composer Michel Chion has written at length about this, as have a number of others. This kind of listening, paradoxically, can also operate in the radio play, even though there are no physical pictures present on radio. (More information on Michel Chion and his wonderful work can be found at www.michelchion.com).

11. Ironic, distanced listening

This might best be explained with a verbal example. When one tells a sick joke, one listener might laugh, while another will be repelled by the grotesque or violent imagery. The person who laughs has the ability to hear the language used in a distanced manner - not being viscerally affected by the imagery used.
The person who is repelled feels, at least inwardly, the violence or grotesquerie of the imagery in such a way that they are unable to appreciate the humour in the situation. In musique concrète, or sound art, this way of listening can also be called for. The section at the beginning of Trevor Wishart's *Red Bird* (1977-78), which sounds like a political prisoner being beaten up, while what is actually happening is a collage of books being slammed shut, is a good example of this.

12. **Practical, purposive verbal listening**

   Listening to verbal instructions so that one knows precisely what to do, and how to do it. A variant on language listening which is concentrated on learning specific things.

13. **Wholistic linguistic listening**

   This is where one listens to language, but is aware not only of the words and their meanings, but also of tone of voice, inflection, accent, 'word-sound', vowel quality, and many other aspects of utterance which give verbal language its overall 'meaning'. With this kind of listening, for example, one can (hopefully) tell when someone is lying.

14. **Paranoiac/critical listening**

   I adopt this term from the surrealists for my own ends. In this kind of listening – mostly to language, but again, it can be applied to other forms of sound - one continuously monitors the content of language for political/social content one agrees/disagrees with. Sometimes this is involuntary, as when one winces at a particularly obnoxious sexist comment, and sometimes it’s done continually and consciously, as when an editor monitors a text being prepared for broadcast.

15. **Internal listening**

   When you hear a tune 'in your head', and that sound is not physically present. A tune continually repeating in your head is called an 'ear-worm'. If you hear original music in your head, and have the ability to write it down, that's one way of composing. If you hear voices in your head, and they're telling you the future of the world, and how to achieve it, it's called either being a prophet, or being schizophrenic. St Theresa of Avila has some amazing descriptions of sounds and voices in her head, which commanded her to write her works. An interesting contemporary consideration of this phenomenon can be found on the intervoiceline.org website.

16. **Dream listening**

   Dream listening happens when sounds from the external world are transformed in the dream state. I had a lovely example of this happen to me recently. I was in Melbourne, staying in a hotel on a busy street which had a tram line on it. It
was hot, and I was sleeping with the window open. In my dream, I was hearing an orchestral piece with very deep basses playing a drone which grew in strength. Then, a cluster of high flutes came in, sustained and insistent. Then I woke up, and my dream symphony seamlessly morphed into what caused it - the sound of a tram going by. There are many forms of dream listening, but this particular one fascinates me greatly.

Some thoughts

I wrote the above list fairly quickly. I’m sure there are many other kinds of listening, and hopefully this list will stimulate others to come up with types of their own. It should be pointed out that not all of the above listening states are voluntary. We are hard-wired for some of these states in order to survive. Defensive listening and semiotic listening usually trump all the others, and thank goodness they do. The person who is so obsessed with the music playing in their head that they fail to hear the truck bearing down on them will not be passing their genes (or memes!) on into the gene (or meme) pool. And, obviously, several of these states of consciousness, for that is what each of these listening states are, can be occurring at once. Some of these states, such as the Tibetan listening meditation, or the Dunn composition, are will-directed, and some clearly aren’t.

In 'normal' life, for example, defensive listening and semiotic listening are (hopefully) always percolating away in the background, being able to be called into use at a moment's notice. In fact, we've constructed safe environments where one can allow these states of listening to be put aside, or at least put very far into the background. These are called, in our culture, concert halls and theatres.

One can compose for these states, and one can compose with these states. Some of these states have situations where we naturally do them, and some don't – we need to create situations for them – this can be as simple as taking the time to do them. For example, coming across a waterfall, one might decide to stop thinking about that conversation one had yesterday in order to concentrate solely on the sound of the waterfall for a while. We are often doing more than one kind of listening at one time.

For music listening, there is often the question of which state to listen to a given work with. Intolerance can often result from applying the wrong listening template to a given work. A trivial example of this might be the conservative Western musician who insists that all activities involving the use of acoustic musical instruments, from whatever culture, be heard in terms of European traditional (1550-1950) harmony.

And some states may produce more therapeutic results than others. Some of the meditative listening states can be quite calming, while some of the others, such as the focussed, label-oriented scientific listening, produce other very valuable kinds of knowledges. For example, composer David Dunn may be fascinated, sonically, by the sounds of beetles inside the bark of trees that he records with his specially built contact microphones. But when he listens to those sounds in
a 'labelling-oriented' manner, he finds out things about the behaviour of those insects that have been previously unknown to science, and that knowledge might be applied to controlling destructive results of those insects.5

At this point, I don’t want to make value judgments about the various states of listening, other than to point to particular conditions in which some might be more appropriate than others. But I would like to identify the various states in an attempt to show how the metaphorical fugue of our consciousness works on several levels at once, and how one can, given the right conditions, direct and guide that consciousness in order to enhance the experience of our listenings to the world.

Afterword

Since I gave Chris Mann the first word in this essay, I might as well let him also have the last word. On reading my essay, he wonders if David Dunn’s piece is the only example of ‘composed listening’. He said that he thought that that was what everyone from Beethoven to Charlie Parker and John Cage thought they were doing. I sort of disagree with him here. I replied that although I thought that composers might think that they were composing someone else’s listening, I thought that that was too broad a metaphor, and that all composers could really do was offer opportunities for people to listen in many different ways.

He also, more importantly, asks why I didn’t deal with the police in my essay. I said I did, under ‘paranoiac/critical listening’. He replied that there was a distinction between listening FOR, and listening TO, and that, for example, a musician who is monitoring their tuning is listening FOR, and that 90% of the listening the police do is listening FOR, etc.

Notes
1. The article, originally published in Art and Text No. 5 (1981), is available on the composer’s website, http://www.warrenburt.com/
3. See: http://www.logosfoundation.org/
4. Red Bird is available as a CD. See: http://www.trevorwishart.co.uk for more information.
5. A report on his recent work in this field can be found at http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/201001/beetles-music.

WARREN BURT
Warren is a composer, performer, writer, video artist, instrument builder, and broadcaster. He was the ARC Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong. This essay was originally published on the composer’s website and was republished with permission by the author.
I: www.warrenburt.com
Flatness, Ornamentality and the Sonic Image:

Puncturing flânerie and postcolonial memorialisation in the work of David Chesworth and Sonia Leber

Jonathan W. Marshall
University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand

The article below enunciates a novel rhetorical strategy for the description of urban sound installation, drawing on the visual rhetoric of Siegfried Kracauer (“the mass ornament”), Walter Benjamin (the flâneur), and Roland Barthes (“punctum”, “studium” and “grain”). The installation Proximities (Melbourne: 2006), by David Chesworth and Sonia Leber, is used as a case study, while The Edge of the Trees (Museum Of Sydney: 1995), by Fiona Foley and Janet Lawrence, serves as a comparison and precedent for the discussion of colonial politics and heterotopic form. Rather than viewing these works in terms of an immersive, layered, or infinitely expansive depth (LaBelle, Kahn), Proximities is examined from the perspective of Kracauer’s theory of the planar superficial visual ornament. The flat ornamental quality of Proximities allows it to engage with the dialectics of memorialisation, the nature of modernism and travel, and with the sounds of the city, all of which are invoked through the artists’ generation of a technological sonic archive to evoke subaltern, colonial identities within the contemporary metropolitan space of empire and capitalism. This essay thus offers a reappraisal of the issue of sonic memorialisation as it applies to public art works and museums within contemporary Australia and the Commonwealth.
Introduction

Reintroducing planar discourse into sonic criticism and the discussion of urban acoustic place or placelessness

In his famous collection of essays *The Arcades Project* (1927–40), Walter Benjamin cited early twentieth century sociologist Georg Simmel’s comment that:

> Interpersonal relationships in big cities are distinguished by a marked preponderance of the activity of the eye over the activity of the ear. The main reason for this is the public means of transportation

—a form of transport which transforms the whole world into a film which the traveller gazes at distractedly while moving from one point to another. Countering Simmel’s proclamation of the primacy of the eye over the ear in urban life, what I want to do below is to draw on the theories of visual culture developed by Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer and Roland Barthes to look at what an aural rather than a visual flâneur might be—or to put it another way, what a distracted audience to the ornamentality of modern urbanism and empire might be—and to apply these planar, imagistic theories to the work of sound artists Sonia Leber and David Chesworth. In this, I will be focusing particularly on their 2006 sound installation, *Proximities* (made in collaboration with visual artist Simeon Nelson). Like Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*, I want to circle my subject without fully resolving its qualities or its valencies. What I am offering then is less a fully-rendered reading of *Proximities* in terms of landscape and site, but more a series of productive visual metaphors and discursive comparisons which draw attention to several of the key issues raised by an artwork like this. Prime amongst these is the challenge of the memorialisation of the colonial subject within modern urban space. This essay is also intended as a continuation of the dialogue on flânerie in the museum, colonialism, and the use of indigenous voice in postcolonial Australian sound installation as has accompanied the creation of *The Edge of the Trees* by Janet Lawrence and Fiona Foley for the Museum Of Sydney (MOS) in 1995.

The problem that I want to pose is how does one construct a politically relevant sense of place through something which is as inherently mobile and placeless as the recorded sound? How do you create a deeply felt, material sense of history, of place, and of depth, through something as inherently superficial, ornamental and externally rich as a newly designed urban space and its associated artworks? How can planar surfaces themselves create a sense of complexity and dialogue?

In this sense, I want to work against the common practice in writing on the poetics of sound in which authors have championed a definition of sound as an inherently or ideally spatial medium which would establish a highly reflective sense of depth, complexity or layered meaning by occupying a location in social
space, in the gallery or in the concert hall, and by physically immersing the listener within this realm. Indeed throughout their discussion, authors such as Douglas Kahn and Brandon LaBelle show a marked preference for the use of a watery, immersive poetics which negates any consideration of sound as a planar or commercial phenomenon. Kahn for example notes that while visual information only comes from directly before the listener, sounds reach the individual from behind and all around.2 From this observation, LaBelle claims that “Space is a potential awaiting activation through [the] durational insertion” of sound, which fills it and which give it shape and texture for the listener.3 Kahn draws selectively on the writings of Benjamin and on the citation of Simmel given above, skipping over Benjamin’s writings on flânerie, to liken the author’s discussion of sound to how one perceives acoustics whilst under the influence of hashish. In such a state, one experiences the direct presence of sound within oneself and about oneself, whilst simultaneously mapping and generating a subjective three-dimensional space about oneself—“the projection of space.” These models certainly apply to the sound sculptures by WrK (Toshiya Tsunoda et al) and architect/composer Iannis Xenakis, both of whom LaBelle discusses. They can scarcely be assumed to be valid in all, or even most, cases however.

Kahn himself concludes that this “sense of immersion in noise is guaranteed by the ease through which so much” in terms of space and depth “can be perceived within it.” The perception of sound for Kahn may therefore be seen as essentially antithetical to the flattening effects of modernity and capitalism, especially where the overheard public speech cited by Simmel and Benjamin is concerned:

Fields of significant sound constituted by café speech may … invoke the phenomenal depths articulated by language, as opposed to the surfaces of visual imagery, [commercial] signage [and display] included.4 Even when discussing post-World War II abstract painting, Kahn follows Michael Fried in foregrounding a haptic, “object-like” quality to planar art pieces, whose size and textual qualities causes them to generate “an extension of the painting out into the room toward the viewer” in a “wrap-around effect.”5 Defining Jackson Pollock’s work as a form of action-painting, Kahn concludes that for Fluxus artists like George Brecht: “Pollock’s painting produced a state of immersion for the spectator through the combined action of scale and … delirium” while Alan Kaprow’s own “immersive tactics achieved” a similar “extension” through the use of the “enveloping spatiality of sound” itself. Even late twentieth century painting and its associated performances thus come to seem, through the eyes of Kahn and Fluxus, as performing a form of all-encompassing spatiality and oceanic depth.

What I would like to effect below then is a de-architecturalising of sound discourse; to define those volumes and affects which sound sculpture generates in terms of relationships within a single mechanistic or ornamental plane, rather than in terms of a massive recession of depth which, in the words of Kahn, Brecht and Kaprow above, might be seen to oppose capitalism and power through a
sense of physical immediacy or through the collapse of distance between the
listener and the sonic object. On the contrary, by returning to early twentieth
century writings about modernity and urbanism, I would like to suggest that
the flattening of depth is both part of the problem and part of the solution or
critique which sound sculpture might effect. In the words of Siegfried Kracauer,
the problem with capitalism is not that it is too rational and so destroys any
resistant sensations of ecstatic fusion or immediacy of perception across distance.
Rather capitalism and those art works which engage with it such as Proximities or
Kracauer’s equally mediated metropolitan “ornament” highlight how capitalism
itself is actually not rational or consistent enough. It is not the sonic performance
of depth or of fusion which exposes the flaws of modern capitalism and empire,
but rather the performance of depthlessness and flatness which highlights these
tensions across the surface of the work and across the plane of the social. It is the
affective sameness of these art works to capitalism, empire and planar machinic
mediation which generates criticism, not their immersive spatial difference.

What I want to suggest then is that when one places such a work as Proximities
within the denatured, tabula rasa of a new civic development or the modernist
museum, what one is presented with is often far less akin to a sense of watery
expansiveness, differentially layered spatiality, or depth, but rather something
much closer to an affective flatness; or to what is described by Siegfried Kracauer
as an “ornamentality”: a superficial yet embodied play across the richly textured
planar surface of the technological material as it confronts the observer. Sound
sculptures in general—and the urban commissions of Chesworth and Leber in
particular—seem to function best on the level of their self-conscious, superficial
detailing, rather than at the level of a massive receding depth, or as an infinite
expanse of layers which might englobe the listener. In short, sound sculpture
would seem to be more like an explicitly flat image or ornamental spectacle than
Kahn and others have typically given it credit for.

Proximities and the Australian Commonwealth

Sonia Leber and David Chesworth have been working together as Wax Sound
Media since 1993. Their piece, Proximities, is located on the bridge which provides
pedestrian access to the Melbourne Cricket Ground from the new Birrarung Marr
park, crossing over the railway lines, tramlines and the freeway. The riverside park
runs out of Federation Square in the centre of Melbourne, and the bridge passes
high above the transport routes and stretches of rolling, grassy parkland below.
Walkers are presented with an impressive panorama of the city on both sides, and
which allows the eye to move from the Governor’s mansion (completed in 1876)
located on the edge of the Botanic Gardens to the west, around to the commercial
high rise developments situated along Collins Street east of the city centre. From
this position on the bridge, city and landscape becomes spectacle.

The bridge was named in memory of William Barak after Chesworth and
Leber had completed their design for Proximities. Barak was an important
figure in cross-cultural relations between the Aborigines and Anglo-European settlers, 1835-1903. More recently he has been seen as a precursor to the later boom in Australian indigenous art, with a National Gallery of Victoria catalogue describing him as “one of a select group of nineteenth-century Aboriginal artists who welcomed the opportunity to use new materials, and to produce work on paper … for Europeans.”

*Proximities* consists of a twenty-four channel mix of vocal samples played back according to a semi-randomised, partly movement-activated score, relayed through fifty-six speakers. These are mounted in low wall-panels on either side of the bridge. The installation was one of many civic works and art exhibitions organised by the state government to coincide with and commemorate the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games. Given its location, title and commissioning, it is therefore impossible to discuss this work without examining some of the issues of politics, contextual cultural meaning and social valency which concern both Kracauer and Benjamin, as well as more recent writers on Australian museology—while Leber and Chesworth themselves relate their work to the terms developed by Roland Barthes in his writings on Romantic lieder (grain) and photography (punctum).

To satisfy the conditions of the Games’ commission, Chesworth and Leber chose to represent the Commonwealth of Nations linked together under the British Crown by crafting *Proximities* from voices, songs and ritual spoken texts (chants) offered in various languages by mostly indigenous or subaltern subjects of the Commonwealth. This included song fragments from Ghana, Trinidad, Malaysia, Australia, the United Kingdom and other locales—with African and Afro-Cuban vocalisations being particularly prominent. Although this dominance of African diasporic exclamations could be said to reflect the make-up of the Commonwealth itself, the relative scarcity of Anglo-Celtic voices within *Proximities* mitigates against this. In the context of the predominantly African flavour of the languages in the mix, isolated voices such as the Scottish potmender’s song come to take on an added significance and aural distinctiveness,
serving as a statement of the equivalence—at least in aesthetic terms—of the culture of early modern Britain and that of Africa. This rendering of national cultural affiliations via speech and voice takes on yet another meaning when one considers the fact that all of these vocal materials were recorded locally by Leber and Chesworth. Far from representing a series of distant ‘Others,’ Proximities depicts the ‘Other’ within our midst; Australia not as a homogenous cultural unit, but as a chorus of voices drawn from around the globe in which African peoples and language groups are particularly well-represented. This is not the predominantly white nation of such mainstream Australian cultural imaginings as Cloudstreet or Neighbours. This is indeed the conventional interpretation of most public artworks to which Proximities might be compared, with commentators treating The Edge of the Trees and other contemporary Australian sound art memorials as celebrations of cultural diversity. This position is not without its detractors, as we shall see below.11

Before I move to look at how the work of Chesworth and Leber is allied with the ideas of Barthes and Kracauer in the artists’ use of the recorded voice, I would like to examine in some detail the issues of place, identity and empire which Proximities raises by the very nature of the commission, and the site where it is found, above the central traffic hub for the city of Melbourne, with its newly landscaped, scenic views over the modern, commercial metropolis of Australia.

Cultural Mnemonics and the Politics of Replacement

In his influential text Sites of Memory (1984), Pierre Nora makes a distinction between that pre-modern memory which is kept alive by recurrent ritual acts, story telling and other practices carried out directly by those individuals and groups affected by these memories, versus a technologisation of memory in which memory comes to be invested in and shaped by such modern institutions as archives, libraries, history texts and those civic monuments which are commissioned and managed by the state on behalf of the individual.12 Although Nora’s distinction between an actively-engaged pre-modern community and impersonal contemporary state-run practices has been challenged, his chief point is that the act of memorialisation in those art works and institutions which are exterior to the individual may serve not only to keep events within the consciousness of the populace, but also to neutralise these memories and to—in effect—facilitate the forgetting or erasure of important aspects of these memories.

In the Australian context then, one could argue that the trend since the 1990s to memorialise or otherwise depict indigenous cultures within parks, civic monuments and art galleries serves as a screen to hide the replacement of actual indigenous peoples themselves—and the legal rights they exercise—with the mere “representation” of Aboriginal bodies.13 The fact that the work offers the sound of speaking subjects whose literal or visual presence is denied to the listener effects a substitution of physical presence by ghost-like sound—a trope which Michel
Chion describes as acousmatics, and which here takes on a potentially negative political valency. Julie Marcus for example talks of an aestheticised “smudging of the body” of the Aborigine into the sand which acts as a “denial of dispossession” by transforming “the Indigenous people” into static features of “the land itself”—rather than featuring them as dynamic, living agents and owners of this landscape who remain active within the modern metropolis of today. Marcus contends that many of the apparently progressive art installations located within our cities re-enact this marginalisation by literally or metaphorically placing politics and the Australian indigene at the periphery of the space. For Marcus, works like those by Foley and Lawrence or Proximities are aesthetic marginals to the real work of museums, histories and the courts, constituting little more than aesthetic window-dressing on a new form of terra nullius.

Following Marcus, one could argue that the Australian Aboriginal and indigenous folk voices which feature within Proximities stand-in for the body of the absent colonial subject—especially in Melbourne, a city under the British Commonwealth where the presence of our own Indigenous peoples tends to be confined to quite specific geographical areas such as Collingwood, Northcote and Fitzroy. By contrast, such recently bulldozed, cleared and landscaped civic spaces such as Birrarung Marr or the MOS forecourt are only populated by archival or sculptural references to pre-colonial cultures, which have thereby been safely neutralised and rendered as little more than attractive aesthetic ornaments—like the “message stick” sculptures found in Birrarung Marr (pictured below)—all now situated within a space both literally and metaphorically occupied by Anglo-European populations and by their principles of ownership and law. The practice of field recording and ethnomusicology has indeed historically been driven by precisely this kind of translation, in which music anthropologists like Alan Lomax of the Smithsonian Institute sought to document, memorialise and to render as aesthetically pleasing or curious recordings of those sound worlds which—like indigenous folk culture itself—were said to be vanishing in the wake of the inevitable victory of modern, urban Western civilisation. Even influential avant-garde composers such as R. Murray Schafer and Ros Bandt have dedicated much of their practice to preserving those acoustic forms whose integrity is apparently “endangered” by the modern urban metropolis, both artists arguing for the conservation of the pre- or early-modern “sonic ecology” of the world.

Such neo-Primitivist ideas are widespread within much of the discourse about contemporary Australian sound art, as is evidenced by curator Julianna Engberg’s essay on another separate Games’ commission from Leber and Chesworth. The very title of Engberg’s catalogue essay—“My Chicken is Missing”—evokes a sense of tragic “loss” for a prelapsarian sound world, in which “Songs that once described the pulverising of corn” for the inhabitants of the pre-modern African “village” are conceived as radically other to, and threatened by, the contemporary “synthetic bustle of Elizabeth Street” and the sounds of the urban metropolis. Engberg’s comments are ironic given that they are actually more applicable to
Proximities than to the specific work which she describes. Reiterations (Elizabeth Street) by Chesworth and Leber was commissioned for the +Plus Factors exhibition held at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Melbourne during the Commonwealth Games Festival, and it was in some ways a more radical work than the long-term civic commission of Proximities. The ACCA piece consisted of seven recordings of individual African immigrants moving by foot and by public transport through Melbourne. Presented on headphones, the work put the listener in the position of the immigrant him or herself. Leber and Chesworth observed that audiences to Reiterations: “encounter each individual in turn, inhabiting their listening perspectives as they sing and move about the crowded city,” thereby reinscribing Melbourne and its modern transport routes with the migrants’ own voices, languages, songs and experiences, producing a contemporary patois of spatiality and sound.21

Irrespective of Reiterations’ actual formal qualities and display format though, as far as these critics are concerned, the possibility—or indeed the desirability—of sonic hybridity across time and space is, at best, marginal. Sonic history is seen instead as a never-ending sequence of conflicts between the irreconcilable forces of the authentic (the pre-modern voice and the direct bodily presence of the listener and sound-maker) and the synthetic (modernity). This model was also challenged in an even more explicit fashion by Chesworth and Leber in a piece which they designed for the first exhibition at the Museum Of Sydney in 1995. This was an environmental soundscape which accompanied the main videowall installation by the stairs. Chesworth has noted that the processed field recordings

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Figure 2 Vicki Couzens at al, Birrarung Wilam sculptures (2006), at Birrarung Marr. Photo by the author.
from which this soundscape was built contained “remnants” or “aural ghosts” of various “machine sounds” which impinge today upon the acoustic ecology of modern Sydney’s parks and gardens. The resulting audiovisual montage was described by the artist as “a giant organised sea of electrons which appeared to create a vast ‘electronic ecology,’” or “a dynamic space delineated by movement, timbre and the tactile”—and not in fact a simple recreation of pre-settlement Sydney’s soundscape.²²

Given Chesworth’s own deployment of the noise and sounds of the metropolis within the MOS environmental soundscape, the absence of any urban patois or more overtly ‘modern’ forms of speech within Proximities is all the more remarkable. Apart from one instance where the words being sung by an African dockworker are impinged upon by the distant sounds of machinery and horns, the material in Proximities is notable for a level of acoustic detailing and recording in which almost all such contextualising sounds and traces have been removed. This does not however naturalise the speech archived within this work. On the contrary, the level of fine crafting and skilful manipulation produces an acoustic surface which is distinctly unreal, unusually proximate to the listener, and which is at times quite uncanny. Nevertheless, the recognisably non or pre-industrial verbal and sonic content of Proximities does tend to place those cultures which it represents in the past—rather explicitly depicting them as a logical extension of the dynamic, Western metropolitan spaces and travel routes which flow beneath the Barak Bridge. Proximities and its verdant surrounds become a site for the distanced spectacularisation of the urban metropolis, rather than immersing or pulling the listener into these dynamic modern spaces through the content of the speech itself, as Kahn would have of Benjamin and Simmel.

To simply read Proximities as a work which marginalises the validity of the contemporary subaltern experience under modernity through its construction of space, language and history would, however, be ungenerous, and would be to interpret this very subtle work exclusively in the context of its literal placement and those factors which facilitated its commission. As Genocchio notes of The Edge of the Trees:

While all acts of symbolic reconciliation [or resistance] run the risk of replaying the structures through which dominant cultures have appropriated and assimilated difference … they cannot simply be reduced to such a negative reading.²³

Such an interpretation here principally fails to take fully into account the acoustic richness of Proximities and its qualities such as the sonic detailing noted above. The task then is to develop a rhetorical strategy which recognises the specific formal aspects of recorded sound and playback, whilst nevertheless explicitly engaging with these debates in museology, memorialisation, acousmatic physical presence and colonial history—issues which are raised all too rarely in the wider context of sound art itself.
What I am arguing here then is that the work of Leber and Chesworth does in fact suggest an engagement with, and critique of, these trends in contemporary memorialisation and urban sound, yet this critique is one which functions indirectly, through an overtly superficial or ornamental treatment of the sonic material and the body, rather than through a deep and explicit dialogue in terms of verbal rhetoric or architectonic space. It is indeed hard to imagine how the artists could have secured the commission for Proximities had they tackled such issues head-on, through an angry, vociferous statement of culturally hybrid, dynamic subaltern modernity. There may be a space for such an attack on ideas of racial, immigrant and subaltern identity through forms such as French-African rap, yaourt and Franco-Algerian rai, but not, I suspect, via the design of those official state-sponsored monuments which are situated at the very heart of the civic metropolis and its spaces of leisure.

The Theatre of Disappearance

Writing about his own use of recorded Indigenous speech in his piece for the MOS (The Calling to Come, 1995), Paul Carter observed that:

The Museum of Sydney occupies a site of disappearances: its monumental appearance may be said to contradict the site's history, or once again to obscure it. What then? We can colonise it with little theatres that exhibit what has disappeared. Or, refusing to come to the party … we can persist in enunciating the space of disappearance…

Such an enunciation … renames the site as … [a] place where symbolically the end has not come and a different kind of —distracted “exchange” might be said to be enacted. In offering a critique of history as an already-finished, closed and pre-scripted theatre, Carter, Chesworth and Leber present an alternative construction of history as a melancholy theatre of ghostly memorialisation, in which the audience attends to the choreographed movement and disappearance of voice even as these historic voices continue to pulsate and morph throughout these harmonically-charged, Romantic aural planes—a sonic disappearance which can only end in noise (see below). The finality of history is suspended or resisted in order to allow “a tonally and timbrally mediated” circulation and flow across the mnemonic, acoustic space. Such an approach cannot, of course, overcome the disappearance of other signs of spatial specificity, of indigeneity, or of the literal bodies of Aborigines and of their principles of jurisprudence and ownership. It can, however—perhaps—hope to hold in abeyance, or to engage in a dialogue with some of these forces; to resist them in some small way, and to publicly articulate the aesthetics of disappearance within this public space by re-enacting such a dispersal of presence each time an acoustic fragment moves through the speakers, only to dissipate into the wind again.
Flânerie and Mobile Spectatorship

Part of the issue here is to what extent does that quality of dynamism, renewal and endless movement which we take as normative to modernity finally annihilate any sense of cultural specificity and place, and to what extent does it allow for a counter narrative in which sounds, objects and cultures can in fact be tied to a specific location, without merely becoming static monuments to a moment in history which we, active subjects of the modern urban metropolis, have now supposedly superseded.

Writing in Germany during the 1930s, Siegfried Kracauer claimed that increasingly people did not travel to go to a particular location, but rather that “travel has been reduced to [the] pure experience of space,” to an experience of moving along a horizontal plane from one coordinate to another. As a result, there had been a “flattening out of” affect, experience and the body “in order to make” the individual seem as “smooth and shiny as” a 1930s “automobile … desiring nothing other than the greatest possible technologising of all activities.”

For Kracauer—like Benjamin—the chief characteristic of modern life was its increasingly self-reflexive, abstract or fetishistic quality. Kracauer nevertheless argued that:

This emphasis on the external has the advantage of being sincere. It is not externality that poses a threat to truth. Truth is threatened only by the naïve affirmation of [those] cultural values that have become unreal [in the modern world] and by the careless misuse of concepts such as personality, inwardness, tragedy, [pre-modern authenticity] and so on.

In short, the very superficiality and abstractness of modern culture was not only a sign of the alienation of the individual and of modern travel, of social, economic and racial problems and conflicts, but it was also a dramatisation of these very same problems in a way which made them easier to perceive—and thus rendered this aspect of modern life open to attack and criticism. The transformation of the world into a series of vacuous images with nothing behind them was also what made the city a place of dreams, a place where one could re-imagine such arbitrary images for one’s own purposes and desires—just as Benjamin claimed the flâneur had done when travelling through the streets of Paris in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Kracauer and Benjamin were in many ways trying to recover for progressive politics the aesthetics of Romanticism, which they felt had been claimed by fascism and other oppressive ideologies under bourgeois, imperial capitalism. One of the ways Benjamin proposed that such a resistant culture could be reformulated was through a Surrealist critique of the city whereby—in the eyes of the late nineteenth-century figure of the flâneur and his Surrealist successors—the modern metropolis was transformed from an alienating manifestation of contemporary capitalism and the colonial state, into a space of dreaming, desire and of self-realisation. Benjamin claimed that “the father of Surrealism is [the] arcade” or the
passage, which contained that “bazaar” of barely organised objects which made up “the last hang-out of the flâneur.” A novel feature of Parisian architecture in Paris during the 1840s, the passages were the precursor to the shopping malls of today, consisting of roofed arcades lined with shops, newsagents, cafés and windows which displayed all of the dusty bric-a-brac and shiny new commodities to be found in Paris during this period of capitalist transition. The passage was, for Benjamin, a fabulous public interior, glistening with objects of visual attraction and distraction; a realm where new models of consumption and display had yet to fully take effect, and where the very redundancy and inefficient nature of such an approach to marketing created a space for the individual to rework such tawdry, reflective baubles for his or her own desires.

The flâneur was, in this a sense, a Romantic figure—but not one who stood aloof from the object of his gaze, as did the man shown in Friedrich’s Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog. The flâneur projected his deepest longings onto the city such that he became—like the passages themselves—a site where the distinction between a roofed, private, interior space, and an open, public, exterior space, dissolved. The flâneur projected his desires onto the commodities in the shop-windows of the arcades which he travelled past, becoming, in Charles Baudelaire’s words “a roving soul in search of a body”—an acousmatic presence if you will—for whom “the familiar city as phantasmagoria beckoned.” Like the Surrealist artist who composed material by allowing whatever uncensored thoughts which unconsciously arose in his or her mind to be “automatically” transcribed onto the page or the canvas, the flâneur was “an automatic walker, yielding to the metropolis, avid for its dreams.”

Figure 3 Modern Paris as a world of reflections, of Surreal consumer products, and of the uncanny conflation of interior (the shop) and exterior (the street), in Eugene Atget’s Shop Avenue Des Gobelins (1925); versus the deep interiority of Caspar Friedrich’s Romantic Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog (1818). Images courtesy of, http://www.masters-of-photography.com and Wikipedia, respectively.
see his stormy depths echoed in a sublime vision of nature and its awesome
majesty, but rather the flâneur acted as a mirror of the city, his disinterest in any
specific object paradoxically allowing his eye to graze indifferently over the subjects
of the city, and so to reconstruct them according to his own fantasies and his
own idiosyncratic, fungible associations or fantasies of embodiment. Flânerie and
ornamentation are in this sense antithetical to the Romantic sublime. In this world
of pure planar surfaces, the flâneur was, for Benjamin, the ultimate critic because
he defied altogether any claims to bourgeois interiority or the mystic depths of the
fascist Götterdämmerung, finding instead his jouissance and personality through
his own creative interpretation and voyeurism of the otherwise superficial city.

Flânerie and Modernist Ornamentalism

Kracauer argued that such an attention to the superficial aspects of the modern
spectacle could act as a critique of this modern sense of abstract placelessness
and the impersonal state by reflecting back at modernity its own image. If the
sale of the products of one’s own body (labour) caused the modern individual
to become alienated from him or herself, then what modernity achieved was the
transformation of “individuals” and their bodies into interchangeable physical
elements within a larger machine—be this the factory, the office, or global
capitalism as a whole. Kracauer saw this machinic logic as being exemplified in
those spectacles which he described as “ornamental.”

Modern culture was ornamental for Kracauer because it referred only to itself
and to its own depersonalised machines and structures. The female chorus lines
of the 1920s, for example, were not ‘about’ anything as such. Rather each woman
was transformed into a series of physical elements (legs, arms, breasts) which
moved in waves, in a ripple of kicks or shifts to the left, rather than as a collection
of self-aware, psychologically-complex individuals whose depths of character
might have been hinted at in such visual displays. Whereas for the soldier on
the parade ground “regularity was considered a means to an end” which “arose
out of patriotic feelings and in turn aroused them in soldiers and subjects. The
star formations” of the girls, however, “have no meaning beyond themselves.”
The “masses above whom they rise are not a moral unit”—like Hitler’s military
performer at Nuremberg, but:

Rather the girl-units drill … to train the broadest mass of people … to create
a pattern of undreamed-of dimensions. The end result is the ornament,
whose closure is brought about by emptying all the substantial constructs
of their contents

—and of their meaning. This produced a gigantic, depthless “star formation” of
body parts and machinic elements. The distracted gaze of the audience over the
performance of such ornamental objects is one which does not have a central focus,
but which roves indifferently between different ornamental objects, body parts, or
sites of (in)attention. The viewer’s eye casts about this display of planar surfaces
in a way which acknowledges and foregrounds the lack of depth on offer in such cultural phenomena. Here, as with Benjamin’s flâneur, the absence of interiority in the viewer is echoed in the dispersed superficial pleasures found within those objects which the viewer gazes upon. More importantly, this depthlessness takes on a specifically embodied character, in which acoustic sound and voice generates a specifically machinic sense of fantastic bodily presence. The depthless-subject of the flâneur is realised through a machinic, fragmentary body, where the distracted gaze or aural perception (an eye or ear that views many acoustic objects with an equal, roving indifference) accords with the construction of a fragmentary and non-unified body (a moving corpus which also lacks any overarching hierarchy of parts).

If then, as Barthes has argued, the voice can evoke a sense of embodiment in its sonority and in its timbral qualities,34 I would suggest that the acoustic subaltern or Indigenous body which is conjured up by Proximities is precisely such a mobile, planar ornamental body as that found in musical film director Busby Berkeley’s choreographed “star formations.” Proximities evokes a hybrid, disjointed mass of physical units which do not cohere into a collection of psychologically or culturally profound human subjects, but which rather creates a great, billowing plane of abstracted materials which implicitly extend infinitely in time and space beyond the literal boundaries of the work itself. The aural mix of Leber and Chesworth creates a passage-like or ornamental display of glistening, artificial-sounding sonic elements, suggestive acoustic objects and dispersed bodily presences, which listeners stroll between, flâneur-like, while the cars, trains and trams below the walkers echo their own distracted sensations of placelessness, flow and transport. Where Kahn’s ideal work would immerse and englobulate the listener within a liquid spherical space as one walks within it, the experience of travelling between the two rows of speakers from which Proximities is constructed is more like moving between a pair of kaleidoscopic walls or flat planes, covered

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**Figure 4** The “girl ornaments” of 1930s film director Busby Berkeley; and *The Tiller Girls (6 April 1962)*, photograph by Jane Brown (© Guardian News and Media Ltd 1962).32
with materials which acoustically dance and shift across their vertical surfaces. Benjamin famously argued in “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936) that modern recording technologies have rendered all art as flat, and superficially available for universal consumption as the filmic image. While some critics have seen in this the death of art as we know it, Benjamin himself felt that it had the potential to free art from the oppressive hierarchies of capitalism, culture and class via new technologised forms such as movies and photography.

Writing about the filmic actualités of the Lumière brothers from the 1890s, Tom Gunning describes exactly the kind of visual distraction which Chesworth and Leber solicit in their own highly crafted, acoustic surfaces:

The lack of dramatic narrative in these early street scenes invites a different sort of gaze to the one we have learned from classical narrative cinema … One must scan the surface of the image for various centres of interest … Once focussed, however, the pleasure one finds in a face, a gesture, an odd mode of transport, a bit of architecture, gives no guarantee of being sustained. Further, these points of pleasure are simultaneous with other possible points of interest; one is peripherally aware of all one is missing. New centres of interest bob into the frame unexpectedly, while others depart beyond reclamation. The receptive spectator approaches these images with a global curiosity about its “many interesting places,” a curiosity that is endlessly being incited and never completely satiated. The street is filled with endless attractions.

In the case of Proximities, these “endless attractions” take the form of constantly appearing and disappearing voices and exclamations, as series of digitally choreographed “many interesting places” and sounds and bodily presences whose totality eludes the individual listener through its mobility and machinic complexity.

Clearly the figure of the Euro-American flâneur and his or her free consumption of imported, recorded cultural objects in the form of images or sounds needs to be viewed somewhat more critically when, as Tony Mitchell observes, contemporary systems of exchange have produced a “binary dynamic” which “places the Western listener in the privileged position of being a musical flâneur able to tune into new sonic adventures” which have been strip-mined from the colonial peripheries of the Western metropolitan centre. Nevertheless, Australian museologist Andrea Whitcomb has pointed out that a degree of flânerie has been normative within state-sponsored mnemonic institutions such as the museum since at least the time of the nineteenth-century’s world fairs, and that the increasing use of sound sculpture and multi-media installation in museums today constitutes an attempt to harness such a model of distracted viewing and listening as a counter to earlier attempts by imperial museum administrators and archivists to present a unified narrative of colonial progress. This position is echoed in Susan Best’s celebration of The Edge of the Trees and the MOS as a site for the “immersion and distraction” of the flâneuresque observer.
As the subtitle of *Proximities* suggests—*Local histories / global entanglements*—what is evoked in this sound sculpture then is a flattening and collapsing of space which resists any attempt to clearly order the shifting, kaleidoscopic materials according to any transparent hierarchies of race, geography or class. The sculpture is a kind of tangled, sonic superhighway, promoting in this case a potentially radical and *destabilising* form of aural flânerie in the audience through the complexity of Chesworth’s and Leber’s digital choreography of voice across the space.

**Montage and Distraction**

Kracauer echoed Soviet film maker Sergei Eisenstein in strongly endorsing that quintessentially urban practice of cinematic “montage.” By this, Kracauer meant a process in which technological fragments which “by their” very “nature demand to be isolated from one another”—namely the separate images in each frame of the film-strip, each individual sound within the Foley score, or each note and tonal element within a composition such as in *Proximities*—were not simply turned into a “motley sequence of externalities” by being coerced “into an organic whole” or used to forge a spurious “artistic” unity. Instead, these “isolated” montaged elements should leap one from the other in a series of jagged discontinuities, such that their status as superficial signs or dancing recorded ornaments with no real connection to deep psychology or the human subject was maintained. When art is constructed through a dancing montage in this way, the viewer does not focus his or her attention on an implicit narrative goal, fully rendered human presence, or upon the construction of character, but—as Gunning observes above—rather he or she muses distractedly about the relationship *between* these machinic elements themselves.

Translating this model of montage into Australian acoustic and mnemonic space, both *Proximities* and the MOS’s *The Edge of the Trees* installation might be considered, in the words of Catherine Rogers and Susan Best, to evoke an ornamental, utopic “non-place.” As Rogers observes of Foley and Lawrence, such montaged sound works do not generate any sense of a “real place” as such, but rather seek to present themselves as a perfected egalitarian, multicultural acoustic “society” constituted from discrete historic fragments of other places and cultures. This generates a “heterotopia.” Each acoustic or museological “artefact” or “high art installation” is comprised of “a number of sites and spaces that are in themselves incompatible and contradictory.” In these heterotopic, montaged planes, Aboriginal and subaltern “presence ... exists as a kind of virtual reality, an embodiment in the form of” a partial, fragmentary “digital re-incarnation” or montage. I would add that the possibility of heterotopia is here enabled by the fact that the sound never coalesces into a stable spatial form, but rather that voices move across the plane as vocalists appear and disappear.

For Kracauer, such montaged cinematic presentations therefore lacked:

any authentic and materially motivated coherence … convey[ing] precisely
and openly to thousands of eyes and ears the [heterotopic] disorder of society—this is precisely what would enable them to evoke and maintain the tension that must precede the inevitable and radical change. [Walking] in the streets of Berlin, one is often struck by the momentary insight that someday all this will suddenly burst apart. The entertainment to which the general public throngs … [produces] the same effect.  

What Kracauer is arguing here—and which I would like to endorse in the context of Proximities—is that the distracted spectatorship or process of listening which is created by such a technologised flatness forges a heterotopic choreographic space in which the observer is free to reconfigure and grapple with the meaning of these ornamental acoustic objects, bodies and presences, and what their relationship to each other might be. Planar ornamental opacity and arbitrariness thus comes to act as a spur to the conscious reflection on political meanings and structural relations in society and art. If we combine this with the insights of Benjamin and the Surrealists, desire—and its structuration of attention or distraction—becomes a way to activate a political consciousness through the listener’s relationship to the aural art work and to the metropolis.

The rich and gorgeously recorded vocal samples of Proximities would seem to me to accord quite precisely with this sense of “Elegant,” heterotopic “surface splendour” which Kracauer celebrated within modern culture. The array of different voices, of laughs, of linguistic fragments, oral inflections and of thickly applied acoustic detail which Chesworth and Leber offer recalls that “Gesamtkunstwerk of effects” whose dancing body Kracauer claimed “has crawled out” of the Art Deco movie palace in the form of an unnatural “glittering, revue-like creature” or “visual and acoustic kaleidoscope” which “assaults … the senses.”

The massive array of shimmering, mobile technological ornaments marshalled within Proximities elicits a similarly distracted response in the listener, who struggles to find order within something which fundamentally defies any clear sense of orderliness beyond its own machinic embodiment and the experience of travel through colonial space.

Similarly—drawing on postmodern theory, rather than Benjamin and the Frankfurt School—Simon Reynolds has described a comparable sense of mobile technological flatness in 1980s house music. “Above all,” Reynolds argues:

this music is shallow, an array of surfaces and forces that engage the listener through fascination (what was that sound?!): [but] there’s no depth, no human truth or social concern to be divined, no atmosphere … just an illegible, arbitrary alteration of torques, vectors, [and] gradients, whose opacity is endlessly resistant to the attempts of white rock critics to read anything into it.  

One must acknowledge in this respect that the nature of the sampled material within Proximities as culturally specific linguistic traits and vocalisations does mean that, unlike the subject of Reynolds’ analysis, the artists’ productions clearly do
have social concerns already woven into their acoustic fabric. Nevertheless, both house music and the compositions of Chesworth and Leber are characterised by an apparently “arbitrary alteration of torques, vectors,” intensities and “gradients” across the plane and by the soliciting of a barely-legible sonic “fascination” which tends to work against any attempts to firmly fix the meanings of the work in terms of deep political signification—rather than in terms of these very flows, transports and ornamentally-arranged planar gradients themselves. This lack of any transparently visible hierarchy within the mobile acoustic surface of Proximities acts as a call for the political and social awakening of the flâneur-esque listener.

The Edge of the Trees, by contrast, was designed with less attention to speaker placement and acoustic detailing of the recorded voice than Proximities. Its aural surfaces alone cannot generate a comparable sense of complex heterotopic pulson and ornamentality. Nevertheless, if one follows Rogers in moving from the museum’s forecourt to read the institution as a whole, the combined impact made by Ross Gibsons’ audiovisual series The Bond Store (1995), together with Carter’s recitation piece referred to above, Narelle Jubelin’s arrangement of the display drawers, and so on, then the MOS does evoke a rich sense of heterotopic ornamentality—though perhaps more through the deployment of actual physical objects, materials and surfaces (wood, stone, iron, feathers, ochre and bones, in combination with quiet Indigenous vocalisations), which are further supported by sonic ornaments, rather than principally through a densely active surface of aurality, sound and embodiment, as is the case for Proximities.45

Punctum and Harmonic Ornamentalisation

Proximities is not, however, entirely without a hierarchical arrangement of materials, and I would like to turn to two elements of the work itself which act to order the samples according to two different and opposing principles. The first of these ordering structures is what I think we can legitimately here describe as a “layer”—that is to say a single track which one finds relatively evenly dispersed throughout the piece as a series of harmonic undertones—yet it is a “layer” which, by the very nature of its even distribution across the space, contributes to this sense of planar flatness and ornamentality which I have been describing. Chesworth has taken a series of tonal strata from within each of the individual grabs of sound

\[\text{Figure 5} \text{ The speaker slots of The Edge of Trees (left) and materials (right). Images by the author.}\]
played back within the work and has pitch-shifted and harmonised them together to produce a wavering series of tones and hums. When walking across the bridge, this sinuous drone remains a constant element amongst the rest of the aural detailing and it serves to link together all of the samples, coalescing them into the hybrid, harmonic and overtly machinic or technologically-produced, ornamental body which I mentioned earlier. This is echoed by artist Simeon Nelson’s visual design for the wall panels of the bridge, which feature a constantly undulating motif recalling both Maori moko facial tattooing (the absent subaltern body) and the filigree patterning of ancient Celtic metalwork and design (ornament). These continuous acoustic and decorative strata also act as a metaphor for the humanist ideal of “multiculturalism,” in which different voices, bodies and cultural influences come together in a complementary fashion to make up a greater and essentially unified social whole. This might indeed be considered a visualisation of what one of Benjamin’s contemporaries described as a mellow, gently pulsing “tone painting, in which conflicting colours take their place without quarrelling with one another, and none shrieking” which have been acoustically “shaped out of discords, beaten but not molten into a harmony” which blends together within the metropolitan space such sources as the vaudevillian sonic exclamations and cultural identities of a “Cockney Comedian, a Spanish Tango … a Swedish Acrobat … American Clog Dancers, an Argentine ‘Stunt’ Artist” and other sounds.

The other organisational structure which I would like to examine is the spatial placement of the indigenous Australian material on the bridge. Sonia Leber has referred to this as a “punctum” within the work, alluding to Barthes’ description of the photograph and the way in which the structure of its surface is punctured or rendered problematic by isolated, almost incidental details within the visual

Figure 6 Visual moko and aural planar continuity across the speakers. Images courtesy of the artists.
The punctum is, for Barthes, to be distinguished from what he calls “the studium” of the photograph. The studium consists of those sets of significations, meanings and formal arrangements which exist within the image. This can also be related to Barthes’ separation between the “phenosong” of the Romantic lieder, versus its “genosong.” In the studium of the photograph or the phenosong of vocal delivery, the use of light or shade and the representation of specific, known events, actions or individuals via recognised codes of gesture, pose, setting, décor, emotional inflection and so on—in other words, the technical excellence of the work in its formal, expressive and tonal character—these make up the studium or phenosong. The punctum, however, constitutes a disturbance in the visual field; a gap, omission, error, or fragment which somehow exceeds the designs of the photographer. The genosong is slightly different in that it is less a hole or a gap within the surface of the vocal image, than it is a positive aural presence which subverts the expressive topography and hierarchy of the voice. The genosong contains what Barthes, Leber and Chesworth refer to as the “grain” of the voice, something which speaks of the soft, wet material body of the singer—“the tongue, the glottis, the teeth, the sinuses,” in Barthes’ words—just as the more breathy immaterial phenosong speaks of the immaterial “soul” or psychology of the singer or of the character whom he or she voices. In either case, however, these elements of grain and punctum do not simply overturn the structure of the image or the recorded voice. Rather both highlight that which mechanical transcription lacks; namely full presence, a live subject, a fully-rendered interiority or a deep connection with the real world as depicted in the photograph or in the recording, and thus that to which Barthes’ most personal memories might be connected.

The punctum can only really affect the viewer or the listener if one allows oneself to pass beyond “the unreality” and flatness “of the thing represented, I [Barthes] entered crazily into the spectacle, into the image, taking into my arms what is dead”—namely the recorded image or sound—causing Barthes to become “mad for Pity’s sake.” Even for Barthes, the effect of the punctum is, in the end, to turn the viewer into a kind of mad flâneur; a viewer or listener who has paradoxically entered into the flatness of the image and who has flattened his or her own subjectivity by linking it to such a disembodied form of modern, technological reproduction. The disturbance of the punctum is not one which saves us from the flatness of the image, but rather one which transforms this flatness into the ornamental or flâneur-esque strategies of resistance identified by Benjamin and Kracauer, producing a self-conscious dialogue with and critique of this depthlessness of modern perception. Indeed, Leber has suggested that, by representing such a Barthesian discontinuity within the urban environment, Proximities may act as a punctum for the city as whole; a superficial machinic structure which highlights the ornamental heterotopia of the surrounding metropolitan sights, sounds and locales.
Staging Place

When viewed in these terms, Leber’s strategic use of the term “punctum” to describe the placement of the Indigenous material within Proximities becomes highly revealing. After consultations with prominent Wurundjeri elder and descendant of William Barak, Joy Murphy-Wandin, Chesworth and Leber decided that the material which represents the Indigenous peoples of the Melbourne region needed to be given special treatment within Proximities. These voices are therefore confined to approximately three speakers on either side of the highest point of the bridge, which walkers encounter as they reach the peak of the gentle slope which leads up from both ends of the bridge. While most of the rest of the samples consist of songs and the odd exclamation, the Aboriginal recordings are made up of the sounds of clap-sticks and the sequential repetition of key Wurundjeri words, terms and names for population groups. Close listening reveals this material to be taken from a lesson in Wurundjeri being given by Murphy-Wandin and others. “Waah!” says Murphy, who is answered back, somewhat inexacty, so she corrects her partner by saying “Waah! Like ‘waah,’ as in … the crow!” “Waah!” comes back the response and Murphy goes on. Although these Indigenous materials are literally and metaphorically displaced from their point of origin through their existence as recordings and by their disembodied acousmatic playback amidst the hard, empty surfaces of urban machinic modernity and its monuments, Proximities at least strives towards a sense of Indigenous continuity by documenting the transmission of that most central of cultural formations—language—from one person to another. Leber’s hope is that walkers get the impression that they are “arriving at a place” when they move into this section, while the “peripheries” of the bridge impart a sense of “flow.” The central Indigenous section is therefore more physically and spatially grounded. This more concretised and fixed spatial and sonic ambiance within the composition acts as a kind of “punctum” within the harmonic studium of the surrounding material.

Just as for Barthes, though, the psychophysical wounding of the punctum cannot in fact transcend the flat materiality of the image, but only allow for a transitory moment of madness in which exterior surfaces become overtly and consciously ornamental. The strategic placement of Indigenous voice by Leber and Chesworth cannot fully arrest the passage of modernist depersonalisation, abstraction and travel, nor can it halt the transformation of bodies into a technological archive. Such disappearing acts are set up in advance by the very conditions of the commission, and by the modern urban world within which it acts. In closing then, I would like to hint at one last way in which these patterns of modernity, consumption and colonialism are contested—but not through an act of wounding, grounding, puncturing or stopping, as the punctum would imply—but rather through the deployment and infringement of noise within Proximities.
Finale and Götterdämmerung:
The Ursound of chaos and the critique of modernity

The Barak Bridge is a elevated structure. This exposed position means that the bridge is often windy. The travel routes beneath it are moreover extremely active. Depending on the weather or time of day, one is likely to hear the art work within a bed of peripheral sound ranging from diesel goods trains, to transport and venue announcements being given out on the loudspeakers located not far from the bridge, cars, and—somewhat more sootheringly—the gentle, ringing tones of the *Federation Bells* installation (located about four-hundred metres away) which commemorates the one-hundredth anniversary of Australian Federation and which is set off in Birrarung Marr twice at day. The space also comes alive with noisy crowds when a sporting event is staged at the MCG. To listen to *Proximities* is to engage in a distracted dialogue with other sounds—particularly the burbling, chaotic zephyrs of the wind, passing crowds, and the zooming ringing drones of mechanised transport, which in turn ornament and adorn the complicated mixture of moving samples and elements which make up the installation proper. Indeed, Chesworth and Leber actively encourage the integration of such material within the installation by including within the mix itself the sound of footsteps such as those made by the flâneur him or herself. This creates what, to paraphrase Kracauer, might be considered a kind of mise en abyme within the soundscape, with the score containing within it the sounds of the very city within which it is located. Both as a series of recordings and as a socially-situated, urban art work in public space, *Proximities* cannot be separated from the sounds of travel itself and the kind of noise, chaos and disruption which this implies. If, as Michel Serres suggests, all communication involves a dialogue between two parties whose aim is to successfully marginalise a third speaker—noise—then *Proximities* explodes this tripartite structure, threatening to expand the exchange of speaker, listener and their third “parasite” into an ultimately chaotic festive discussion which has no limits. The presence of such noisy parasites within *Proximities* speaks to the dispersal of the work and so invites ornamental fragmentation and deconstruction.

Brandon LaBelle has claimed that: “Sound art as a practice harnesses, describes, analyses, performs, and interrogates the condition of sound and the processes by which it operates,” and that in so doing “it teaches us that … knowledge is festive, alive as a chorus of voices.” While a conventional museological or highly aestheticised approach tends to produce “a bounded geography, of this space with that sound, this room with that voice,” a more expanded approach such as that which Leber and Chesworth employ contains within it the potential to take: on all sounds and all places. Yet in doing so it shrinks back from its own discoveries, for the Ursound as primary soundscape must in the end be pure noise, as the sound of the universe [or of culture] exploding into being, its signals still travelling, as white noise from dying stars.
Sound art has the potential to create and foreground an ambiguity within the architectural which threatens not just to blast apart modernity, but also the ornamental machinic structures of modern art and culture itself, leaving nothing but an ever expanding circuit of noise and the disappearance of bodies and of centres of light. As a work of art, Proximities enacts these tensions and contradictions within modern space, travel and colonialism, even as it struggles to aestheticise, spatialise and contain these forces so as to reclaim a site for the indigene, the subaltern and the self-aware flâneur. Proximities flattens space, sound and culture into a series of planar ornamental motifs which become engulfed in the Ursound of chaos, to produce a complicated field of distractions for the flâneur to become embroiled within, which she or he must decode—not as a series of deep structures, but rather as absences, disappearing relations, and pulsing, vibrating textures of flow, travel and repetition. Proximities cannot enforce social justice, nor can it arrest the flow of capital, empire and modernity. It can however, in Kracauer’s words “evoke and maintain the tension that must precede the inevitable and radical change” of society “that someday”—we hope—will burst this all apart.

Notes

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2. Kahn, esp. pp. 23-44.


4. Kahn, p. 44.


7. Personal discussion with Leber and Chesworth, Barak Bridge (June 2006); anon, “William Barak Honoured in Bridge Name” (Melbourne: Officer of Victorian Premier and Minister For the Commonwealth Games, 8 Dec 2005), <http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/domino/Web_Notes/newmedia.nsf/b0222c68d27626e2ca256c8c001a3d2d/face8018acfd90c1ca2570d10080f5de!OpenDocument>.


9. Proximities was the only permanent, wholly commissioned work. It was however to be unveiled within the 2006 Commonwealth Arts Festival, which included various events and major exhibitions at the National Gallery of Victoria Australia and the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, both located nearby in Federation Square. See Charles Green, ed., 2006 Contemporary Commonwealth (Melbourne: NGV, 2006); Karen Burns, “2006 Contemporary Commonwealth,” Art Monthly, 188 (April 2006), pp. 9-11; Anthony Gardner, “Assassins in the Attic” and “Rapt in Rhetoric: Musings on ‘politics’,” in Broadsheet, 35.2 (2006), pp. 80-83 and 35.3 (2006), pp. 144-7 respectively.

10. Describing the exhibitions associated with the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, curator Green observes that “culture was associated with the Games as a medium for celebration, and the projection of a progressive image of the Australian nation,” acknowledging that the 2006 Contemporary Commonwealth exhibitions were propelled by a “similar descent and humanitarian motives.” Charles Green, “The Empire Strikes Back,” Gallery (Feb-April 2006), p. 31.


24. France’s leading hip-hop artist, for example, is the Senegalese-born MC Solaar, who has sampled such quintessentially French musicians as Serge Gainsborough. He describes his oeuvre as “jazz de souk” (jazz of the north African market or bazaar) and is one of many French-African rappers to compose work dedicated to Les Halles, the railway nexus and shopping precinct just north of the centre of Paris, where black youths from the depressed banlieue of the city come to congregate and claim space within this former centre of empire. Tony Mitchell, “World Music and the Popular


30. My reading of Benjamin and Kracauer is here guided by Schwartz and Elsaesser in their linking of the Weimar critics to Surrealism and to a kind of prescient postmodernism, a world of surface and false-yet-real appearance. By contrast, Gunning—while conceding that “Benjamin’s characterisation of the flâneur” is highly “unstable”—is nevertheless keen to distinguish between a three-part continuum of spectatorial positions: the distanced ironic flâneur; the “badaud” or gawker absorbed by the sights which he sees; and the X-ray vision of the detective. Benjamin, “The Flâneur”; Crickenberger; Tom Gunning, “From the Kaleidoscope to the X-Ray: Urban spectatorship, Poe, Benjamin, and *Traffic in Souls* (1913),” in Arnwine and Lerner, eds, pp. 25-61; Schwartz, passim; Elsaesser, passim.


39. Simmel noted that such a “rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions. These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates.” Sergei Eisenstein, Film Form: Essays in film theory, trans. Jay Leyda (NY: Harcourt, 1949) and “Montage and Architecture” [1937], in Assemblage, 10 (1989), pp. 437-469; Kracauer, Mass, pp. 22-26, 322-8; Simmel, “Metropolis”; Arnwine and Lerner, passim; Elsaesser, pp. 47-51


41. Rogers takes the term from Foucault, although the space which accords most fully with the latter’s rhetorical construction of a heterotopia would be that of a ship. The travelling vessel is unfixed from the normal temporal continuities of terrestrial life and place, whilst also constituting a fluid, unresolved amalgam of different cultural, social and political realms and regimes amongst the passengers. Even so, such an apparently utopic spatial structure may facilitate colonial structures and wars. Though Foucault does not himself ally the heterotopic with political resistance, the specific locales which he identifies—museums, libraries, cemeteries—echo those which I describe above. Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” [1967], Diacritics, 16 (Spring 1986), pp. 22-27.

42. Kracauer, Mass, p. 327.

43. Ibid., pp. 323-4.
51. Phone conversation between the author and Sonia Leber (May 2007).
52. Hansen notes that Kracauer argues: “It is not only the preserved presence of the grandmother” or other photographic subject which “moves the beholder but, on the contrary,” it is “her reduction to a spatialised configuration of time. This is what makes the beholder of old photographs shudder—and makes grandchildren giggle … Kracauer’s photograph is disturbing because it alienates both object and beholder, because it ruptures the web of intimacy, memory, and interpretation.” Quoting Kracauer, Hansen observes: “We are contained in nothing and photography assembles the fragments around a nothing.’ The photograph thus in fact enables, rather than prevents, a momentary encounter with mortality, an awareness” that history does not necessarily “include us,” assisting in our recognition of the “provisional status of all given configurations” and “confronting the viewer with the actual state of disorder and crisis” found within the abstractions of machinic, capitalist, imperial culture. Hansen, pp. 455-7; Kracauer, pp. 47-64.
53. Personal discussion with Leber and Chesworth, Barak Bridge (June 2006).


57. LaBelle, p. ix.

58. Ibid., p. 241.

Jonathan relocated from his post as research fellow at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, Edith Cowan University, Perth (2004-08), to take up the position of lecturer in Theatre & Performing Arts Studies at the University of Otago, New Zealand. Marshall is a contributor for the national arts magazine, RealTime Australia and TheatreView NZ (2000-present; www.realtimearts.net; www.theatreview.org.nz). He has written academic & journalistic articles on all aspects of the arts, with a particular specialisation on issues of theatricality and how they interact with medical practice & its history. Marshall was a convenor of the 2008 Fotofreo Conference and is a member of the organising committee of the 2009 Australasian Drama Studies Association Conference in Perth.

Oku Ou Talanoa Mo Hoku Loto:

A Musical Realisation of Te Arikinui Te Atairangikaahu: Telling the North from the South

Michael Atherton

Interculturalism is linked to world view, practice, theory/criticism – that is, the mental attitude that precedes performance, the performance process, and the theoretical writing that accompanies performance [...] a state of mind, as much as a way of working. (Marranca, 1991, p. 9)

The title, Oku Ou Talanoa Mo Hoku Loto, is a Tongan saying meaning talking with the inner self and communicating with the heart (Manu’atu, 2003). It reflects Aurora’s 2008 theme – music of the spirit. The choice of a Tongan rather than an English title reflects a mental attitude of intercultural positioning. I want to acknowledge faka’apa’apa, paying respect to the two artists who helped the composer explore his leaning towards an aesthetic influenced by Asia-Pacific cultural expressions. They are ‘Okusitino Māhina, a Tongan social anthropologist, philosopher and poet, based in Aotearoa/New Zealand; and Lotte Latukefu, mezzo-soprano and academic, of Tongan and German background, resident in Australia. My initial interest in setting Tongan poetry was kindled by the prospect of collaborating with Lotte. She is a Western art music trained vocalist; she is the daughter of Tongan historian Sione Latukefu (1927-1995) and anthropologist Ruth Fink (Latukefu).

Selecting one of ‘Okusitino’s poems for Lotte was serendipitous, if not unusual. Her father, Sione, and ‘Okusitino had first met each other at the Australian National University. This guided the composer’s aim to develop a music that should tap both Lotte’s classical music training and her Tongan heritage. We chose the poem together and it was written in Māori.

Another influence on the choice of poem was the performance genre I wished to explore – Korean p’ansori. P’ansori is a composite art form that combines song
(sori), narration, and dramatic action (pallim), but by far the most important element is song’ (Howard, 2006, p. 60).

In p’ansori, the primacy of vocal, facial and body gestures are accompanied and sometimes led and encouraged by the drum player who is free to interject with compliments and encouragement during the singing. I felt there were connections between the p’ansori singer as the teller of tales, European operatic recitative in advancing the narrative, and the effect in performance of the Tongan orator – who has the job of making an audience laugh or cry (Kaeppler, 1993). Thus, the selection of ‘Te Arikinui Te Atairangikaahu: Telling the North from the South’ was guided by its capacity to be sung as well as spoken forcefully.

Pre-compositional research into aspects of Tongan cultural expression revealed deep levels of meaning and complexity in literary expression. Kaeppler describes the Tongan aesthetic ideal of heliaki as indirectness and metaphorical thinking. This comes from extensive cultural knowledge (1998, p. 785), which as an outsider I lack. However, as a composer, it was a responsibility under faka’apa’apa to appreciate my limitations but also to inform myself of ‘Okusitino’s and Lotte’s backgrounds and identities.

I will now explore in more detail the musical influences and the intercultural ‘state of mind’ (Marranca, 1991) that shape an aesthetic response.

Crossover

Intercultural composition is understood here as exploratory practice that results in musical hybridity and is nurtured by collaborative work in a mostly tolerant and plural Australian society, situated between Asia and the Pacific, where a growing number of performer-composers, improvisers and multi-instrumentalists reject uncritical acceptance of European music hegemonies (Atherton, 2003, p. 356).

Intercultural music is that in which elements from two or more cultures are integrated. The composer of this music usually belongs to one of the cultures from which the elements are derived, but this does not necessarily have to be the case. Indeed, this type of intercultural activity is thematic, being inherent in the music itself and, therefore, the origin of the composer is irrelevant to the definition. (Kimberlin and Euba, 1995, pp. 2-5)

I have observed and studied numerous musical genres, at times listening mainly for nourishment. In designing music that combines diverse, seemingly disparate sound sources, it is not to produce musical syncretism for its own sake, but new possibilities nurtured by osmosis. This approach may be characterised by what Tan Dun terms ‘extreme cross-over’ (Utz, 1998, p. 142). Oku Ou Talanoa Mo Hoku Loto was honed by multiple excursions playing a host of different musical instruments too numerous to mention in full. Examples include Turkish ud, Macedonian gaida, Greek bouzouki, and Polynesian drumming. It has been a plan since 1993 when I was deeply moved by p’ansori, in particular, the intense occupation of a performance space and the charged environment created by a
single vocalist, centre stage, and a percussionist with one drum facing the singer from the side, in profile to the audience. The p’ansori genre is direct and uncluttered – a voice and a drum played with bare hand and stick, the antithesis of hyper-produced opera archetype or *dramma per musica*. The absence of ostentatious artificiality was so compelling that I wanted to take on the role of percussionist in order to experience the forcefulness of *p’ansori* performance.

A background that includes several performing and research trips to Korea (see Figure 8.1) and some introductory study of the language finds me with basic playing skills in some Korean membranophones and idiophones. The account above describes the dynamics of what lies behind my compositional experiments. As a practice, I can best sum it up in these words:

One way to describe my compositional relationship to the found material is that of filter. In the contemporary sonic environment of information overload, filtering is akin to survival. I become filter. What I see, hear, think, and feel is cross-examined at a sensory level and, if accepted, takes its place in my personal musical language. Mapping one musical language onto another through filtering is a cross-species practice. (Taylor, 2008, Section 6.1)

**Process outlined**

I approached *Oku Ou Talanoa Mo Hoku Loto* from an interest in *p’ansori*’s strong vocal gestures, observing the alternation between speech and song, its shifting rhythmic modes and its dramatic element of tension and release. The drum player, the *gosu*, accents certain beats, following the text and the gestures of the vocalist, offering *chuimsae* or exhortations to assist the flow of tension and release in the story and draw the audience closer. By way of cross-fertilisation, in *Oku Ou Talanoa Mo Hoku Loto* the analogy to the *chuimsae*, such as ‘eolsiggu’ (well-done), echoes the use of the Tongan expression ‘malo malo’. The percussionist employs interjections in the same way, as encouragement. Rather than pastiche, an intuitive link is established between the folk opera resonances of *p’ansori* and the ceremony and ritual I sense in Tongan tradition of *hiva lakalaka*, a major form of sung and danced poetry. *Oku Ou Talanoa Mo Hoku Loto* is less of a narrative than *p’ansori* material, especially on the question of length. *P’ansori* performances may last hours. By contrast, my music is more of a vignette that responds to the gravitas of the poem’s mythological references. The intention of the composer is to be receptive to the gestural vocabulary of the performer, as if to inhabit the ritual space and allow both performers and audience to appreciate the unusual combination of voice and drum. Connecting with the theme of the Aurora concert – *Music of the Spirit*, was also a consideration.
As mentioned, the text for *Oku Ou Talanoa Mo Hoku Loto* comes from a recent poem: *Te Arikinui Te Atairangikaahu: Telling the North from the South*

Translation:

1. Carefree and unaware I stay
   And never was there thought
   Of the complex cycle of time
   Suddenly a big wave has crashed

5. The airwaves sounded the alarm
   Telling the North from the South
   Swells crashing through rough seas
   The cause of my crying in words
   Dearest Ngaruawahia is deserted

10. Yet, Turangawaewae is crowded
    To weep loudly beating one's breast
    The one and only stone washed away
    The Pounamu, the most precious

15. Its age-old rays that glitter
    Shining in the midst of Aotearoa
    Flashing through to distant lands
    The Pohutukawa is blossoming
    It branches out and is flowering

20. Nourished by the cool morning dews
    Spraying the fine-leaf fern shrubs
    Dearly beloved Tainui and Turongo
    The child of your birth, a tāongapō
    Interweaving, uniting us as tautoko

25. Thro' love the motto of our living
    Of the Kingitanga that's mentioned
    A tradition of such refinement
    Knotted through great sacrifice
    Led by Te Wherowhero the agitator

30. The Maui Kisikisi of our own time
    Who stood up against oppression
    Anti ignorance he fought it out
    Making way for freedom to endure
    Now that I have korero-ed my tangi

35. Let me retreat to the Friendly Isles
    Death's freely acting and inevitable
    Rightfully invested in women's hands
    Life condenses here and rarefies there
    Yet, whenua is the ever-lasting soul

40. With trappings worn on and off

(Mahina, 2006, *Faiva* p.63)
The composer has considerable responsibility when setting poetry to music, and the reading in this case had to take into account the intercultural position of the author, a Tongan writing in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Understanding the rhythm of the language was enhanced by recitation sessions with the vocalist and discussions about meter and cadence. This was followed by examinations of metaphor and poetic tone of voice, and an acknowledgement of poet ‘Oskusitino Māhina’s demonstration of heliaki, a highly desirable aesthetic concept in Tongan poetry – a concept of metaphorical indirectness. The poem, Te Arikinui Te Atairangikaahu: Telling the North from the South, belongs in a Tongan genre, ‘ta’anga tangilaualau, ta’anga tengihia or ta’anga tutulu’ (Māhina, 2006, Faiva, p. 63) a poetry of weeping and lament. Māhina’s poem on the death of the Māori queen is also a sublime example of heliaki. It emphasises the historical and cultural bonds between Tonga and Aotearoa-New Zealand. Thus Māhina writes his poem in Māori. One can do no better here than quote the poet:

[It was]… composed in deep mourning of the death of the much-beloved, well-respected Māori Queen (Lines 8-11). Symbolically, the poem makes reference to the extremely sad public pronouncement of her death (Lines 4 & 7), which emanated from Aotearoa and reaching Tonga (Line 6; see sub-title). With symbolism, the poem proceeds to celebrate her unique royal trappings and great social achievements as an exceptional Māori heroine (Lines 12-24), representing her very own people’s common struggle for freedom (Lines 25 & 32). A permanent

Figure 8.1: Playing puk and ching in nongak (Farmers’ music), Suwon, Korea, 1996. Photo: Michael Atherton.
way of life, this ongoing spirit of freedom was originated amongst such great Māori heroes as Te Wherowhero, enumerated through the enduring landscape movement of the Māori as truly a great people. (Māhina, 2006, Faiva, p.63)

A decision was made early in the compositional process to have the text sung, spoken and recited in translation, in order to bring an Anglophone audience closer to the Tongan heliaki concept and an understanding of the cosmology shared between Tonga and Aotearoa-New Zealand. Were the composition to be performed in either country, the spoken translation should be superfluous.

Once the metrical accents of the Māori text were grasped, the next step in composing Oku Ou Talanoa Mo Hoku Loto was the decision to set the words mostly note for syllable, avoiding melisma, in order to ensure clarity. Taking this further, Māori oratory is highly evolved, and to speak or address a gathering is deemed an honour and a privilege, one that requires skill and gravitas. In order to make them powerful when recited, poems and chants should appear to be accomplished in a single breath.

Oku Ou Talanoa Mo Hoku Loto is constructed segmentally. Alternating rhythmic modes emphasise the distinction between the liberamente sections of slow singing and recitation, contrasted with sections using an established pulse. The slow sections are based on chinyang (Lee, 1973, p. 219), a rhythmic mode of pansori (see Example 8.1).

Example 8.1: Mode.

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\begin{quote}
\begin{tabular}{c}
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In contrast, the other sections rely on an ostinato pattern that suggests music of the lali, a Tongan slit drum made from wood. The percussionist in Oku Ou Talanoa Mo Hoku Loto uses a basic pattern for variation or embellishment (see Example 8.2).

Example 8.2: Ostinato.

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\begin{quote}
\begin{tabular}{c}
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\end{tabular}
\end{quote}
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This alternation of both modes in the juxtaposition of freer with more accented stepwise singing is shown in the following excerpt (see Example 8.3).
Example 8.3: Michael Atherton, *Oku Ou Talanoa Mo Hoku Loto*, alternation of rhythmic mode to an ostinato at G.

A transition figure is used at Bar 91 to prepare the shift into a more dance-like rhythm at G. The alternation between singing and recitation is augmented with hand clapping, yet another essential element of Tongan lakalaka and the *ma'ulu'u'ulu* (women’s dance).

The main accompanying instrument is the *puk* (a Korean word for drum). The *puk* is a shallow double-headed barrel drum (Howard, 1988, p.44). There are several types; the one used in *nongak* (farmer’s music), an antecedent of the more recent *samul nori* music, has the heads bound to the shell and tensioned with ropes. However, in *p'ansori* the smaller *puk* is used, in which case the drumheads are attached with studs. Its body is also covered in smooth cowhide. I chose both instruments for their different timbres, such as the sharp percussive attacks that are achieved by striking the shell of the *p'ansori puk*, and the deeper, more reverberant sound of the *samul nori* instrument. Two Korean idiophones are employed: the *mokt'ak*, from Korean Buddhist ritual; and the *ching*, a bronze gong. The *mokt'ak*, a wooden temple block made from apricot wood, is struck with a heavy wooden beater. It is traditionally associated with temple music and the recitation of sutras. Its function in *Oku Ou Talanoa Mo Hoku Loto* is to indicate solemnity. The *ching* is a bronze gong that emits a deep sustained tone when beaten in the centre. It is traditionally held and played in dancing. However, in contemporary genres such as *samul nori*, it is suspended from a wooden stand.

Complementing the Korean instruments are two found objects that are prevalent as Pacific instruments: the *ke'lea* (conch shell trumpet), an aerophone prevalent throughout the Pacific, another idiophone called *ili ili* (paired pebbles). The colour palette offered by these and the other instruments and sound making objects, provides rich possibilities for supporting and contrasting the voice, the only melodic instrument in the ensemble.

Directions for the performance of *Oku Ou Talanoa Mo Hoku Loto* are written into the music. The singer stands centre stage facing the audience, while the percussionist remains sitting *p'ansori style*, cross-legged on a mat, facing the vocalist. The conch shell has a dramatic role: it is played at the beginning to call the singer onto stage and at the end to signal the exit. Its muffled sound and striking visual appearance suggest ritual (see Figure 8.2 and Example 8.4).
Another aspect of the crossover approach is the inclusion of audible encouragements from the percussionist to the singer in *Oku Ou Talanoa Mo Hoku Loto*. Korean *p’ansori* and Tongan music practice contain words of encouragement. The *chuimsae* of the *p’ansori* drummer, for example *eolsiggu* and *choch’i* – ‘well done!’ and ‘good!’ – are contextually similar to the Tongan words *malo malo* and *mālie.*

Although the melodic material is not melismatic per se, the climax of the poem is carried by the voice alone, where passionate text demanded a more melismatic approach in celebrating the achievements of the Māori queen and the liberation of her people (see Example 8.5).
A bifurcation between performance and recording

Composers and performers of notated music normally revise music after its first performance and only then record it. This was a case of the reverse.

The recording of Oku Ou Talanoa Mo Hoku Loto varies in a number of ways from the first performance. Arguably, they are two different works. The recording required a compromise to the staging of the work, as the engineering required separation of the percussion from the voice. The musicians faced each other behind perspex screens and had the benefit of several takes as required. Another change occurred: the conch shell trumpet’s call to bring the singer-actor on stage was not included. Ideally the singer’s footsteps should be heard. Further, the recording studio allows but one room and digital signal processing in the mixing of the music, to fix spatial considerations that should remain fluid in live performances in any given space.

A live audience naturally emphasises the ritual element of a performance. Lacking that, in order to capture resonance and atmosphere, an open grand piano with the sustain pedal depressed by a sandbag was allowed to resonate sympathetically with the voice, hand claps and drumming throughout the session.

The effect is intended to be subliminal in its suggestion of infinity, as befitting the subject matter of the poem. What often happens in recording sessions is that critical reflection occurs with retakes. As the session moves towards a desirable performance for a compact disc realisation of the music (see Figures 8.3, 8.4, and 8.5), there is evolution resulting from the scope to embellish and improvise. For the first performance at Aurora, both the ili ili and mok'tak were added to the score.
Figure 8.3: l-r Pung mul puk and p’ansori puk; k’elea (conch shell) and ching suspended. Photo: Bruce Crossman.

Figure 8.4: Mezzo-soprano, Lotte Latukefu. Photo: Ji Yun Lee.

Figure 8.5: Voice distanced from the percussion in the recording. Photo: Bruce Crossman.
Conclusions

The process of researching and composing Oku Ou Talanoa Mo Hoku Loto, was an experiment linked to the Tongan background of the singer and the composer’s ongoing interest in cross-cultural music. It was also a response to the composer writing to a theme of the Aurora Festival. Through a process of cross-fertilisation, the music suggested a connection between tengihia, a Tongan style of poetry, and Korean pansori, a form of narrative folk opera. In diverging from the Western practice of harmonic underpinning of song, the composer emphasised Pacific values of singing and oratory supported by a rhythmic modal development found in Korean music.

Notes

1. ‘The Tongan saying ‘Oku ou talanoa mo hoku loto (Talking with my inner self, I am communicating with my heart)’ is an example of talanoa as an act as well as a way of thinking. Talanoa articulates a Tongan sense of thinking and acting as an inseparable relationship. It is a Tongan cultural relationship expressed in words, senses, and body language.’ Linitä Manu’atu, 2003.

2. I am grateful to Associate Professor Richard Moyle, Ethnomusicologist and Director of the Centre for Pacific Studies, and Dr. Melenaite Taumoefolau, linguist. Both University of Auckland scholars helped me contact colleague ‘Okusitino Māhina. ‘Okusi wrote to me and generously offered examples of poetry from his wonderful anthology, Faiva ta’aanga: Maau filifili ā ‘Okusitino Māhina (Art of poetry: Selected Poems by ‘Okusitino Māhina, 2006).

3. Te Arikinui Te Atairangikaahu (1931-2006) was the longest reigning Māori monarch, serving for forty years. In her title, Te Arikinui means Great Chief; Te Atairangikaahu means the hawk in the morning sky. She lived at Ngaruawahia in Turangawaewae Marae. She is buried in a customary unmarked grave on Taupiri mountain, an ancestral site. The monarch’s role in Aotearoa/New Zealand has no constitutional empowerment. However, Te Arikinui Te Atairangikaahu was a champion for Indigenous matters.

4. Translated into English by ‘Okusitino Māhina.

5. The Tongan name for conch shell trumpet: it has a long history of use in Polynesian music and ritual. There are two main species, Charonia tritonis and Cassis cornuta. After the marine creature is removed, a hole about 1.5 cm in diameter is knocked into the third or fourth whorl and the shell is then ready for blowing. The primary function of the conch in Tonga is for signaling.

6. Ili ili is a Hawaiian name for paired pebbles or stones that are struck together or rubbed. They can also be placed near the open mouth of the performer, to capture overtones as the lips are opened and closed to varying degrees and the tongue is raised and lowered.

7. This word is difficult to translate in English. It is central to Tongan ways of thinking and doing, and is conceptualised as energy that moves and transforms the psyche, draws upon the passion and uplifts the heart and soul, and fulfills the senses.
The well weathered piano: A study in ruin

Ross Bolleter

The only unchanging law is the law of change. Ruins are what remain. A piano judiciously left in the open and exposed to all weathers will ruin. All that fine nineteenth-century European craftsmanship, all the damp and unrequited loves of Schumann, Brahms and Chopin dry out, and degrade to a heap of rotten wood and rusting wire. The piano returns to aboriginality, goes back to the earth. Plucking the bass strings on an ancient weathered piano whose sound board is cracked wide open can produce astonishing pitch bends, then cataclysmic shuddering. Sounds which would be suppressed in conventional performance are given full rein. When those arch symbols of European musical culture and cultural imperialism linger as Ruined Pianos, they sing of transience, failure and loss. They sing of all that we loved that will never come again—the loss of home, the fading away of prestige and glory. They sing the chaos at the heart of the colonial enterprise, an Australian expression of the heart of darkness—the dark heart howling its cracked anthems.

for Eric Harrison and Vivienne Robertson

Introduction

A piano is said to be Ruined (rather than Neglected or Devastated) when it has been abandoned to all weathers and has become a decaying box of unpredictable dongs, clicks and dedoomps, with not a single note (perhaps excepting D) sounding like one from an even-tempered upright piano. Sometimes you push down one key, and five or six others companionably go down with it, making for a surprise cluster and swathes of harmonics singing forever. The notes that do not work—clicks, doks and tonks—are at least as interesting as those that do. Each Ruined Piano is utterly unique with respect to action and tuning (if we can talk of tuning at all). An F# one and a half octaves above middle C on a West Australian Ruined Piano in a semi-desert environment differs radically from the same note on a flooded piano in a studio four floors below pavement level in Prague.
A Ruined Piano has its frame and cabinet more or less intact (even though the soundboard is cracked wide open, with the blue sky shining through), so that it can be played in the ordinary way. By contrast, a Devastated Piano is usually played in a crouched or lying position.

All this raises the question: “What is a piano?”

I discovered my first Ruined Piano in June 1987 when I went on a holiday with my wife and children at Nallan Sheep Station, just north of Cue, some 700 kilometres north east of Perth, Western Australia. On our arrival, the owners of the sheep station told me that they had a piano in one of the sheds. I was not interested, though. This was meant to be time with family, and I was tired of pianos.

However, on the third day I succumbed, and found a piano that was totally done for. During the 1980s I had been preparing pianos—altering the sound of them by inserting objects between their strings. This one, however, without the familiar festoon of guitar jacks, rubbers, coins and pegs, was “prepared” beyond any piano I had ever played or heard. Prepared by weather and neglect; prepared by the radiant earth, and by how far off the stars are.

I respectfully approached the Ruined Piano in the shed and took hold of the lid to lift it.

It was so rotten that it came away in my hands. I shoved batteries into my Marantz recorder and slung microphones over the dusty rafters. As I played, ants appeared journeying in concentric circles on the front panel of the Jefferson (Chicago 1926). The golden haired eight-year-old daughter of the sheep station owners came in out of the majestic heat and stood on the cool floor of the shed watching me. I knelt to pull back the bass strings and
then released them as if I was firing off huge arrows. The piano roared and groaned. After some minutes the girl’s mother came over and muffled her daughter’s ringleted head in her huge flowered dress, as though shielding her from an atrocity. I knew that the mother wanted to speak, was about to speak. I pointed frantically up to the Nanyo and the Sanyo microphones with my right hand, while trying to finish the performance with my left. Finally, she broke in: “Have you finished?” And I had.\(^2\)

On that day, I played with birds singing, roosters crowing, generators starting up, and the owners complaining about the drought; in short, everyone and everything having its say. The recording turned out to be a lusty union of the environment and the ancient roaring song of that decaying hulk.

Before its life in the shed, the Ruined Piano had spent a year on the sheep station’s tennis court, where it had been exposed to searing heat and a flash flood. When I examined the inside of it, I found a mud map left by the rising waters.

Forty years before the flood, the Jefferson had been the bar piano in the goldmining town of Big Bell, east of Cue. Although gold mining has resumed in Big Bell, there is nothing left of the town except its 1930s hotel, which is now derelict—an Art Deco ruin in the middle of nowhere—the floors collapsed, fireplaces halfway up walls, the ladies’ lounge opened up to the harsh blue sky.

The only unchanging law is the law of change. Ruins are what remain—still passing away to be sure, but lingering. When they linger as Ruined Pianos, they sing their song of transience—of failure and loss. They sing of all that we loved that will never come again—the loss of home, the fading away of prestige and glory. Death comes eventually to every piano. And dead, they sing a different kind of song.

A piano judiciously left in the open and exposed to all weathers will ruin. All that fine nineteenth-century European craftsmanship, all the damp and unrequited loves of Schumann, Brahms and Chopin dry out, and degrade to a heap of rotten wood and rusting wire. The piano returns to aboriginality, goes back to the earth where the chirrup of its loose wires blown about by the desert’s easterly wind is almost indistinguishable from the cicadas’ long electric blurt.

The piano, that arch symbol of European musical culture (and cultural imperialism) in its present condition as the Ruined Piano, functions as a dead end sign for Northern Hemisphere traditions and styles that we have so gratefully and eagerly adopted in Australia.

WARPS—the World Association for Ruined Piano Studies—was formed in 1991 by Stephen Scott (of bowed piano celebrity, and professor of music at Colorado College) and myself.\(^3\) Steve suggested the catchy acronym. The organization has worldwide membership, has never held an AGM, and tends to move into action only from whim or from a rush of blood. WARPS has devoted energy to giving old pianos a good home, which can certainly mean adequate sunshine and rain—or in the case of Stephen Scott and myself, plenty of snow. In *When the Anzac Body Blossoms and Blooms* (25 April 1991, Colorado College),
I played three Ruined Pianos that had been prepared by rain and snow. That performance was made possible by Stephen’s students drying out the pianos with twenty-three hair dryers over three long nights. Otherwise, the pianos would have been disarticulate.

The WARPS Taxonomy of Ruin
—neglected (including veranda pianos),
—abandoned (including shed pianos),
—weathered,
—decayed,
—ruined,
—devastated,
—decomposed, and
—annihilated; as after having been blown up by a landmine planted in it by the Germans retreating northwards through Italy in 1945.

A Cultural History of the Ruined Piano in Australia
As Jon Rose and others have observed, the French musician and critic Oscar Comettant visited several former colonial nations during the nineteenth century, including the USA and Australia. In 1888, he acted as one of the music judges for Melbourne’s International Exhibition. In a book he published two years later, Comettant wrote:

I do not believe there is a country in the world where music is more widespread than in Australia. Certainly there is none that has more pianos
per head of population. 700,000 instruments have been sent from Europe to Australia since the vast territory became a centre of white settlement.

Everywhere here the piano is considered to be a necessary piece of furniture. Rather than not have one of these sonorous instruments in the drawing room … they would go without a bed. Custom demands that there be at least one piano in every Australian home; even in the most distant shacks, away from any centre of population, the humblest farmer will have the inescapable piano.

Way out in the outback they are not so expert in music, and the piano that adorns the humble dwelling will be cheap and nasty … constantly going wrong. But the main thing is that they look like a piano, with vulgar moulding and ostentatious double candle-brackets; they make a noise when you strike the keyboard, and often that is all that is required.\textsuperscript{4}

A century or so later, in her short story “14th of October 1843,” Kerryn Goldsworthy wrote:

Perhaps all over this terrifying country there are Dead Pianos—left on beaches—abandoned on tracks—pushed over cliffs—rotting in ruined huts and cabins—making peculiar homes for birds and mice and spiders playing witches’ music among the strings and fretwork, and the silk all gone to rags.\textsuperscript{5}

The piano on the beach has become a defining image of the early days of white settlement in Western Australia. It anticipates by some 160 years the piano on the beach in Jane Campion’s film \textit{The Piano} (1993), where, presumably to protect Michael Nyman’s asinine score, the beached piano is almost in tune after its immersion—hard to believe, considering the sea change it must have undergone. The tuning and structural outcomes for beached pianos in Western Australia in the 1830s would surely have been more disastrous, and a good deal more engrossing.

The piano was the bearer of European musical culture and the status that went with that. It was also an agent of social cohesion (evenings of Schubert songs, and selections from \textit{Don Giovanni} mixed with popular sentimental songs of the day). No wonder immigrants to New Holland clung to their pianos. As Goldsworthy has one of her characters put it:

One story we heard at dinner concerned a ship in trouble at sea whose captain ordered the thirteen pianos on board with much of the cargo to be thrown into the sea—and there was almost a riot on the ship as the owners tried to prevent him and were shouted down by the other passengers, fearing for their lives.\textsuperscript{6}

It is not difficult to imagine that the first people to play these thirteen pianos could have been Aboriginal people, and that these strange offerings from the surf would also have been a source of convivial music making. Importantly too, these would have been some of the first Ruined Piano performances in New Holland:
As the invasion began
Aboriginal kids hammered on salt pianos
pushed from ships in desperate straits.
Morning rolled them in the foam
thumped them up on to the beach.

Great gift of the morning surf—
sweet ringer dead ringer tumult cave.

She sings high while her sister on the wooden cliff
swings her heels down on to the cold wet keys
clink clinank…

Some 170 years later I encountered a Schwechten Piano at Hermannsburg Cultural Precinct, out of Alice Springs, in the Northern Territory. It had spent fifteen years in the dressing room behind a stage where theatricals were mounted. While old codgers, their heavy guts bursting out of their pink tutus and tights, danced for the delight of the missionaries, their charges, the Aboriginal kids, would invade the dressing room and jump from the top of the piano onto the keys, creating unheard of clusters. Each one opened cracks and widened crevices in the pantomime up front. Subsequently, this piano was sent down for a season or two in the cattle yards.

Back in 1989, when I was working late one night at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), I decided on a midnight coffee in Northbridge. I came back to find I had left the door open and in the dark auditorium an old Aboriginal man, wearing a Salvation Army great coat, was coaxing a shivery plangy tune from the Ruined Piano at the lonely centre of the auditorium. Immediately, security and the police (in competition as to who got there first) burst in through the open door. “Do you wish to refer charges sir?” they asked. “No,” I replied. “That was the best piano improv I’ve heard this year.” The old guy gave me a grin and shuffled out, a Schweppes bottle sticking out of his left coat pocket.

The Ruined Piano sings the chaos at the heart of the colonial enterprise, where settlement was invasion. It is an Australian expression of the heart of darkness—the dark heart howling its cracked anthems. In the wail of their ringing-forever tones I sometimes sense the grief of Indigenous people killed in massacres and through transmitted diseases. In that wailing I feel the pain of separation of Aboriginal children stolen from their parents.

An Invitation to the Ruined Piano

It is good to approach each Ruined Piano as a new occasion for learning, letting go of last year’s sonata for the chaos, frustration and the joyous confusion that is there at your finger-tips. What was a sweet, swelling, long ringer on Tuesday can
be the merest plink by Thursday. The Ruined Piano becomes increasingly derelict as you play it. Even if you are reluctant to commit to improvisation, you may well be driven to it, because the mechanism is falling away under your fingers.

Knowing in part is best. Over learning can shut the performer off from the intoxication of improvisation, from being truly guided by what lies so richly to hand. Not knowing allows for surprises, and opens up the alluring possibilities of bewilderment and failure.

The Piano Labyrinth (2005)

In early 2005 Tos Mahoney, artistic director of Tura New Music, suggested that I gather Ruined Pianos from throughout the state to create an installation for that year’s Ruined Piano Convergence at PICA. I travelled through the wheat belt and the Perth metropolitan area, gathering pianos, recording some of them, and talking with their owners to find out about the history of their pianos.

I ended by creating a curving labyrinth of some seventeen pianos in the main hall at PICA. People could walk through the labyrinth, playing the pianos as they went, starting and finishing anywhere they liked. This hands-on experience catered for people’s curiosity about the highly accessible sounds of the piano keyboard, and the slightly less accessible sounds of the strings. The installation could be played by any number of people at the same time. As far as possible, each piano had its own story printed and placed on it, so that people could also read their way through the installation.
Sometimes the condition of the piano was such that it could not be moved without it breaking apart. In *Piano Labyrinth*, these pianos were acknowledged by a photograph of the piano with its accompanying story, positioned in the curve of pianos.

One such piano was owned by Ian Clarke, a farmer who has a property just out of Goomalling, about two hours east of Perth. His piano lives on top of a hill in one of his paddocks. You can see it as you drive into his property—strange and lonely against the clouding and un-clouding skies. Ian told me this story:

We had inherited a piano that sat around for years, without anyone playing it. Finally my wife said, “Could you take it out of here, so we can put a dresser in.” So I put it on the front-end loader and drove it slowly up the hill. When I looked back toward the house I could see my wife watching, astonished, from the kitchen window. I drove on to the top of the hill, where I placed the piano. Now we call it Piano Hill. The piano’s been there four years now—returning to the earth from which it came. Now there are lupins growing up around it. When there were sheep in this paddock they used to congregate around it. Maybe it was a talking point for them.

I visit Piano Hill in late afternoon. The piano is casting long shadows. It darkens in the rain, then dries back to light grey. It is shedding its casing. Its pedals are below ground level, and there are caterpillars, spiders, wood lice and ants living in it. As the wind blows through the sea of lupins, the piano emits its own song, but you have to lean in close to hear it. The keys—heaped up on each other—are like the pink scree seen through mallee scrub.

I have found pianos in garages and on verandas, as well as in the open. People were happy to see their piano go, but wanted it to have a good home. Understanding that their piano would be part of the *Piano Labyrinth* was seen as contributing to that. “It’s good that you can find a use for it,” many would say. “Better than it ending up at the dump.”
The Ruined Piano Sanctuary

On Friday 21 October 2005, pianos from the Piano Labyrinth at PICA were taken to the olive farm of Kim Hack and Penny Mossop, which is located near York, 80 kilometres east of Perth. Kim, driving a crane with seven pianos suspended off it, placed them under trees, on rocks, in the bends of streams, on a shed roof, and in a dam, where they are degrading at their own rate, and in their own way.

To play the pianos you have to find them spread out over the 160 acres of the olive farm. At the launch of the Sanctuary on the 18th of November 2006, Kim Hack and I conducted a guided tour for a hundred or so people, enabling them to encounter a number of the Ruined Pianos, and leaving them to discover and explore the remainder for themselves.

Kim is the curator of Ruined Pianos in the Sanctuary. His curatorial tasks involve a delicate balance between allowing the pianos to degrade unchecked, and intervening to do such repairs as are necessary to avoid the more precipitous forms of ruin.

A recent cursory inspection of the Sanctuary revealed: a nineteenth century British Challen piano engulfed by white ants that have transformed its insides into a gothic cathedral of ingested wood; a Blakely and Thomas (also British) that has been occupied by rats who have built their nest in the top, and are no doubt enjoying the resulting high rise living afforded by this unique location; and a German Lindal piano which resides in a dam, and has been occupied by frogs. If you listen at night, you can hear them jumping about on the strings creating strange and subtle accompaniments to their croaking.

A Note On the Ruined Piano

A note on the Ruined Piano is open at the edges: it happily admits the barking dog, the truck starting up, the sheep station owner complaining about the drought. That ruined note differs from a conventional piano note, which writes off the song of the bird in the rafters as an annoying distraction.

When I examined one Ruined Piano in my kitchen (there are four of them!), I found that what we would conventionally regard as middle C, is now a long ringer—a note that sings on uncontrollably after you have left it. A, a sixth above middle C, is a dead ringer—a note that rings brightly and then abruptly stops. E, two octaves and a sixth below middle C, is splendidly rich in sub harmonics—a yum. Similarly for G, B, F that have become respectively—an after shudderer, a sweet ringer and a ghost tone…

On any Ruined Piano, there are a number of non-workers. This is not a cause for dismay. In the first place, those notes do not work in significantly different ways. Some are boomps, others doomp, some click, some buzz… Others do not go down at all, and when you hit against their resistance, they emit a resonant doonk. Non-workers in their infinite variety and manifest laziness create the “negative space” in which the more pushy and industrious tones can shine.
Techniques For Playing Ruined Pianos

Techniques for playing will vary from piano to piano, and they are dictated to an extent by the condition of the piano. Short or boudoir pianos can be turned on their sides and the castors removed. Situated in immediate conjunction like this, they can be played vertically, like a piano accordion. Most Ruined Pianos though can be played in the conventional way, but may also be played seated on the ground. This gives easy access to the strings, as well as the keys. This is also a convenient position for playing multiple Ruined Pianos. The strings of the various pianos can then be played simultaneously, creating intoxicating effects, especially when the sustaining pedals of several pianos are jammed down with erasers.

Plucking the bass strings on an ancient weathered piano whose sound board is cracked wide open can produce astonishing pitch bends, then cataclysmic shuddering. If you are seated, a ruined stool can give a penetrating shriek when you turn from ruined keyboard to keyboard. All such sounds, which would be suppressed in conventional performance, can be given full rein when performing on the Ruined Piano. The metal flap under the keyboards of some ancient pianos can be plucked to create the sound of a goat in heat, for example. When playing Ruined Pianolas, their mechanisms can be manipulated to create the effect of air being puffed through the bellows—one way to turn the piano into an asthmatic accordion. The broken pianola mechanism can also provide a variety of metallic percussive effects.

When keys do not work, the hammers can be made to contact the strings with the fingers. Also the hands can be turned upside down, fingers on the mechanism (juggling position) to activate the hammers, while the unoiled pedals on a Ruined Piano give an array of squeaks, squawks and grinding sounds. Partly depressing some keys gives you access to a range of squeaks and rustling sounds. To reliably elicit these sounds, you need to touch the keys delicately.

Smudging the stars (Van Gogh) is a technique whereby the thumb is slid basswards (leftwards) down the lower strings, without the use of the sustaining pedal. This is normally an intensifying move in an improvisation. Generally though, when plucking the strings, wait and listen. The best sounds, like pitch bending, and vibrant desolation, come at the end of a low plucked bass note—rather like when you wait for someone to finish a sentence, and you find that their subtler feeling then becomes apparent. Rushing to make your next point can obscure those inflections.

According to the principle of limitation, there is no need to introduce extraneous percussion like drum sticks, mallets or brushes into your performance. Simply use parts of the piano that have broken off, to strike or stroke the strings.
Writing for Ruined Piano

For *Left Hand of the Universe*, I composed a fugue, march, and a waltz so that when Slovak and Moravian musicians played the score, I would know, for instance, what middle C sounded like on a Slovak Ruined Piano. In this way, the score, rather than being created on the presumption that the pianos were similar (conventionally well-maintained as to pitch and mechanism) was devised in order to elicit and expose the differences between pianos. In that way I could find out what F sharp an octave and a half above middle C sounded like on a Slovak Ruined Piano, as distinct from the “same note” on a West Australian Ruined Piano. Each Ruined Piano has no choice but to be startlingly unique. As Tolstoy put it: all happy families resemble one another; every unhappy family (like any Ruined Piano), is unhappy in its own way.

Care and Maintenance

I decided to bring my own Ruined Pianos out of storage in the Slipstream Carriers warehouse, and place them in the warmth and nourishment of my kitchen. This made eating-in difficult, but given that in Perth it is possible to eat out of doors most of the year, I began to eat on my front and back verandas—or, because I have never established any cooking routines, at my local café. The four or so Ruined Pianos have thrived in my kitchen. House rules at my home: no food or drink on the pianos.

I fix my Ruined Pianos with string and fishing line. I also glue back parts that have broken off. Once, I asked my piano tuner of thirty years to do some primitive repairs to keep the piano going during its terminal decline. He did that only on condition of strict confidentiality.

The Quest

The best Ruined Pianos that I have encountered have been in outback West Australia and in the Red Centre. The extremes of drought and flooding rains produce great roaring hulks. Here, as elsewhere, pedigree is important. The brand names of those pampered aristocrats of the piano world—Ronisch, Steinway, Lipp—appear regularly on the best Ruined Pianos.

At the old telegraph station in Alice Springs, I discovered the Camel Piano—reputedly the first piano in Centralia. It was a Ralph Allison Piano (Royal London model) made by Wardour and Sons, Soho, London, in the mid nineteenth century. The story goes that it was brought from the railhead at Oodnadatta to Alice Springs on the back of a camel. It occupied one side of the hump, while a drum of water occupied the other. This was shortly after the telegraph line went through from Adelaide to Alice Springs. Although it is only a short upright piano, this was certainly an arduous, even heroic journey for the camel.
The Camel Piano is innocent in appearance—a so-called boudoir piano with a sulky expression. It has a chintzy orange cloth under fine elaborate fretwork on the front panel. The top register sounds Chinese, though it is utterly beyond tuning. The bass sounds like someone ripping up kerosene tins with secateurs—heart stopping.

During the drought that never ended at Nallan Sheep Station, I confess to recording on the Ruined Piano at night. I would hide in the freezing iron shed, waiting for Dave, the sheep station owner, to go to bed. Straight after he stumbled back up the homestead steps, I would drag up an oil drum, feel the broken teeth of the Jefferson piano under my fingers, then play con bravura con passione for the applause of millions of cicadas through the shivery, shuddering, graveyard shift.

When the week was up, I paid my friend Nathan’s accommodation and mine. Dave, having shot two hundred sheep that morning, with hundreds more dying out at remote windmills, was so drunk I could see through to the inside back of his skull. “That mad bastard you brought with you,” he said. “The other night I was going to bed. I heard thunder, rushed out onto the veranda. The sky was clear full of f--king stars. You should shoot that maniac piano thumping bastard.”

That maniac piano thumping bastard, Nathan Crotty, is a pioneer of the Ruined Piano in Western Australia. Apart from his early works for Ruined Piano on cassette, which he recorded in the late 1980s and early 1990s, he made several super 8 films, including Sheep Station Follies, which features the original Ruined Piano at Nallan.

Nathan turned up for his second piano lesson with me carrying a broken violin. The first lesson had already been abandoned to free improvisation. And improvisation it remained through ensuing months and years. Nathan always referred to such sessions as piano lessons. We put the Gulbransen piano that his mother had bought from the Salvation Army on the back of a ute and drove it past the oblivious security guard and onto the roof of Canterbury Court car park, exposing it to wind and sky. We played unprecedented duets for businessmen who momentarily noticed, but couldn’t take it in. They went straight back to their working concerns—to being worked by their concerns. It was as though what was truly monstrous was not happening at all. When Cook’s ships sailed into Sydney Cove, Aboriginal people looked up, saw what was happening, but apparently went straight back to their ordinary tasks and concerns. Cook flew the Union Jack. We gaffered a red gold and blue blanket to the low guard rail to announce our occupation…

Young students would arrive at my home for their piano lesson. “Jump in the car,” I would say, and I would drive them to that nightmare monster shedding death. I would take them up to the roof in a shuddering lift that smelt of urine. We’d only just make it. These were times before litigation became rife in Australia.

Staggering around, swiped by the cold wind, we would finally settle down to entertain acres of rusting roofs, and obscured advertising hoardings—including an advertisement for spectacles that no one could see from the ground, and the
odd seagull, hopelessly off course. Occasionally we would see a steeplejack trying to fix the wooden barrier, risking his life.

The Gulbransen weathered a winter on the roof. Water leaked through its canvas cover, and it shed its casing in long strips and coils. One frozen morning I tugged back the tarpaulin and disturbed a young Aboriginal boy asleep, curled up in the dead leaves in the bottom of the piano. He woke up as the wind got in. We stared at each other. Neither of us could speak. Behind me someone coughed. I turned and saw an Aboriginal girl, maybe eighteen years old. I couldn’t avert my stare of alarm as her hacking cough went on and on, and her face soaked over. She swallowed, tried to speak, then finally got it out—“Hey man—watch me spit man”—while the little guy took off down the stairs.

Notes

All photographs © Vivienne Robertson, 9 August 2007. All URLs accessed June 2008.


2. Ross Bolleter, All the Iron Night (Mount Hawthorn: Smokebush Press, 2004), p. 34. For an example of this kind of sound, see “Unfinished Business,” track 01 on Crow Country (NY: Pogus Productions, 1999), CD ref. no. 7 6034-21021-2.


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ROSS BOLLETER

Ross, “The pianola’s dusky melodies become the harsh and common parlance of dogs, crows and sheep station owners complaining about the drought.” Bolleter is a West Australian improviser/composer. His love of *Ruined Pianos* started in 1987 with the discovery at Nallan Station. Many international *Ruined Piano* recordings and performances later Ross is delighted to have this ‘herd’ of instruments on which to discover yet another universe of sounds and possibilities.

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Unbearable beauty!

Two Australian choral classics: a conductor’s reflections

Carl Crossin

Conductor Carl Crossin writes about two of his favourite Australian unaccompanied choral works, by Clare Maclean and Stephen Leek. In addition to some detailed analysis, he shares his invaluable practical experience about performing the works with different choirs under different circumstances.

Clare Maclean’s *Christ the King* and Stephen Leek’s *Kondalilla* (from *Great Southern Spirits*) are two of the great Australian unaccompanied choral works. Although drawn from spiritual traditions that are literally continents and eons apart, both works share a deep sense of spirituality that transcends historical and stylistic boundaries. Both works also share a richness of choral sonority that is derived essentially from seemingly irreconcilable manifestations of polyphony - canon and aleatory. For Maclean, canon (or similar imitative techniques) is an essential tool in the creation of a polyphonic fabric that draws both inspiration and technique from the polyphony of Dufay, Ockeghem and Josquin. Leek, on the other hand, uses a repeated, aleatoric overlay of a few melodic fragments in the soprano and alto parts above simple drones and phrases in the tenor and bass parts to create what sounds like a complex melodic web, but which, is in practice, astonishing in its simplicity.

Both works are accessible to good SATB choirs, but both require secure ensemble singing. The Maclean requires divisi in all four parts (SATB - up to 14 parts at one point!) whereas the Leek uses only the standard SATB division of the choir with minimal divisi in the male parts. Although *Kondalilla* can sound quite complex, the aleatoric nature of the music actually helps to make it much more accessible than it sounds.
Clare Maclean *Christ the King*

Although Clare Maclean was born – and initially educated – in New Zealand, she moved to Sydney in 1979 at the age of 21 to study composition with Peter Sculthorpe. We in Australia have thus become presumptuously proud to call her one of ours! Maclean’s strong affinity for writing for the voice was nourished when she became a member of the Sydney Chamber Choir, and her involvement with the choir also provided the opportunity to study the polyphonic music of the 15th and 16th centuries.

*Christ the King* manifests both Maclean’s love of Gregorian chant and her passion for the music of such Renaissance masters as Ockeghem, Josquin and Victoria and, like the Estonian Arvo Pärt, Maclean draws on a substantial compendium of medieval and Renaissance techniques. In the words of Sydney Chamber Choir’s conductor at the time, Nicholas Routley, Maclean, ‘…has translated the vocal purity and contrapuntal strength of Ockeghem and Josquin into twentieth-century terms. In so doing she has revitalised a somewhat intermittent tradition of a cappella choral composition in Sydney.’

*Christ the King* draws virtually all of its text from James K. Baxter's poem 'Song to the Father' (No. 4 of *Five Sestinas*). The work begins with a single vocal line that marries the opening lines of Baxter’s poem ('Father, beyond the hills and water, beyond the city of the stars…') with the Gregorian plainsong for the Roman Catholic Feast of Christ the King. The first two stanzas of the poem then continue with the same plainsong set as two-part, and then three-part, canon. The beauty of this simple technique is heightened by the subtle use of word accents to define the chant-like rhythm of the phrases.

From a conductor’s point of view, it is worth discussing the rhythmic element of this opening section because, stylistically, it can be one of the greatest challenges in the entire work. To successfully combine the rhythmic ‘elasticity’ of chant with the metrical strictness of canon is no mean feat, and a brief discussion of Maclean’s compositional process can be illuminating. Maclean actually composed two versions of this first canonic section. Up until the first 'Alleluia', the original version used a variety of different time signatures (4/4, 5/4, 6/4, 7/4), presumably to align metrical accents with the natural accents of the words, and to take away the perceived regularity of one constant time signature - a regularity which is anathema to chant.

Maclean’s second version greatly simplified these first two pages and, in doing so, actually made the music more accessible to the singers and thus more successful. The first two bars are still in 7/4 and 3/2 (for the words ‘Father, beyond the hills and water…’) but from there on, it is all 4/4. Most choral singers with
the technical and ensemble skills to sing this piece will probably already have had experience with Renaissance music and will instinctively understand the type of phrasing required for this section of the work – both for the unison plainsong line at the opening and the canonic treatment of that line following. In essence, the time signature and barlines are simply a sign-posting of beats to help keep the singers together. The singers' own awareness of the natural word accents and the fluid combination of twos and threes, found in any plainsong, is the real key to the success of this music in performance. In essence, a score is simply the link between the composer and the performers. It is the musicians themselves who make the music 'work', so whatever translates the composer's wishes most clearly to the performers is therefore the best solution.

Structurally, Christ the King is both 'organically' through-composed, and yet linked throughout by the recurring use of the Christ the King Gregorian chant. The overall structure of the work is also articulated by the three statements of the 'Alleluia'. These glorious, ethereal utterances are slightly different from each other but all three are 'poly-modal' – that is, each of the three upper parts (SAT) sings in a different mode.

Although the drone or 'pedal' note sung by the basses in two of the 'Alleluias' is different on each occasion, the soprano part is G Mixolydian (G major with F natural); the alto, G Aeolian (just like G minor) and the tenor, G Dorian (like G minor but with E naturals). On paper, this sounds much more complicated than it actually is, but once the singers get used to the modality of their own 'key' or mode, the effect is both inspired and inspiring. These three ten-bar 'Alleluias' remain, for me, some of the most beautiful vignettes of 'Renaissance' polyphony composed in recent times.

Not only has Maclean made subtle changes in the forces required for each of the three 'Alleluias', she has also provided some minor variations in the word underlay. Given that the text is somewhat 'stretched' in these 'Alleluia' sections (with long melismas for each syllable) the individual vowels themselves are actually more obvious than the word itself. This modification of text underlay also changes which vowels are sung for various phrases in the 'Alleluia' section (the word 'Alleluia' has three different vowels – 'ah', eh' and 'oo'). For a choir, 'vowel colour' and 'tone colour' are inextricably linked, so an important element of the sound of a work is related to the composer's setting of the words in relation to their vowels. It is not unlike instrumental orchestration - giving a melody first to the flute and then to a clarinet doesn't change the actual melody but it does change its colour. Maclean's 'chorestration' is subtle but wonderfully effective.

I have conducted this piece many times with a number of different choirs – including a high school choir, a university choir and a professional chamber choir – and the singers never fail to be moved by the sheer beauty of the homophonic choral section set to the words 'Father, you know that it is so, that your kind prison makes me grieve…' Christ the King is not an easy work for a choir to memorise, but I have always made sure that my choirs memorise this particular
The simplicity and directness of this portion of the work is enhanced immeasurably when the barrier of 'reading the score' is removed.

There is not the time or space in this article to explore every section of Christ the King in detail but even the briefest journey through the work must make mention of the beautifully translucent Alleluia/Adonai section at the end. It is scored essentially in 8 parts (with a couple of chords in 9), one of which is an alto section solo.

Maclean has given a melodic line (the Christ the King chant again) with the words 'The murmur of many voices will stay with me when the light has gone…' to the altos. The rest of the choir sings the words 'Alleluia' and 'Adonai', and the sopranos are asked to divide three ways to cover all of the other notes in the accompanying harmony in both the soprano and the alto range. I have performed it this way and, given that this is the way the composer intended, it naturally works superbly.

I have also performed the work using a soloist on the alto line while the rest of the choir (albeit a 16-voice chamber choir) sings the accompanying parts. Balance between the solo and the accompanying choir can be an issue here but it can also bring a wonderful intimacy to the text as well. If done this way, the rest of the choir needs to sing exceptionally quietly. I have distinct memories of one 'chamber' performance where the alto soloist was not well and began to lose her voice just as the solo started. There's not a great deal one can do in such circumstances but it became obvious to all that if the remaining fifteen singers didn't sing quietly enough she would be lost in the choral texture. They listened, they sang exquisitely softly, and the moment was even more powerful because of it. When musical intent meets human sensitivity, ensemble singing can provide some of the most sublime musical experiences – even by accident!

The end of work is one the most perfect plagal cadences you will ever hear! The final Alleluia is unmistakably G Dorian and yet the way that Maclean approaches the very end of the work – harmonically speaking – is such that we almost accept the C major (the penultimate harmony) as the final chord. Until, that is, the 'real' final chord reveals itself - a G with no 3rds. Neither major nor minor, just the stark, bare beauty of opens 5ths. If sung with delicacy and with a slight diminuendo as the choir settles onto the final chord, it can be almost unbearably beautiful.

Stephen Leek Kondalilla

Stephen Leek’s choral cycle Great Southern Spirits was composed for Graeme Morton and The Australian Voices youth choir. Like many of Leek’s choral works, this extended choral cycle uses both aleatoric and conventionally notated material, and draws its inspiration from the Australian Aboriginal Dreaming.

Although composed as a choral cycle, each of the four movements (Wirindji, Mulga, Kondalilla and Uluru) can be performed as stand-alone pieces. Kondalilla, in particular, has been a tour favourite with my Adelaide Chamber Singers for many years, and we have very fond memories of expatriate audiences overseas.
being moved to nostalgic tears by this startlingly beautiful and distinctly Australian music.

*Kondalilla* is the most aleatoric of the four movements in the cycle and, as such, is the most variable in performance in terms of structure and 'interpretation'. Was it Forrest Gump who said that aleatoric music is like a box of chocolates – you never know what you’re going to get?!

Like all aleatoric music, *Kondalilla* grows through the process of performance. A powerful characteristic of aleatoric music such as this is that, in a sense, the composer eventually transfers ownership of the music to the singers.

Leek’s notation is quite specific about what each part sings in terms of notes, rhythmic relationships and expressive markings. In the case of the sopranos and altos however, the composer leaves the decision to the conductor and singers as to when each singer actually sings their line. Naturally, this means that no two performances will ever be the same. This is true of all music to an extent but with aleatory, the variations can be quite astounding. The early stages of learning aleatoric choral music are really workshops rather than rehearsals in the traditional sense because the singers must experiment and take ownership of the music in a different way.

This approach also means that the work will grow quite organically over time as the singers discover what works and what doesn’t. In the early stages of preparing Kondalilla, I have usually determined which singers will begin the work, or have at least assigned a particular order of singers so that there can be a basic framework upon which the rest of the in situ decision-making can work. Musically speaking, total freedom often produces chaos, whereas freedom within even a loosely defined structure creates clarity, momentum and some quite illuminating results. As the choir becomes more familiar with the music and is able to take more responsibility for working independently of the conductor and other singers, some or all of these imposed structures can be removed. The process of learning aleatoric music is not unlike building an edifice by using scaffolds - medieval stone masons built the great Gothic cathedrals with wooden formwork which at first obscured but then liberated the lofty spaces within.

Although *Kondalilla* is expressive on a number of textual and musical levels, the symbolism of the work is simple but remarkably effective: *Kondalilla* is the spirit of falling water who, through the slowly cascading phrases of the sopranos and altos, feeds Ouyen, the spirit of still water, who is represented, in the opening section at least, by the calm sustained pedal of the tenors and basses.

The instructions at the end of *Kondalilla* and *Uluru* both ask for a range of whispered, 'environmental' sounds. When I first conducted the cycle, we made sure that the sounds at the end of Kondalilla were quite perfunctory so as not to detract from the effect of those at the end of Uluru. As I have continued to
perform Kondalilla as a separate work, the extended 'bush' sounds have migrated from the end of Uluru to the end of Kondalilla. Singers can be remarkably creative when, within the right context, they are asked to imitate the sounds of nature. So as not to distract the audience, I usually ask the singers to turn away from the audience at the end of the piece so the audience hears the sounds around them but loses the sense of direction.

Using the spatial potential of a venue can also be an exciting way to present some music in concert, and the aleatoric nature of Kondalilla is further enhanced by such treatment. I have experimented over time with placing the sopranos and altos 'around' the venue – including amongst the audience – while the tenors and basses remain together on stage for their initial drone and subsequent tutti melodies. This can be particularly effective in any venue with galleries, and, even with only eight female singers, we use all of the available space. Singing with vast distances between the singers requires a considerable amount of confidence on the part of the singers. However, once the security and confidence is in place, the experience can be quite empowering for the singers, and certainly very moving for the audience.

Despite the level of independence and confidence required of the singers, Kondalilla is remarkably accessible to SATB choirs of all ages. In fact, it is a wonderful work for building independence and confidence in singers. The cycle Great Southern Spirits was originally composed for a youth choir, and it is through singing works such as this that singers gain the skills and confidence to step out of their musical comfort zones.

Carl Crossin

Carl - conductor, educator, composer and arranger - is one of Australia’s most experienced and respected choral conductors. He is currently Acting Director of the Elder Conservatorium of Music at the University of Adelaide and is the Founder/Conductor of Adelaide Chamber Singers. Carl has conducted a wide variety of choirs at virtually all levels of education and professionally and, in addition to his international tours with ACS, has been a clinician and conductor at summer schools, festivals and conferences throughout Australia and internationally. In 2007, he was awarded an OAM for his services to music.

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Noise and Texture, Towards an Asian-Influenced Composition Approach to the Concert Flute

Garth Paine

Western art music has featured the concert flute as a solo instrument and a member of chamber and orchestral works for several centuries. The instrument has evolved from the subtle rounded tones of the end-blown flutes such as the recorder (bloch flute) through to the traverse instruments of wood and then metal, becoming the exuberant theatrical instruments of gold, performed in contemporary times by celebrities such as James Galway. The repertoire includes works of gentle, lilting beauty (Claude Debussy *Syrinx, La Flute De Pan* flute solo, Francis Poulenc Sonata, Gabriel Fauré *Sicilienne*, Op. 78), lyrical works of folk origin (Prokofiev, Sonata for flute & piano in D major, Op. 94) to extraverted competition works (Jacques-Francois Ibert Concerto for Flute and Orchestra, Cecile Chaminade Concerto, Op. 107, etc.). The oeuvre reflects idiomatic qualities of speed, lightness, brilliance and dynamism, whilst the low register can be characterised as rich and melancholic.

Asian wind instruments offer similar characteristics, but are usually more ‘earthy’ in nature and have a more limited pitch range than the Western concert flute. Asian wind instruments are utilised in very different ways to Western wind instruments, delivering melody, unpitched timbres and plosive articulation as part of the musical work. The shakuhachi, for instance, has an extraordinary dynamic range and can produce a very pure tone, but is equally well known for the noisy over blowing that provides explosive expressivity more easily related to contemporary composition where tone colour and/or noise act as predominant musical parameters (Varese, Xenakis, Boulez, Murail, Messiaen, Ligeti, Stockhausen, etc.) than traditional harmony and counterpoint.
Electroacoustic music is characterised by an exploration of timbre through an expansive and fluid approach to the manipulation of acoustic instrument and other sound sources (electroacoustic music) or composition utilising location/field recordings (acousmatic music), and shares with spectralism the conceptual framework that ‘music is ultimately sound evolving in time’ (Fineberg, 2000:2).

Gagaku

The Japanese musical tradition of gagaku (literally meaning: refined, elegant music) was a music of the Japanese Royal Court. It is a rich pot-pourri of influences, including: 1. ancient Japanese tradition, 2. works newly composed by Japanese composers based on the ancient pieces, and 3. influences from outside of Japan, including togaku (also defined as music of the left) from China and Komagaku from the Korean peninsula (Ohno, 2005; Harich-Schneider, 1960; Kishibe, 1969).

According to Thompson (2006), the forms of gagaku included the following, not all of which survive today:
1. 唐樂 Togaku: music from the Tang
2. 高麗樂 Komagaku: music from Korea
3. 度羅樂 Toragaku: music from Thailand
4. 林邑樂 Rinyugaku: music from Southeast Asia, some perhaps originating in India
5. 渤海樂 Bokkaigaku: music from Manchuria or Mongolia
6. 舞樂 Bugaku: dance music; can also fall into one of the above forms
7. 伎樂 Gigaku (also 吳樂 Kuregaku): a dance or theatre form apparently originating in the 吳 Wu (modern Zhejiang) region of China.

Of particular interest, and the inspiration for Fue Shō, is one of eighty remaining togaku pieces (of Chinese origin), the Manzairaku, which belongs to the hyojo (tonic on E) mode. The togaku has six modes, of which the Manzairaku represents only one.

I have, for several years now, been mesmerised by a recording of the Manzairaku ~ Derute, performed by the Tokyo Gakuso (Ohno, 2005). The music contains waves of sound that fold over and over, tumbling in a very abstract and refined manner as if representing direct experience of an ancient myth. The various instruments for the orchestra seem to operate on almost independent temporal scales; drums beating a regular, short, accelerating pattern as if the beater is just dropped on the skin like a rubber ball and allowed to bounce, whilst the other instruments exchange echo-like calls, building textures in which a temporal pulse is almost indistinguishable.

The Manzairaku is attributed either to Wu Hou, the only Empress of the Tang dynasty (late 7th century), or Yang Ti, the second emperor of Sui dynasty in early seventh century China. The Manzairaku score describes the piece as a chukyoku (medium-scale piece), nobeyahyoshi (a rhythmic pattern in 8/4 time in 8 bar metrical units) and ‘consisting of 20 metrical units’. (Ohno, 2005)
As mentioned above, the Manzairaku forms the compositional model for Fue Shō. Gagaku, and especially Manzairaku display rich timbral qualities. Shimmering layers of simultaneously complex and yet simple tones form an ancient yet, at the same time, postmodern music. A music that seems timeless, reflecting a very pure aesthetic.

Gagaku music is thought to have been heterophonic, that is, music in which each performer is playing essentially the same melody but each interprets it in his/her own way. Heterophony is one of the reasons why the Manzairaku - Derute has the quality of folding layers. Each of the instruments of the Gagaku ensemble introduces the melody at different times with small temporal and timbral alterations. This flexibility of temporal organisation is explained by the Japanese principle of elastic or breath rhythm.

Gagaku and Buddhist chanting both make use of a common Japanese principle of elastic or breath rhythm. There are, of course, many steady, metronomic beats in Japanese music, but one also finds sections – like the opening of any Gagaku piece – in which the beat simply cannot be conducted. The melody moves from beat to beat in a rhythm more akin to that of a breath taken in deeply, held for an instant, and then expelled. In ensembles, such a rhythm can only be coordinated when the performers listen and feel the music together. This is the kind of attitude we associate with chamber music. Much Japanese music has this chamber music quality regardless of the size of the ensemble. (Malm, 1996)

The instruments of the Gagaku ensemble include:
1. 筝 zheng (so) zither or koto
2. 琵琶 pipa (biwa) lute
3. 竽 sheng (shō) mouth organ
4. 箫 bili (hichiriki) double reed aerophone
5. 笛 di (fue or ryuteki) flute

See (Thompson, 2006).

Figure 13.1 hichiriki

Figure 13.2 ryuteki
According to current gagaku practice the ryuteki and hichiriki (see Figures 13.1 and 13.2) play the main melodies while the other instruments provide simple accompaniment. The Tang Dynasty Music Research Project has shown that these ryuteki and hichiriki melodies were added later and that in fact all instruments played the melodies (Thompson, 2006).

The shō provides the harmonic infrastructure for the Manzairaku, and uses a specific scale that reveals several chords (see Example 13.1).

This composition is titled Fue Shō, as the work is written for flute (fue) but with the aid of the live electronic processing which acts to expand the solo flute line in a manner reminiscent of the timbres produced by the traditional shō orchestra. Fue Shō exhibits rich timbral fields characteristic of the traditional use of the Shō to produce finely nuanced multiphonic progressions (Crowe and De, 1992).

**Composition**

As mentioned above, the primary compositional material for Fue Shō is derived from the Manzairaku - Derute (Kohachiro, 1991; Ohno, 2005). The scales used in this kind of music are as follows:

**Example 13.1** basic scales of wind instruments in Gagaku. (Harich-Schneider, 1960)
The main melodic instrument in the modern version of the *Music of the Left* (*togaku*) is the *hichiriki* (see Figure 13.1), which produces a piercing tone. The flute (*ryūteki*, see Figure 13.2) plays variations on the melody. The mouth organ, *shō* gives to the music its harmonic support. The chords derived from the *Shō* scale are indicated in Example 13.1. The root notes of these chords, E, B, D and A act as the harmonic anchors for *Fue Shō* as can be seen at section markers A, B, C and at the climax in Bars 92-99, and the opening and final notes.

*Ryōō* Music of the Left (*rinyugaku*) was originally written in the mode called *Sadachō* then transposed into the mode *Ichikotsuchō* during the Middle Ages. This piece is also called *Ran-Ryōō, Ra-Ryōō, Ryoō* and begins with a short musical spell, the *koranjō*, performed on *ryūteki*, *shō*, and *taiko*. The musical spell is represented in *Fue Shō* by the first ten bars (see Example 13.2), which introduces long held notes on the flute that are gradually expanded using granular synthesis so that a rich drone grows from the introductory acoustic notes producing a rich timbral texture.

**Example 13.2** Garth Paine, *Fue Shō*, Introductory Meditation

In the traditional Japanese composition, the musical spell (*Koranjō*) is followed by an introduction, known as *Ranjo*. This accompanies the dancer from the music-tent, the *Gakuya* (used as a dressing room) to the dance stage. The *Ranjo* is in the form of a canon, and when performed in its entirety, develops into ever increasing contrapuntal virtuosity.

The *Ranjo* section of *Fue Shō* begins with the rhythmic figures introduced at ‘A’ initiating a lullaby-like rocking whilst also encapsulating the Japanese principle of elastic or breath rhythm discussed above and is the first time in the work that a more temporal structure is introduced (see Example 13.2 and 13.3).

**Example 13.3** Garth Paine, *Fue Shō*, Second Theme

Section ‘B’ of *Fue Shō* sees the introduction of the main melody (see Example 13.4), which starts on a B natural (the 5th). I transcribed the melody from the *Manzairaku ~ Derute* performed by the Tokyo Gakuso (Ohno, 2005). The bending of pitches between notes is a feature of the style and is indicated in the *Fue Shō* score with the slide lines leading to the note.
Bar 61, Section ‘D’ represents a diversion from the Japanese form as Western harmonies are introduced, and the pitch material rises above the range previously used. This point is also marked by the second only use of the note middle C, which is absent from the shō chords (see Example 13.1). The Neapolitan 6 is used intentionally to produce tension between the Japanese modal qualities prevalent in the work up to this point and the cultural context of the composition (Fue Shô), the instruments being used (Concert Flute in C, with live electronic processing) and the composer’s background and training (Western art music and jazz).

This point in Fue Shô begins a final release of this cross-cultural tension with a false climax at Bar 68, which immediately repents. Bar 75 sees a reduced ghosting of harmonic material from earlier in the work, leading into a frivolous dotted quotation of material from Bar 42 before an intense climax (Bar 84-88) around the notes d, e, d, two octaves above the opening bars and final bars of the work. The note c# is used here for the first and only time in Fue Shô, leading to the climax which establishes the high e as the 2nd of a Western Dorian mode rather than the root of the Japanese mode. The Western modality quickly dissolves again to resolve onto an e, d, e pattern, turning the cultural mirror around before settling finally on the E root of the Japanese mode in the bottom octave of the Western concert flute, harking back to the musical spell of the first ten bars, derived from the Koranjô.

As Ohno explains (2005) early Manzairaku scores describe nobeyahyoshi (a rhythmic pattern in 8/4 time in 8 bar metrical units) ‘consisting of 20 metrical units’(2005). In general Fue Shô follows the pattern or 8-bar metrical units, but uses 4/4 time, with Section A appearing at Bar 10, section B at Bar 26, section C begins at Bar 34 and D begins at Bar 61. The fact that these sections are not marked by multiples of eight is a product more of the Western scoring system accommodating the qualities of elastic or breath rhythm discussed above than a lack of observation of the 8 bar metrical unit. Section E, the real climax, begins at Bar 82. This also represents the tension between the Japanese and Western musical influences at play here (Battier et al., 1995).

General Discussion about pitch material

Fue Shô is essentially in E minor, however it derives its pitch centre from the Japanese hyojo mode, (tonic on e), illustrated by the traditional shō chords in Example 13.1 which contain the interval relationships documented in Example 13.5 and Figure 13.3.
Key intervals used in *Fue Shô* include

- \( e \rightarrow g \)
- \( a \rightarrow b \) natural
- \( c \rightarrow d \)
- \( c \rightarrow f \) one octave above the root of the *hichiriki* scale
- \( f \rightarrow g \)
- \( a \rightarrow \) down to \( e \) (the root)

Example 13.5 the scale used for the flute in *Fue Shô* illustrating key intervals used in the work.

It should be noted that the *shô* scale includes a \( g# \) not found in either of the melodic instrument scales. Contrary to this, the *Shô* chords do not include \( c \) or \( g \) in any octave.

These pitches are used sparingly in *Fue Shô*, but mark important moments. For instance Bar 13 introduces the phrase from section A transposed up a minor 3rd before its appearance up an octave in Bar 16. This is an early hint at the multicultural tension inherent in the writing of a work of this nature. The note \( g# \) is only used immediately before a \( g \) natural, creating a falling pattern before rising to the \( a \) above (Bars 35-36 and 65). It should be noted that the lowest note on the *shô* is the \( A \) above middle C. The \( A \) above middle C is a pivotal point in the traditional *shô* chords which share four notes across all chords, \( e \ a \ b \ f\# \) representing the tonic, the subdominant and the dominant chords. It should also be noted in Kyma timeline for the live processing in *Fue Shô* (see Figure 13.4), that the intervallic relationships illustrated in Figure 13.8, are used to structure the pitch shift intervals in the processing.

The range of the concert flute in *Fue Shô* begins a tone below the range of the *hichiriki* and rises to the high \( e \), half way through the range of the *ryuteki*. The principle intervallic relationships used in the work are illustrated in Figure 13.5.
Specific Electroacoustic Techniques used in Fue Shō

Compositional considerations:

1. **Heterophony** – The melodic instruments in *gagaku* generally play in a heterophony manner. However the elastic, breath rhythm technique produces small variations in the melodic line, generating a chorus like effect. This effect is applied in *Fue Shō* through the use of varying delays, repeating parts of phrases. The delays draw on separate four or eight second buffer recordings of the live flute (four buffers regularly refreshed at random intervals). Additionally the delay time is constantly varied, generating small variations in pitch. These variations are subtle, but are also randomised, again to introduce a sense of ‘liveness’ in the computer response to the incoming live flute part and engender the computer part with the quality of ensemble member. The overall effect is to produce a chorused effect.

2. A **repeated accelerando phrase** is associated with the *taiko* drum part of the *Manzairaku*. This repeated pattern accelerates in the manner of a bouncing ball, seemingly freed from the temporal pulse. This characteristic is applied in *Fue Shō* through the repeated live recording of the flute into a four or eight second buffer. The playback of this buffer is then randomly altered so that the length of the replayed segment shortens, causing the loop time to shorten, creating a sense of accelerando. This technique results in a sound that also becomes more percussive as the loop time shortens and ends with a rapid acceleration towards a loop time of zero seconds, causing an effect that might be equated to the sound being sucked into a black hole, or simply imploding. The recording is triggered at semi-random times so that a sense of surprise and natural chaos is represented in the work. These subtle variations also generate a more active relationship between the performer and the electronic part, characterising the computer as an ensemble member.

3. **Pitch shifting** of the live flute notes occurs throughout the work. The pitch shifting generates a multipoint effect, illustrative of the *shō* orchestra. The harmonic relationship is always within the chordal structure of the traditional Shō chords (see Example 13.1) with the exception of the use of the Neapolitan 6th in Section D, and the live transposition of the flute down two and three octaves in the first half of the work, generating a low frequency pedal point for the melodic and short staccato patterns occurring above.

4. **Fast Fourier Transform (FFT)** manipulation of the frequency content of the flute together with granular synthesis based reverb causing a smearing of the spectral content of the flute sound to broaden individual notes into spectral clouds, thickening the harmonic content of the largely monophonic flute. The FFT technique allows the flute sound to be divided into a number of frequency bands (bins in FFT parlance) – these bins essentially contain a measurement of the energy (the amplitude) of all the frequencies it contains. An inverse FFT
can then be done to re-synthesise the FFT bin as a sound. The beauty of this analysis and re-synthesis technique is that the temporal and pitch structures are un-coupled, allowing a pitch transposition without changing the temporal structure or a stretching or accelerating of the temporal structure of the recorded sample without changing the pitch. This technique is also used for the pitch shifting discussed above. An additional procedure applied in Fue Shô is to re-synthesise the analysis bins through a process whereby their range is changed from that established for the analysis. This causes a smearing of the spectral information, altering the timbral quality of the recorded sound, and when then also processed through granular synthesis (a technique that smashes the sound into minute particles and then re-assembles those particles into a variation of the source – quite a fluid sculptural technique), the live flute sound produces a rich, evolving texture as accompaniment. This technique is used throughout the work to greater or lesser degrees and results in the sparkling, continuously changing textures that support the melodic line. These FFT, granulated lines also have longer temporal structures (they are stretched) and are fed into some of the pitch shifting and delay algorithms generating a variety of rhythmic and temporal structures rather than simple, immediate responses by the computer system to the live instrument sound. Once again this generates a more active relationship between the performer and the electronic part, characterising the computer as an ensemble member.

5. **Spatialisation** of the various layers of electronic processing over six or eight channels of loudspeakers within the performance space is done in order to envelop the audience within a reflective space, and ensure a lively and ever changing texture. The spatialisation surrounds the audience and so they become part of the work, part of the performance and actively engaged in experiencing the piece in a manner only possible in acoustic performance with antiphonal singing.

*Figure 13.4* Kyma timeline for *Fue Shô*, showing encapsulated algorithms set for dynamic instantiation as the piece proceeds.
Conclusion

_Fue Shô_ represents a thorough re-interpretation of the _Manzairaku_ within a Western musical context and on a Western concert flute. The work embodies both structural and aesthetic elements of the _gagaku_ tradition. As outlined above, the framework provided by the _Manzairaku_ had a profound impact on the development of both the structure of the work and the manner in which the flute material tends towards noise in overblown, spectrally rich moments. These moments represent both transitional inflections and release, and are always counterpoised against a thick harmonic texture derived from the traditional voicing of the _shô_ orchestra chords.

Summing up, I have found this to be a rewarding way to work, bringing together my interest in ancient Japanese music with my proficiency on the concert flute in C, in a way that presents a composition rich in interest, reflecting the ancient whilst finding a fresh voice for the Western concert flute.

Notes


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**GARTH PAINE**

Garth is an innovator in the field of interactivity in new media arts. His immersive interactive environments have been exhibited in Australia, Europe, Japan, USA, Hong Kong and New Zealand. He participates in the organising and peer review panels for the International Conference on New Interfaces for Musical Expression (NIME) and is a guest editor of Organised Sound, published by Cambridge University Press. He develops interactive systems for real-time musical composition for interactive dance and theatre performances. He was awarded the Australia Council for the Arts New Media Arts Fellowship at RMIT University in 2000 and is a member of the advisory panel for the Electronic Music Foundation, New York.

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Claire Edwardes - Coming a full circle

Kammerklang brings young composers together

Anni Heino

A dozen or so years ago, Claire Edwardes was a talented young woman studying percussion at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and performing as part of the newly founded 'Spring Ensemble'. In 2009, with a wealth of experience under her belt, she worked with young composers from the Sydney Conservatorium as part of the Kammerklang initiative – and remembering her own immersion into contemporary music as an opinionated, second-year student.

‘At the time when we started Ensemble Offspring, I definitely didn’t have a particular passion for contemporary music. I guess the thing I really liked was the social interaction and the collaborative aspect of playing with people, and working with composers. I remember being really harsh on composer Matthew Shalomowitz, who is now one of my best friends. I was just, "This really doesn’t work at all, I don’t know what you were thinking but I think we have to rewrite the whole thing!" We often laugh at how harsh I was. But I think it is just in me to say it how it is! He was a really shy guy in third year, wearing his cardi, your typical daggy composer – which I can say because he is one of my favourite people in the whole world!’

In May 2009, at the receiving end of Claire’s feedback, are the composers associated with the Kammerklang concert at the Sydney Conservatorium,

‘I urge composers to just remember that there is more than one sound per instrument...’
Cameron Lam, Chris Williams, Amy Bastow, Peggy Polias and Jason Pestana. The program was a mix of their new solo and chamber works and also included a premiere of Peter McNamara’s work entitled *The Styx*, and a performance of Stuart Greenbaum’s recent Chamber Concerto for flute, percussion and large ensemble. In addition to the concert, there was also an exhibition.

Having the composers benefit from an experienced performer’s advice was one of the core ideas of the Kammerklang project, explains Cameron Lam, a third-year composition student who initiated the project. The composers were able to send drafts of their work to Claire for comments, but the bulk of the work was done in real-time, face-to-face sessions at the Conservatorium.

'This brings some real educational opportunities in this esoteric niche of new music. You can really sink your teeth into the practical things. Having a performer’s experience is extremely useful – not only getting to hear the work, but getting real-time feedback on the playability,' says Cameron.

Both Cameron and Claire admit that getting and giving direct feedback is a skill to learn, too. It can be a devastating moment for a young composer to recognise that what he or she has written might sound wonderful on MIDI-playback but is awkward or impossible for a flesh-and-blood performer to play. What can be helpful, then, is to learn that small changes will make the work more playable and consequently more attractive to other performers. And even more helpful is the realisation that even the most experienced composers seek and accept similar advice from percussionists.

Claire remembers particularly well a recording session with the distinguished British composer, Sir Harrison Birtwistle. The piece in question was *The Axe Manual*, written originally for Evelyn Glennie and Emanuel Ax, and picked up by Claire and Nicolas Hodges. The composer travelled to Cologne for their recording session, sat in the recording box and talked openly with the performers about some changes that proved necessary for a successful recording.

'It was a quite a long recording session for a 25-minute piece – I think we spent two-and-a-half or three days recording it, so it was a pretty full-on process. He was amazingly open – I was really quite surprised: there is this composer who I really revere, and his parts were of course very well written. I felt that if I couldn’t quite play something well enough, it was more to do with my inadequacies and not his inadequacies of how he conceived the music. I’d be getting frustrated trying to play a hard section, and I’d say, "Look, I just don’t know if this is possible in this moment right now." And he was very much like, "Claire, I trust you and whatever you suggest, I think we should change it, you can just buy me a beer", basically.'
'I think this just makes a point that, as a composer, of course you get intertwined in the music and you are invested in it, but hopefully over time you can take a step back and realise that it is not the end of the world if a few little things change. Because the involvement of the performer leads to making the piece more idiomatic, and in the end this can only benefit the work.'

Claire is known for suggesting that composers sometimes use fewer instruments and make the most of them, rather than expanding the set-up bit by bit in order to add yet another sound or effect.

'Percussion has now developed so far, and composers are getting more well educated as to how to write for it, that I urge them to just remember that there is more than one sound per instrument, that you can go really far into the possibilities of that one instrument. For example, something simple like a cymbal has many different things that you can do with it, you can bow it and roll it and you can get a crisp sort of sound. And then there are all the different stick possibilities. I’m very much into using lots of different sticks to get different sounds out of instruments! I guess it is a practical thing on one hand, the frustration of moving around with too many instruments sort of gets to you after a while, but it’s a musical thing, too. In reality the difference of the effect between, say, four drums and seven drums is not that much, so why wouldn’t we try and use less and get more out of that? It is so tempting to just keep adding and adding and adding, and you can, because you are just writing stuff down on a piece of paper, you know!'"
to keep my face known and my name known, and I think that was important because you don't really want to disappear off the face of the earth for seven years.'

Claire's involvements include a series of concerts with Ensemble Offspring which she co-directs with composer Damien Ricketson. Her collaborations also include a new percussion concerto *Golden Kitsch* by Elena Kats-Chernin for the Sydney Youth Orchestra, which Claire premiered in July 2009.

And when it comes to maintaining her career in Europe, she is now trying to travel back there once a year or so to perform – not easily accomplished for a mother of a 2 young children. In 2009 she performed a series of concerts in The Netherlands – solo performances as well as with various ensembles, her Antipoduo partner, violinist Sarah Oates and her Duo Vertigo counterpart Niels Meliefste.

A more recent collaboration is her duo work with the Australian pianist Bernadette Harvey. This has prompted her to think once again what collaborations really are about.

'I used to think it was important to keep finding people to collaborate with who were interested in contemporary music – that's one thing. But almost more important than that is that you just have to have a personal bond with them, and a feeling when you play together and then you can find pieces that you both like. Bernadette, she just has this thing where she listens so well and is so open that you don't even have to talk about it most of the time. It is not very often that you come across people like that. When you play with people like Bernadette, it's just amazing. Then you go back to the other sort of people that you don't necessarily have the bond with, and you realise how amazing the situation is, where you don't even have to talk about the music. I guess that is what string quartets often have.'

'At the end of the day you do find that your best collaborative relationships are often with people who you are close to on a personal level. For example, with the members of Ensemble Offspring: we are all very good friends and love playing together. It makes sense because music is an extension of your personality in a way, it's more than just how you play. The rehearsal rapport is extremely important – how you get along with each other on a personal level is at the core of it, you know!'

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**ANNI HEINO**

Anni is a Finnish-born journalist and musicologist, and editor of *Resonate* magazine.

Ensemble Offspring: www.ensembleoffspring.org.au

Claire Edwardes: www.claireedwardes.com

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An Overview of Australian Radiophonic and Radio Art Practices

Colin Black

Generations of Australian experimental radio practitioners and artists have charged the airwaves across Australia with their inventive and imaginative works. As early as 1909 organised groups of wireless experimenters started to spring up across Australia with the Wireless Institute of Victoria being the first such group. In these early days of radio, unofficial broadcasts were a free-for-all, at least for all who could afford the latest technology. To demonstrate the potential of radio to the Australian authorities, L. A. Hooke in 1920 transmitted a programme of live music from his home in Brighton (a suburb of Melbourne) to Parliament House in Spring Street, Melbourne. Official general issue licences for transmitting purposes later became available in July 1922.

Creative sonic experimentations with telephonic (sound) radio in Australia can be traced back to Mr. J. W. Hambly-Clark, who in the early 1920s, after recording himself playing violin solos onto his phonograph, would broadcast his recordings by positioning a carbon microphone in the throat of a long phonograph horn speaker. What makes this particularly interesting is the idea that he also moved the microphone in and out of the throat of the long phonograph horn speaker while he was broadcasting the work, which would have further shaped the acoustic characteristics of the recorded work and was apparent in the broadcasts. In this way Hambly-Clark used the proximity of the microphone to the sound source like an experimental audio filter and therefore this could arguably be considered as an early form of Australian acoustic art and/or radio art. Sadly no audio recordings of these broadcasts exist today.

Australians with their keen interest in sport, combined art and sport together to create what Andrew McLennan has identified as a form of radio called, ‘Synthetic Cricket’. McLennan has argued that the process of receiving telegrams from England during 1934, 1936 and 1938 that outlined the cricket events and instantly having the commentator and sound effects operator re-create the sound of the game in the studio for broadcast is a ‘crude’ example of long form acoustic art.
Controversially, Jack Ellitt in the 1930s, using film sound technologies to record and edit sound, developed a style of musique concrète before Pierre Schaeffler. In 1935 Ellitt stated that, ‘When good recording apparatus is easily acquired, many people will record simple everyday sounds which give them pleasure. The next step would be to mould these sound-snaps into formal continuity’. Although Ellitt’s works were not commissioned by or broadcast on Australian radio (which is a great pity), Ellitt’s ‘musique concrète’ works, just like Schaeffler’s, would have been ideally suitable for radio broadcast.

The ABC’s role of cultivating an Australian radio practice from 1936 was paramount in building a body of ‘experimental’ radio works. Leslie Rees (ABC’s first drama editor 1936 to 1966) states, ‘We’d save up seven or eight of these offbeat plays, which we knew that only a small handful of people would like, but that minority audience had its rights … ’ and Ree’s actions also nurtured the rights and talents of the minority creators. Via this sustained support from the ABC for innovative Australian radio, international recognition eventually followed in 1959 with the Prix Italia winning work The Death of a Wombat. Charles Moses (managing director of the ABC, 1935 to 1965) states, ‘Our staff was convinced that we could do as well as the BBC could, and we started to enter for the Italia Prizes. We won a prize with one of our first efforts’.

Building on this open, risk taking and supportive working methodology between the ABC and artists/composers, Nigel Butterley was commissioned to create a ‘musical collage’ for radio entitled In the Head the Fire. Butterley, working closely with audio engineers, deftly wove together numerous individual recordings with musical composition to create the overall form and sound of the piece. In the Head the Fire was awarded the 1966 Prix Italia ahead of Berio’s Laborintus II.

Also, in the late 1960s David Ahern (after studying with Karlheinz Stockhausen) was invited by the ABC to create a radiophonic work entitled Journal for their 1969 Prix Italia entry. This 57 minute electronic improvisation for broadcast based on the journals of Captain Cook is thought to be the earliest simulcast experimental stereo broadcast in Australia. At the time the ABC only had mono AM networks, which were used to broadcast each channel of this stereo work (i.e. one AM network for the right channel and one AM network for the left channel). In Sydney the audience tuned into 2FC for the left channel and 2BL for the right channel.

After the Journal broadcast, Ahern, still fuelled with creative ideas from Europe, proposed that the ABC build an electronic music studio. ‘Such a studio should also be as a place of free thinking’ Ahern exclaimed, ‘complete creative freedom is to be given to all composers invited to work in the studio’. Andrew McLennan, after researching Ahern, explains, ‘He could see all the possibilities; he had very modest requests … just asking enough to get going, based on what he’d seen in Europe’. Ahern’s list of equipment included; ‘One technician employed full-time … Revox AU777 ½” 4 Track Stereo recorder $600; Voltage Frequency Converter $140’. His proposal to Harold Hort, head of music (radio) dated 28 May 1970
ends with, ‘A creator must be at the head (the HEAD), otherwise, I predict instant failure. Cordially yours …’. The response to Ahern’s proposal could not have been much colder as someone at the ABC penciled on his proposal, ‘My God, he can type!’, and Ahern’s vision for the ABC’s creative sonic future evaporated.

Reacting against the Vietnam War, groups of highly politicised students from Melbourne made ‘alternative’ broadcasts on 3DR (Draft Registers) and 3PR (People’s Radio). Not surprisingly these ‘alternative’ broadcasts had their signals swiftly jammed, equipment smashed in raids and legal action taken against them. In the aftermath of this a number of groups came together under the name of the Alternative Radio Association with the aim of providing broadcasts in Australia ‘counter’ to the dominant broadcasting culture of the time. Officially operating under a restricted education licence, the first sanctioned public (later to be changed to community) radio station emerged from the University of Adelaide in 1972 called 5UV. This opened the way for a new kind of radio licence to be introduced in Australia called public (later to be changed to community) radio broadcasting in 1974.

This new licence combined with more affordable sound technologies (e.g. ¼-inch tape, 4 and 8 track machines and cassette recorders) gave DIY producers and sound artists the opportunity to make radio, perhaps in a way that Ahern had dreamt of with his proposed electronic music studio at the ABC (i.e. complete creative freedom given to all composers). Melbourne’s 3AR aired radiophonic performances from the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre that were created by its own collective of artists. 2MBS-FM in Sydney, the first station to broadcast in FM stereo, had an eclectic programming schedule; Virginia Madsen states it included ‘exploratory and world musics and risk taking forays into tape cut-up and electronics, the historical acoustical arts, new music and sound poetry, the station had become a magnet for many of Sydney’s musical innovators and emergent sound artists’. As a consequence of this new licence there was a more diverse audio broadcasting landscape in Australia, at least in the capital cities where these new stations were chiefly located.

In 1975, Andrew McLennan visited radio stations in England, Europe and Scandinavia. During his visit he became very concerned about the lack of progress (both aesthetically and technically) at the ABC compared to the Europeans counterparts. Frustrated by this situation McLennan moved from Sydney to Adelaide where in 1976 the ABC established its first FM stereo broadcasting station. McLennan with co-producer, Jaroslav Kvaricek later founded 360° Shift, a bi-weekly six hour experimental audio and music program broadcasting from 6.00pm until midnight. McLennan states that they broadcast ‘... all kinds of music that was really on the cusp of new music ... We put on everything from soundscapes, sound poetry; we put on all kinds of material, sound documentaries, everything that we thought was new and good for FM radio’. Although the programme only ran for a year, 360° Shift is thought to be first regular experimental audio and music program on ABC FM Radio.
In the 1980s, Alessio Cavallaro’s *Contemporary Editions* on Sydney’s 2MBS-FM presented an eclectic mix of audio explorations. Cavallaro, when discussing a performance by The Loop Orchestra, stated that he even started to consider ‘the radio station, the building itself and some of its inherent acoustic properties and responses, was the instrument’. Later in the 1994 dj smallcock (aka Lucas Abela) took this idea of the radio station as an instrument to its next logical level at Skid Row (Sydney) when he utilised ‘radio station feedback’ as part of his broadcasts. dj smallcock states, ‘in a bored fit I decided to bring in a radio [receiver into the radio studio] … spinning the dial randomly I found 88.9 (radio Skid Row) and discovered radio station feedback, the radio began to howl … by turning the announcers mic on and off ’ dj smallcock created ‘syncopated rhythms over the top of’ the records he was playing’.

Returning to the 1980s, the ABC consolidated its experimental acoustic focus during 1984-85 when Tony MacGregor, Robyn Ravlich, Andrew Mclennan and Martin Harrison formed the ABC Arts Unit. Later in 1988 under Roz Cheney’s leadership *The Listening Room* program was formed and aired on ABC Classic FM from January 1988 to 15th December 2003. *The Listening Room* by consistently commissioning artists and winning international awards (averaging roughly one and a half awards per year) for excellence in innovative radio work during its lifetime, was a crucial factor that contributed to a global presence of Australian artists on international airwaves.

The significance that radio art has played in the development of a vibrant sound art/music community within Australian culture hasn’t gone unnoticed. Elliott Gyger (when discussing Nigel Butterly’s 1966 Prix Italia award winning radiophonic work *In the Head the Fire*) writes that Butterly’s radio work was of ‘unmistakable importance both for its composer’s output and for Australian music as a whole.’ Further to this, theorist and art historian Douglas Kahn, referring to the body of acoustic art works resulting from the activities of *The Listening Room* program, concludes that this was ‘one of the most influential factors for the strength of the new music and sound arts in Australia’. In 1997 the ABC Acoustic Art Unit commissioned 27 new radio art works (with a total running duration of roughly 600 minutes). Sadly in December 2003, *The Listening Room* program was decommissioned, cutting off a lifeline to artists in this field. As a result, radio art activities at the ABC have been drastically diminished and dispersed across its networks.

While the ABC did not specifically commission any new works for the 2010 ISCM World New Music Days Festival held in Australia, they chose to dedicate four New Music Up Late programs (ABC Classic FM) to radiophonic work as part of the festival programming. Presenting a mix of works from international radio artists and composers such as Mikako Mizuno (Japan), Andre Castro (Portugal), Ros Bandt (Australia) and John Oswald (Canada) these programmes explored a range of international approaches to radio art. Notably Australian composer Jon Rose gave a graphic sonic account of discarded pianos in the vast rural areas of Australia with his *Ivories In The Outback*. 
So where does this leave Australian radio art in the present day? Ironically we now have at our means more affordable and experimental audio hardware and software than any other generation before us (equipment that Jack Ellitt could not even imagine), but Australia doesn’t have a dedicated platform on which to present innovative works or an allocated budget from which to commission a cohesive body of work. While community radio stations continue to provide an entry point and valuable opportunities for emerging artists to initially explore the creative possibilities of radio, there is little in terms of real financial support or incentives for radio artists and composers to develop professionally. It may be some years before we discover the impact of these recent changes in the Australian radio art landscape on artists and composers who are full of potential, but lacking in opportunities. So in the spirit of making do with the materials at hand, Australian artists and experimenters will continue to produce works that can only come from the undercurrents of Australian culture.

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**COLIN BLACK**

Colin is an internationally acclaimed composer/sound artist, having won the 2003 Prix Italia Award and achieving the final round selection in the 2010 Prix Phonurgia Nova for his major length works. Black has received national and international commissions to create innovative works for broadcast. He is currently a PhD Candidate at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and has also authored a number of conference papers and journal articles.

For more information see: www.colinblack.com.au

This article was augmented and adapted from the ‘Curator’s Statement’ associated with the 2010 Frequency Oz: An On Air Festival of Australian Radio Art which was broadcast on London’s Resonance 104.4fm during September and October 2010.
World Music Days in Sydney, Australia
Sydney, Australia hosted the ISCM World New Music Days Festival from 30 April to 9 May 2010. This heralds the first time in the 88-year history of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) that the prestigious event has been held in the Southern Hemisphere. It was also the largest festival of contemporary music ever held in Australia.

Photos by Bridget Elliott and Emily Sandrussi.
The ISCM World New Music Days
Festival Reports

Report no. 1

Jeannie Marsh, Australia

Okay, let’s make it clear at the start: I was not a delegate, and this was my first ISCM World New Music Days. However, as an Australian singer who has been a passionate performer and promoter of new music for 20 years, it was impossible to resist this opportunity to hear new music from around the world, experience an event I have heard so much about over the years, meet fellow enthusiasts, and support the organisers of this historic first Southern Hemisphere event. So, I flew up from Melbourne, attended almost every concert, and had a ball!

Matthew Hindson was a perfect choice for Artistic Director, bringing to this daunting task his huge knowledge, enthusiasm and experience as composer, educator, organiser, and promoter of new music. There was also a productive collaboration between major music organisations: the Australian Music Centre, ABC Classic FM, Sydney Conservatorium of Music, and the Aurora Festival. This ensured that there was: an interesting mix of excellent venues, both in the city centre, and in arts centres in the West of Sydney; brilliant, exemplary contribution and coverage from our national broadcaster (ABC Classic FM); and exciting young student ensembles performing in many concerts. There was also a good mix of some of Australia’s most distinguished ensembles and soloists (with Ensemble Offspring doing sterling work as ensemble-in-residence), and two well-chosen international ensembles (from Belgium and New Zealand). I found the broad mixture of musical styles most stimulating, allowing me to sample recent works from composers young and old, from around the world. I expect that international visitors also appreciated the opportunity to hear the strong selection of Australian music on offer. Events ran smoothly, and there was a very friendly, efficient vibe, allowing us to sit back and concentrate on the music, or get involved in lively artistic discussions with fellow participants. I was also lucky to attend the final General Assembly as an observer, and it was inspiring to see this in action – composers from around the world keeping this collegiate event going for almost 100 years, working to provide opportunities for new work to be heard.

The festival began with an excellent curtain-raiser of two short films. In *Jeux d’Enfants* Thomas Bensdorp (Netherlands) created a witty and moving re-imagining of a home-movie of music-making from the 1940s. Replacing the sounds of the Debussy piano duet that the two women on screen were playing, the new soundtrack took us to somewhere totally different, and yet strangely appropriate.

The opening concert appropriately consisted of all ISCM works. In the five movements of *Jinx* Ivan Brkljacic (Serbia) told a tale that is at the core of many creative projects (including organising international new music festivals, I presume): 1) enthusiasm, 2) idea, 3) problem, 4) process, 5)
hope. This work was an excellent choice to launch the festival, taking us from driving rhythmic momentum to slower, focused energy. Another stand-out work for me was *Song for Piano and Ensemble* by Svend Hvidtfelt Nielsen (Denmark). Haunting violin solos (beautifully played by a member of the Sydney Conservatorium Modern Music Ensemble) and simple rising melodic lines gave way to a sudden freefall into a highly dramatic section. A moving work that I immediately wanted to hear again.

Saturday was spent at a beautiful arts centre in Western Sydney. The afternoon concert by local ensemble Fisher’s Ghost Youth Orchestra was notable for three dynamic, well-crafted works by music students Jonathan Bekes, Angela Martens, and Vincent Surjadinata, showing the talents of a new generation of Australian composers. Those of us who teach young composers are constantly bowled over by their bubbling creativity, and here it was again!

*Piano Burning* by Annea Lockwood (New Zealand/USA) is something of an “avant-garde classic” that has been staged around the world for over 40 years, but it was new to me. The piano (crowned by cheery balloons that evoked happy celebrations from the life of the old instrument) had been placed in a superb location on the raised rim of a large courtyard, surrounded by sweeping lawns, with a ring of tall gum trees beyond. Once the piano was set on fire, the visual effect was strangely beautiful, with the wisps of smoke, slowing-building orange and blue flames, and gradually-revealed innards of the instrument, framed against the sunset. It was a still, balmy evening, with flocks of chattering parrots and cockatoos providing the soundtrack. And yet this felt like a guilty pleasure, on many levels. Apart from the predictable unease felt by musicians watching an instrument being silenced forever, there was another element feeding into my mixture of emotions. In the Summer of 2009 my home city of Melbourne experienced fire at its most terrifying, with catastrophic bushfires surrounding our city, destroying lives and landscape. Seeing the piano burning made me think of treasured possessions, forests, people, violently destroyed. Given all that, I’m still not quite sure what I feel about the “musical ethics” of this event, but I’m extremely glad I was able to experience it, to make my own judgment.

The evening concert by The Electric Trio was intriguing, showing the focused commitment of three young musicians who are driving the creation of repertoire for electric guitar, electric bass guitar, and drumkit, to take its place beside other new art music in the concert hall. Highlights for me were the driving energy of *Shifting Weight Machine Like* by Joe Manton (Australia), the rich and varied drumkit work throughout, and the revelation of hearing Sonata for Flute and Piano by Carl Vine (Australia) effectively arranged for such a different ensemble.

Sunday was also spent out of town, in another delightful arts centre. It was great to experience the combination of precision and exuberance in the concert presented by Topology ensemble. Humour was a welcome ingredient in their music, and *Voice Portraits* by Robert Davidson (Australia) explored musical and dramatic possibilities within recorded speeches with wit and inventiveness (making me think of Robert Ashley). Next up was Continuum Sax with music for saxophone quartet, in a range of contrasting styles. The strong lines of *Far Away* by Elena Firsova (Russia) stood out for me.

Monday was a huge day, beginning with a concert by the Sydney Conservatorium
Saxophone Orchestra. This included the vibrant electro-acoustic piece *Flurry* by Ed Martin (USA), and one of my festival highlights: *Duodecet I and II* by Clare Loveday (South Africa). This composer truly embraced the physicality of 15 saxophones, with powerful bass lines underpinning big, fat, rhythmic, vigorous, lyrical sounds, and changing textures – totally exhilarating! A short walk to the headquarters of the Australian Music Centre led us far away from massed saxophones in a big hall, to an intimate piano recital in a small space. There was something special about being here in the heart of the AMC (with amazing views of Sydney Harbour), surrounded by all those scores and recordings of Australian music, hearing Kerry Yong play four ISCM works from around the world. All the works made an impact, and *Awakening* by Dusan Bavdek (Slovenia) impressed with its combination of fragility and strength, flowing and bell-like sounds. A fortifying drink was needed before walking back and plunging into another piano concert: a huge, uncompromising program, full of variety, presented by pianists from the Conservatorium. This was a fine opportunity to hear recent works by greats such as Elliot Carter and David Del Tredici (USA), interspersed with works by composers whose works were new to me, such as *And Another* by Je Don Oh (Korea) in a compelling performance, with violent chords creating intense drama. We ended the day with Ensemble Offspring, hearing the virtuosity and energy that are the hallmarks of this group. I find it difficult to engage with music that focuses on exploring timbre (hey, I’m a singer!) and much of this program fell into this category, but I was excited by the dynamic rhythmic world of *Burn* by Jeffrey Ryan (Canada).

The first concert on Tuesday was a festival highlight for me: 21 piano miniatures, each no more than two pages long, each created in just one day, and performed by 21 Conservatorium student pianists. A brilliant idea, with composers from around the world responding to the call, resulting in a fascinating kaleidoscope of works, and students experiencing the thrill of performing a premiere. The programming was excellent, with the music moving from an explosive start (Lachlan Hughes, Australia), through numerous styles including subverted *Für Elise* (Daniel Moriera, Brazil), swaying ostinato patterns (Hiroki Tsuromoto, Japan), ragtime feel (Anthony Moles, Australia), music-theatre with ping-pong balls (Eva Rotenberg, Denmark), to a heartbreakingly simple, pensive ending (Part Uusberg, Estonia). A delight from start to finish.

Ensemble Offspring returned for a concert of electro-acoustic music which I found generally underwhelming, with the exception of the engaging material of *Isolate* by Ivan Zavada (Australia/Canada). The day ended with a cello recital, dominated by an astonishing solo performance by Timo-Veikko Valve of *YTA III* by Esa-Pekka Salonen (Finland) – what a tour-de-force! The coherent argument of *Die liebe Farbe* (Herman Vogt, Norway), and the exuberant momentum of *Race Against Time* (John Peterson, Australia) were also memorable.

On Wednesday I attended two of the four concerts on offer: Match Percussion with Michael Duke (saxophone) was extremely enjoyable, full of interesting textures, rhythms, and instrumental interplay, plus the Latin groove of *Snapdragon* by Miriama Young (New Zealand) to lift the spirits. This set me up perfectly for the next concert, another of my festival highlights: recent music for big band, performed by Sydney
Conservatorium Big Band. I am not very familiar with this area of repertoire, and this night convinced me that I must rectify this, because there is obviously fascinating music to be discovered here! The composers had explored the possibilities of ensemble and solo writing with great inventiveness, producing gutsy, complex material that exploited the natural strengths of the instruments to the full. In particular, Etude 125 by Antun Tomislav Saban (Croatia) cleared out my ears with exciting harmonies, solos, and a powerful climax.

Thursday saw us travelling outside the city centre again, for the third concert by Ensemble Offspring. A stand-out work here for me was Two Sides by Fabian Svensson (Sweden), using the simple but effective device of dividing the ensemble into two “competing” sides. The music built irresistibly in intensity and energy, as ideas were hurled between the groups, finally reaching a manic conclusion. In the evening Synergy Percussion ensemble performed a mesmerising program focused on Steve Reich (USA).

The three concerts on Friday were all very different, beginning with a string ensemble featuring top young artists. Lady Frere, String Quartet No. 5 by Kristian Blak (Faroe Islands) made a strong impact with South African-inspired melodies, and Mahler-Bilder by Hubert Stupnner (Italy) was a robust re-invention of Mahlerian material, revealing familiar worlds in new lights. The next concert was yet another festival highlight: the Sydney Children's Choir, performing mainly Australian works. Okay, so we all know that children's choirs have their own magic, but the combination of outstanding performance and communication skills, unbounded enthusiasm, and vibrant music was compelling. The Australian classic Dawn Canticle (Ross Edwards) was given a whole new level with a

Mongolian throat singer performing the role usually played by didgeriju. The theatrical power of Cane Cutter's Lament (Stephen Leek, Australia), and ringing tones of Carmen Fratrum Arvalium (Hildigunnur Runarsdottir, Iceland), were unforgettable. The final concert on Friday was a welcome one for Australians, as it provided a rare opportunity for us to hear the music of our Pacific neighbour New Zealand (although we are so close, there is surprisingly little exchange of new music between the countries). NZ Trio performed mainly music from their homeland, with Jack Body's irresistibly vigorous Fire in the Belly, and Chris Cree Brown's lively The Triumvirate being stand-outs.

On Saturday we heard a concert of four Australian string quartets (by Carl Vine, Ross Edwards, Ian Munro, Peter Sculthorpe) performed by the Goldner String Quartet. There were great pleasures to be had in each of the works, with the ecstatic finale to Sculthorpe’s String Quartet No. 17 providing a fitting end to the event. From there we moved to the totally different sound-world of the Spectra Ensemble, and it was great to have the opportunity (rare for Australians!) to see and hear this Belgian group live. Their intricate, intense work was most effective for me in SPECTRA by Bert Van Herck (Belgium) in which sensitive sounds are shaped and energised, and in D'un Reve Party by Bruno Mantovani (France), with its jazzy, funky shadows.

Unfortunately I had to return home, and so missed the Sydney Chamber Choir concert on Sunday, and it was a shame that I had to miss a couple of other concerts during the week. However, I went home replete with new sounds, new ideas, new connections with composers and performers, and the satisfaction and pride of knowing that I had been part of an historic event: the
first ISCM World New Music Days to take place in Australia. And not just any old event – this was clearly a stimulating, inspiring, successful festival of new music, with many riches to explore, and many juicy artistic arguments to be had. Congratulations and thanks to all those heroes who conceived it and organised it so well!

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**Report no. 2**

Joshua Chan, Hong Kong

The ISCM World New Music Days festival was successfully held from 30th April to 9th May 2010 in Sydney, Australia. It was the first time in the history of ISCM that a festival was ever held in the Southern Hemisphere. Composers and delegates from over 50 countries had a great time experiencing Australia as well as new music. Incorporating the 2010 Aurora Festival, the ISCM festival 2010 was amazingly put together within a relatively short preparation time by several influential organisations: Australian Music Centre, Sydney Conservatorium of Music, Australian Broadcasting Corporation and other venues presenters, with Matthew Hindson being the Artistic Director. It was one of the best ISCM festivals I have ever attended in term of programming, concert venue and presentation, performance standard, hospitality, environment of the host city, and ISCM spirit, etc.

I encountered the term Australian Music and visited the Australian Music Centre the first time in 1984. It was hard at that time for an undergraduate like me to be able to tell exactly what aspects of a piece by Richard Meale sound Australian, for example. Not until after years of studies of the music by Anne Boyd, Martin Wesley-Smith, Carl Vine, etc, and by attending ACL festivals in which Australian pieces were presented, I was able to formulate some basic ideas. The ISCM WNMD 2010 further reinforced my understanding in this subject, especially when comparing its concerts with those of Grenzenlos (ISCM WMD) held in Stuttgart in 2006. In the opening ceremony of this Sydney festival, Matthew Hindson asked the guests whether there is a thing called Australian Music. I would definitely say yes, probably because I am someone who grew up in the Asia-Pacific region and I have a close sense of connection with the region’s musics and the programming of this festival, which has a very good selection of Australian compositions as well as other accessible, shorter ISCM pieces of diversified styles.

Some of the festival’s concerts were held in the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and performed by its people (e.g., Modern Music Ensemble, Saxophone Orchestra, Big Band, Keyboard staff and students, etc.). The facilities of the Sydney Conservatorium today are much more impressive than those in the 1980s. Each concert venue is well constructed with world-class acoustics, modern interior and comfortable seats. The very first event of the festival, called ‘Sound Installation in Concert’, was held very effectively in its Recital Hall East on 30th April. Koji Nakano’s *Unspoken Voices – Unbroken Spirits* uses gradual changing video images to match the sounds of his Thai gamelan music, while Thomas Bensdorp, in his *Jeux d’Enfants*, uses an original soundtrack of modern sounds to go with the movement of the four hands on a piano keyboard in a black-and-white movie of Johann Hunningher of 1945. What an interesting event in a nice venue to begin the festival! Match Percussion and Michael Duke presented 6 pieces in the same venue a few days later. The sounds were also very satisfactory, especially in
John Kennedy’s *First Deconstruction (in Plastic)* which alludes to John Cage’s *First Construction (in Metal)*. Percussionists Daryl Pratt and Alison Pratt did a great job producing wonderful sounds and rhythms on many plastic objects. In the same evening, the multi-storey space outside the 3 recital halls even became a nice experimental ground for Johannes Sistermanns’s sound installation project *SoundPlastic* which connects different parts of the Conservatorium’s interior with long plastic wrappers and surprises the people who walk into the building without knowing where the sounds come from.

Four other venues in Western Sydney have also presented some of the events. The Campbelltown Arts Centre, together with the mayor of Campbelltown, greeted the delegates on 1st May. Performed in the open space outside the Centre, Annea Lockwood’s *Burning Piano* (part of her *Piano Transplants*) was the highlight of the evening. Starting at 5:15 pm, it took more than 2 hours for a piano to be completely burned out. While waiting for a long time desperately to hear the sounds of the broken strings, the audience and firemen witnessed how the flame grew from gentle to violent while the sunset gradually took place. The concert at 8 pm by The Electric Trio (of electric guitar, bass guitar and drum kit) is a good attempt to create ‘music of our time’ and an example of great variety of ISCM music today, although Joe Manton’s arrangement of Carl Vine’s Sonata for Flute and Piano does not present much timbral variety. On 8th May, the Centre presented two high profile concerts featuring the distinguished Goldner String Quartet and Spectra Ensemble (Belgium), respectively. Four string quartets by famous Australian composers of different generations were played with great precision and beautiful tone colours in the former, while five dramatic European pieces were presented with expressive energy in the latter. Among these 2 programmes, Bruno Mantovaní’s *D’un Reve Parti* is the most impressive piece. Its rhythmic texture that articulates a chord progression is so fascinating and unusual that I would immediately label the piece as truly new music of the 21st century.

Two concerts were held in the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre, Penrith on 2nd May. Andrián Pertout’s *Riesenschritte* was the most striking pieces in the first concert which was performed by the Queensland group Topology. Pertout’s piece and the 4 pieces performed by Continuum Sax in the second concert are the first of a series of many saxophone pieces presented in the festival, which is another special programming feature of ISCM 2010. Emilio Mendoza’s audio visual installation *Sin-Cadenas. TUBE*, performed between 2 concerts by the composer and a lady on a couch in the common area, is another music-and-politics work, which comments on the everyday life under the leadership of the Chávez government.

One main concept of the Aurora Festival is to allow the Parramatta River, which runs through the middle of Sydney from West to East, spread out wonderful music to other parts of the city. This meaningful idea was symbolically manifested in the afternoon concert ‘The Young and the Restless’ performed by Ensemble Offspring on the 6th May in the Lennox Theatre of the Parramatta Riverside Theatres. I would say four out of the seven pieces presented in this concert are superb - all written by composers under the age of 35. Stephen Thorsson transforms such simple sounds as tuning the instruments and other quotations into some modernist gestures
with great variety and fast figurations in his *Shore Leave*. Nicolas Tzortzis’s *Mnésique* is another piece of restless energy and excitement. Alex Pozniak explores various ways of producing unusual but coherent sounds on his solo cello piece *Mercurial*. Fabian Svensson’s *Two Sides* divides the ensemble into 2 groups: piano, bass clarinet and cello start playing lower notes, while piccolo, vibraphone and violin carry high notes. As the piece develops, the gradual overlapping of the 2 groups produces amazing musical results. Two concerts were held simultaneously in the evening in the Blacktown Arts Centre and City Recital Hall, respectively. Delegates have to make a difficult choice between the two most influential Australian ensembles today: The Song Company and Synergy Percussion.

The Verbrugghen Hall of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music seems to be an ideal venue for showcasing the powerful performances of its Saxophone Orchestra and Big Band on 3rd May and 5th May, respectively. The nature reverberation of the hall works very well in Jane O’Leary’s effective piece *Riverrun* which allows melodies to come out from the ever-changing texture of clusters produced on 4 saxophones. In one interesting section of Tim Davies’s full big band piece *Conceivilization*, a saxophone is paired up with a trumpet as a duet. This powerful piece also features semitone clusters in sustained chords. One of the softer pieces is *SoundBox* written and performed by Katia Beaugeais herself on a solo saxophone. Subsequently given the ISCM Young Composer Award 2010, this piece highlights ample performing techniques such as circular breathing, slap tonguing, harmonics and subtone.

Surprisingly, even the office of the Australian Music Centre, located in the famous tourism area The Rocks, was able to stage a concert called ‘My Own Private Keyboard’ on 3rd May. Pianist Kerry Yong gave the Australian premieres of four ISCM pieces in an intimate setting right after a lunch reception. The following concert held in Sydney Conservatorium 2 hours later also featured the piano with an unmistakable title ‘88 Keys’. One common feature among these 2 concerts is the concentration on pitch organisation. One would hear sounds constructed around certain chords or scales, e.g. pc set [0148] in Lauri Kilpio’s *La mer, la brume et le soleil* and whole-tone scale in Jakub Polaczyk’s *Visions from Light*. It was remarkable that pianist Natalia Sheludiakova performed Einojuhani Rautavara’s *Fouco* by memory. Daniel Herscovitch gave a marvellous performance of the demanding Elliot Carter piece *2 Thoughts about the Piano* which is loud and fast throughout. Carl Vine’s Sonata for Four Hands, one of the commissioned pieces to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, seems to be a bit too long and redundant at the end, probably because it is the last piece of a long programme of 8 piano works without an intermission.

Like the saxophone, piano is a favourite instrument in this festival’s programming. Kerry Yong gave another piano recital in Sydney Conservatorium on 5th May. The most innovative piece in this concert is Peter Ablinger’s *Mother Theresa*, Morton Feldman and *Billie Holiday*, in which the piano accompanies voice excerpts of a celebrity recorded in the 1950s. It is amazing to notice the perfect synchronisation between the piano and the tape. The special concert ‘Momentary Pleasures’ featuring 21 short piano solo works was effectively performed in turn by a panel of student pianists in the Eugene Goossens Hall of ABC Centre, Ultimo on 4th May. The interesting idea of asking composers to
produce short pieces in just one day and present all these momentary creations in one concert would probably be unthinkable last century. But it seems to make much sense today, because it reflects the meanings of everyday life for many people in our modern age. Among the 21 pieces, Daniel Moreira’s *Rhythmic Etude 4* and Eva Rotenberg’s *A Perfect Pitch 1* are the most memorable. The former interestingly alters the materials of Beethoven’s *Für Elise*, while the latter gives the pianist an object out of his control – a ping-pong, the bouncing of which is expected to produce different results in each performance.

Besides this concert, the Eugene Goossens Hall of ABC Centre has also staged 5 other concerts. On 4th May, Ensemble Offspring performed a stunning program within a context of electroacoustic exploration. The concert curator Ivan Zavada’s beautiful premiere *Isolate Quintet* shows not only multiple layers of a simple tune, but strong and unusual reverberation which cuts off the sharp attacks in the spectrum envelop of the instrumental sounds. Niel Rønsholdt’s *Die Wanderin* surprises the audience with pre-recorded sounds of walking steps of different speeds and blinking visual images with sudden moments of blackout and silence.

On 7th May, young musicians of the Sydney Symphony Fellows performed 5 pieces with subtle expression and perfect techniques. Violinist Claire Herrick’s performance in Kristian Blak’s *Lady Frere, String Quartet No.5* is the most outstanding. Her high notes and harmonics complement very well the lyrical lines of the second violin in this beautiful polytonal piece. Santa Ratniece’s *Alveoles* is another peaceful piece that uses strings to describe different colours and flavours.

One most striking feature of this festival is the presence of a radio presenter who also acts as the MC on stage in almost every concert. Having the concerts recorded live and broadcast on ABC Classic FM and its special festival digital radio station ABC ISCM New Music is such a clever move that maximises the impact of the festival within the limited resources of multiple organisers. The radio presenter’s introduction of the composition and musician prior to the performance of each piece is not just necessary for the radio listeners, but very helpful for the live audience as well. Special commendation should be given to presenter/composer Julian Day, whose introductions and comments were delivered so precisely and professionally with style, humor, and confidence. In the reception held in the ABC Centre on 3rd May, the Manager of ABC Classic FM Richard Buckham told the visitors that radio broadcast has always been an important means of communication among fellow Australians who live and spread out in such a vast piece of continental land. No wonder ABC is able to recruit so many talented people and have played such an important role in this festival. On the other hand, contemporary music is well known for its innovation which may surprise the listener in many ways; pieces which feature unexpected long silence, extremely soft sounds, body gestures and visual elements may not be suitable for radio broadcast because the listener can’t see the actual performance. In other words, concert producers may not be totally free in selecting pieces if the concerts would be broadcast subsequently. But to a certain extent, this ‘drawback’ may have turned into an advantage for this festival, because most selected pieces end up being dramatic, exciting and more accessible, as opposed to those featuring noise and meditation.

Another thing that distinguishes this festival with other ISCM WNMDs is
the absence of an orchestral concert, which is largely due to the fact that the orchestras were not able to schedule any concert with the given advanced booking time. However, the energy usually associated with orchestral music was not missing during the festival. Fellow composers and delegates would agree with me that we could feel the vigorous energy of the city and its people immediately after we arrived in Sydney downtown. Economic bloom is very apparent everywhere, with many restaurants, shops and entertainment centres full of people. The city’s international population shows a great sense of confidence and enthusiasm in whatever they do. The high performance standard of the Australian musicians may be regarded as a good example of showcasing the promising economy and spirit of the country. It was just a great experience to share the pride of the local people who organised this festival.

The sessions of the ISCM General Assembly were conducted very efficiently by the ISCM President, John Davis, who is also the key figure in making this Sydney festival possible – by lobbying successfully the support of Matthew Hindson, Kim Walker, Richard Buckham and other presenters and sponsors. Decisions on most items of ISCM business were made smoothly without much argument this time, even though John Davis and members of the ISCM Executive Committee had allowed ample time and urged everyone for more discussion. Joji Yuasa and Milton Babbit were named the ISCM Honorary Members. Special guests were invited to present topics in royalties collection, radio broadcast, music documentation centre and music promotion. One of the sessions was turned into an open forum called ‘Building a New Music Centre’ held in Studio 21 of the ABC Centre.

Moderated by John Crawford, this great sharing session was well attended by a keen audience. Paul Steenhuisen mentioned how electroacoustic music has become Canada’s identity for modern music. George Kentros mentioned the situation of presenting electronic music on radio stations in Sweden. Johannes Sistermanns described the recent situation in Germany. Peter Swinnen commented on the impact on modern music while Europe is shifting its economic model in recent years. Emilio Mendoza raised the concern of composers being isolated in Venezuela today. Kate Moore pointed out that composers shall see themselves as part of the society. Jelle Dierickx urged composers to treat the audience nicely, etc.

Special notes of thanks shall be given to the staff of the Australian Music Centre and various co-ordinators of the festival, especially Philippa Horn, who had provided good documentation, clear instructions and perfect logistic arrangements for the visiting delegates and composers. The design and physical dimensions of the festival booklet are also nice and handy.

**Report no. 3**

**Bruno De Cat, Wallonie-Brussels**

The World New Music Days 2010 (though it was only the second ISCM festival I had the chance to attend) will stay in my mind as a very special edition of this world event. One that counted numbers of ‘premieres’ in many other fields than music, and a festival during which one could rejoice of the successes and evolution of the ISCM, an association that proved in its history that it is capable of making dreams come true.
As a Belgium delegate for the French speaking part of the country (‘Communauté Française Wallonie-Bruxelles’, named for short as ‘Wallonia’), I was happy to notice the presence of many compatriots, among whom the Spectra Ensemble, and the famous ex-pat Roland Peelman, artistic director of The Song Company.

“A bloody long way to go”

As frequently underlined, this was the very first time in history the ISCM festival, showcase of music excellence, was taking place in the Southern Hemisphere, in more than eighty years of existence. That more than the majority of member sections made the trip to Sydney (39 sections represented out of 52) proved the vitality of the organisation. Moreover it fostered a kind of ‘Copernican revolution’ in the minds of the European participants, who could experience the longer distance often travelled by Australian, Asian, South-African and South American members to come over to Europe, as our President, John Davis who dispensed all necessary advices for a successful trip to Australia.

Features of the 2010 festival:

The ISCM WNMD within the frame of the Aurora Festival

The eighty-first ISCM festival took place within the frame of the award-winning Aurora Festival, a Western Sydney biennale that is mainly dedicated to the music of living Australian composers, directed by Matthew Hindson. This year was thus a fantastic opportunity to open it to the world, and make the audience discover what’s being accomplished abroad.

In less than two years, the organisers managed to settle a versatile program for a ten days showcase under the name of ‘Living composers, living performers, living music’, taking place in nine different venues, five of which being in the outskirts of Sydney.

Throughout the twenty-four concerts in the festival, the pieces stemming from the call for works were mingled with other compositions, among which many world premieres by Australian composers. After the Aboriginal welcome (which despite the interesting music and explanations turned out to resemble a bit to a tourist attraction), the festival took off at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, placed next to the amazing botanical garden.

Concerts in the suburbs

I enjoyed being hosted at many concerts in the suburbs of Western Sydney, which left me with a strong memory of their different ambiences, far away from downtown Sydney. First being the Campbelltown Arts Centre, which became very familiar to everybody because of the frequency of the concerts held there, and of course with the strong impression left by the Piano Burning at dusk, and people from the neighbourhood came out to see what was going on. This venue was very inspiring as a decentralised place for culture outside the city centre, with its exhibitions and the Japanese garden. In Penrith, Parramatta, Blacktown and Glenbrook (at the foot of the Blue Mountains), gave a different atmosphere to each of these cultural centres, contributing their own fingerprint to the music performed.

The partnership with the radio and the Conservatory

One of the outstanding features of the festival was the partnership with ABC Classic FM. Almost all of the music performed was broadcast on the radio and available on the festival’s digital radio station (among which were a large number of “live” recordings). The festival
radio website, especially created for this occasion, allowed the entire world to join in to the event. With the organisation of six concerts and three sessions of the General Assembly (among which a panel discussion) at the ABC Ultimo Centre, it felt there almost like home. The radio presenters who introduced the live concerts (with Erik Griswold’s unforgettable jingle as announcement for the public that the recording was beginning) brought a special touch to the festival as well as a unique opportunity to inform each delegate of what was happening in his/her country.

Also a very important partner of the festival, was the almost 100 years old, Sydney Conservatorium of Music, which was a good place to meet with the general public, and the musicians. All the concerts turned out to be sold out, showing an important appeal to the public. As it was the case in Campbelltown, the sound installations (among which Johannes Sistermann’s well integrated work Soundplastic) where available on permanent display for the time and attention they deserved, which is always a difficult part of the festival to achieve for the WNMD festival managers.

Living composers, living performers, living music

Once considered beyond its simplicity and the purpose of the existing biennale, it seems to me that the tautological theme of the festival was meant to underline the fact that the most important thing about new music, regardless of differences in styles, idioms, etc. is that, though being composed and performed now, it is not immediate (yet it is vital) to experience it as living art.

For the great majority of us, this festival was the opportunity to be confronted in a short period of time by the music of a large number of Australian composers, whose different orientations showed a great variety of styles. Indeed, the ‘classical’ manner of Peter Sculthorpe, Carl Vine and Ian Munro appeared to be light-years away from the obsession-like realm of Alex Pozniak, or the raw sound productions of Bruce Crossman. I particularly liked the personal and evocative language of Ross Edwards, the inventive mixed pieces of Kate Moore and of Chris Tonkin, Lachlan Skipworth’s refined use of the shakuhachi, as well as the performance of Katia Beaugeais, prize winner of the IAMIC – ISCM Young Composer Award, for her fantastic SoundBox.

In the absence of symphonic orchestras, a lot of ensembles were present at the festival, among which several vocal and wind ensembles. The huge work achieved by Ensemble Offspring, the energy and boldness of Chronology Arts, the outstanding performances of The Song Company and of Continuum Sax as well as the much lauded concert of the Spectra Ensemble will remain with me as the highlights of the 2010 festival. I also loved the presence of children and students, with performances of the Sydney Children’s Choir (led by Lyn Williams), the piano students (Momentary Pleasures), and the Conservatorium Saxophone Orchestra and Big Band.

The dominant impression given by the music was its diversity. Also, humour appeared to me to be a salient feature of this year’s festival, especially in Thomas Bensdorp’s video piece jeux d’enfants (based on Bizet’s piano pieces), Robert Davidson’s Voice Portraits (performed by Topology), John Kennedy’s Deconstruction I (performed by Match Percussion), Eva Rotenberg’s short momentary pleasure A Perfect Pitch, and Paul Steenhuisen’s Copralite Analysis. All these pieces brought something new to the music, and provoked special reactions within the audience.
As raised during a session of the General Assembly, the question of the choice of the music stemming from the call for works made by some ensembles were not convincing and addressed the question of the rules of procedure for choosing the pieces.

Another point that could be discussed is the place dedicated to the radiophonic and video pieces and the installations, several of which could not be heard or seen in the proper environment.

Throughout the festival, the organisational aspects were very well managed by the AMC crew, who were present on a 100% basis and contributed to the success of the whole enterprise.

Panel discussions and visit to AMC

The panel discussion hosted at the ABC’s Ultimo Centre delivered an interesting debate around the present situation for new music and its relation to the public institutions. As underlined by John Crawford, the manager of ABC Classic FM, the Australian issue of creating a ‘sophisticated culture’ where there was none before, as well as the geographical situation of the country, brought another way of experiencing the music life, which seems to be well prepared to face the challenges of the present times. Times where, according to a musician present at the debate, the possibility to realise one’s dreams has never been so important.

A private concert at the AMC gave the opportunity for all delegates to visit the Centre, with its impressive library, and to understand its way of functioning.

Conclusion

If diversity and discoveries were the key words of this 2010 edition of the ISCM festival, the fantastic partnership settled for this occasion with ABC Classic FM, the venues in the suburbs and the Sydney Conservatorium of Music appeared as a central contribution to its success. Such involvement shows the Australian way of addressing the key issues of new music, and the fact that so many delegates made the trip so far away is a sign of the faith in the ISCM organisation, as well as of the stability it has reached.

The General Assembly meetings and the delegates’ activities

Except for two sessions that were organised respectively in Parramatta and in Campbelltown, the General Assembly’s meetings took place at the ABC Ultimo Centre. The first one was introduced by Stephen Adams and John Crawford, producers, with a traditional word of respect to the Aboriginal people.

The 2010 General Assembly inaugurated the endorsement of the ISCM new statutes. Among other things, the main changes concern firstly the extension of the full membership to regions (Flanders being the very first one, which is then also part of Belgium’s history!). Secondly, a new set of rules and procedures has been adopted for the Call for works, aiming at reaching a better balanced (and fair) overall selection of pieces.

Also, a new board was (re)elected, which was the opportunity to understand some of the key issues of our association as well as to hear all the candidates describe the way they see the ISCM and how they wish to be active in it. By its choice among the candidates, the General Assembly opted for continuity.
Report no. 4
ISCM World New Music Days 2009
September 24 - October 4, 2009
Visby, Växjö, and Göteborg, Sweden

Stephen Lias, Texas, USA

As I sit down to write a report on the 2009 ISCM World New Music Days festival, I realise once again, what an unmanageable task it really is. Each year, this lengthy, varied, and prestigious new music event is held in a different location around the world, and the 2009 installment was impressively hosted by three cities in Sweden: Visby, Växjö, and Göteborg. This is my third year attending this festival (having been in Hong Kong and Vilnius in the previous two years), so, while I am still relatively new to the ‘family’, I have gained a modicum of perspective from which to view things. Although written as an official report, this account is, by necessity, only an individual perspective of an extremely multi-faceted event.

To get a clear idea of the scope of this festival, many such accounts would be needed, and surely each would show a unique, but equally true, experience.

I’ll begin with a ‘by the numbers’ summary. By my calculation, this eleven-day festival in three cities included 42 concerts, 5 seminars, 25 sound art installations, 44 separate venues, hundreds of performances, and countless individual composers, performers, and other participants. Added to this were 15 hours of general assembly meetings with 75 delegates representing about 50 nations and arts organisations from all over the globe. It was, in every respect, an incredibly large undertaking which fully lived up to the scope and diversity that has come to be expected of the ISCM World New Music Days.

Much of the credit for this success belongs to the organisers, Magnus Lemark, Ramon Anthin, Björn W. Stålne, Thomas Liljeholm, and Nils Wiklander. Their efforts and organisation over the six years of planning was evident at every turn, from the seamless integration of local media, to the visually striking publicity that seemed to be displayed everywhere we looked. As a delegate I felt extremely well looked-after by the exceptional accommodations, the well-organised transfer between venues, and cities, and the friendly staff who answered all our questions and kept us in line while always smiling.

Ultimately, though, the World Music Days festival is about music, and I’m pleased to report that Sweden did not disappoint in this area either. I attended as many of the events as schedule and stamina would allow. Even though there were some that I missed, I still heard over 125 new works performed by an impressive array of highly skilled and well-prepared performers and ensembles ranging from solo instrumentalists, up to symphony and full-scale opera. Indeed, I repeatedly found myself in conversation with other composers and delegates about the impressive level of commitment and artistic mastery seen in the performers.

My preference as a listener is somewhat eclectic, and I found the inclusive nature of the programming very commendable and quite in keeping with both the festival theme (‘Listen to the World’), and the values of ISCM which aims for musical diversity and a plurality of styles, genres, or media. In some cases, the juxtaposition of approaches was quite striking as in one concert where works for violin, trombone, and percussion shared the program with a work for bowl, candles, light sensors, and Bluetooth transmitter. In other cases it was the contrast between the setting and the content that was unique, as was the
case when we listened to 21st century works on a 18th century organ in a 14th century church on the island of Gotland. Of course, diversity was also amply demonstrated through style and genre. Bearing in mind the hundreds of excellent and thought-provoking works that were programmed, I am somewhat reluctant to single out individual works, but as I have framed this report deliberately as a personal viewpoint, I hope I may venture to list (in no specific order) some of the pieces that I found particularly memorable.

- The Malmö Symphony Orchestra gave a gripping world premiere of *evergreen* by Paula af Malmborg Ward (a native of Göteborg, Sweden). The unusual use of the choir, both spatially and dramatically, gave this fascinating piece a very unique quality.

- *Dancing* by Ukrainian composer Sergey Zazhytko displayed a sense of reckless fun with its use of boogie-woogie and implications of polytonality.

- The French composer François Sarhan had the audience captivated with *Lear Summaries*. This was partially due to the enthusiastically theatrical presentation of the VOX Vocal Quartet, coupled with the unique surroundings (the Gotland Museum) and the unconventional concert approach (the audience moving from room to room hearing sections of this work interspersed with others).

- Two choral works from New Zealand particularly impressed me – Carol Shortis’s *Tangi* included exceptional use of the choral ensemble, both in terms of vowel sounds, and placement of soloists. *Hoquetus Sanctus* by Pepe Becker had a shimmering density to it with long soaring lines and the fragile sound of tapping stones.

- Rarely have I heard such ferocity in a piece as was found in Hong Kong composer Pui-Shan Cheung’s *The Dragon* for saxophone quartet. In the eerily-lit museum where it was performed, it had much the same effect as being in a blind alley with a ferocious animal – no doubt this was her intent.

- Swedish composer Rolf Martinsson’s *Open Mind* provided a dynamic finale to the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra’s concert and showed an impressive command of the nuances of orchestral writing.

- *The Horses of Saint Mark* by Serbian composer Isidora Žebeljan, performed by the Göteborg Symphony Orchestra, was filled with energy, emotion, and humor.

- Yannis Kyriakides’s piece *mnemonist S.* (the selected piece from The Netherlands) was one of the most memorable of the festival. I was enthralled by his use of mixed meters and minimalism to accompany a captivating and clever text (displayed as video).

- *Ora* by Iceland’s Áskell Másson, in addition to being a very dynamic and effective piece, also provided a great vehicle to showcase the percussion by putting them in front of the orchestra, rather than behind.

- Another Swedish work that generated a lot of discussion was Anders Hillborg’s *Peacock Tales* performed with theatrical flair and stunning virtuosity by clarinetist Martin Fröst with Musica Vitae. It was a dynamic and varied piece of music, combined with unusual lighting and choreographed movement.

- The members of the Stockholm Saxophone Quartet tackled the complex, intoxicating rhythms of Mexican composer Enrico Chapela’s piece *La Mengambrea* with incredible accuracy and commitment.
Of course, there were countless others that I enjoyed, and more beyond that that I missed, so I hope that my failure to list something here will not offend any of the other excellent composers or the countries they represent.

One thing that is particularly worth pointing out is the admirable involvement of the local audiences in these events. A special effort was obviously made by the organisers to foster this relationship. Holding a concert in a local parish church; inviting a men’s choir to sing sentimental songs between modern saxophone quartet pieces; Involving local groups to participate in the ISCM Songbook project; having a concert with dancers in a museum where children could sit on pillows on the floor; these careful choices (coupled with the remarkable publicity and live radio broadcasts) paid off in obvious ways that I hope will last far into the future. Too often this is not the case and I think it behooves ISCM to be actively fostering this sort of audience growth.

As if producing a world-class series of new music concerts were not challenge enough, the hosts also must provide for the needs of a large group of delegates, and arrange for them to have a series of general assembly meetings. This is the more personal and intimate aspect of the ISCM World Music Days, but one that is no less difficult to accomplish. Again, I have nothing but praise for the organisers in this respect. I have already mentioned the excellent lodging and transportation between cities (including a chartered flight from Visby to Växjö), but I should mention a few other things as well. The preparation of tickets, directions, schedules, etc. were all handled very well. I really appreciated the useful ‘shortcut’ pages that were provided to us at each city. These became an invaluable tool as we learned our way around, and we soon found ourselves quite dependent on them. Likewise, providing guides to take everyone to the more difficult locations was also very helpful and they were uniformly good-humored and patient with our talkative, late, and wayward delegates.

By far the most dramatic manifestation of how we were cared for was the food! Oh, the food! I will forever think of Sweden as a magical place where buffet tables of endless variety pop up at every turn and no one is made to wait more than three hours between meals. I will remember with particular fondness the sausages Ramon Anthon used to lure us to VICC, and then the wine he used to draw everyone inside. Other memorable meals included the farm on Fårö, and the Teleborg Castle in Växjö.

Along these lines, I must say that I think that one of the most valuable things about the ISCM World New Music Days is the way that the collective housing and meals foster real relationships between people. I am only in my third year at the festival (my second as a delegate), but already I have developed genuine friendships that are, in turn, leading to meaningful collaborations. Since collaboration between sections is an often-expressed priority of the ISCM, I think it is doubly important that these festivals continue be organised in such a way as to foster the social networks that lead to these collaborations.

There was a noticeably lighter tone between the general assembly meetings of this year and last year. In Vilnius, long-prepared changes in the statutes generated heated debate and some disagreement. I felt a sense that the vote on these things represented a culmination of years of work by some of the outgoing members of the
Executive Committee, and so there was an underlying seriousness to the proceedings. This year, felt more like a beginning. The executive committee had a new makeup, and the agenda items were less controversial. Issues like the definition of ‘regions’ and the best official name for the festival (it has recently been unofficially morphing into ‘World New Music Days’) were discussed, and reports were made regarding future festival locations. I was encouraged by the number of collaborating organisations we heard about. ISCM’s ability to interact with Re:New Music, ECPNM, ACL, and many other groups will be a key part of its future effectiveness in this increasingly interconnected world. We are all eager for the pending online enhancements to become realities. Certainly, electronic score and report submission, as well as an online database of works, will be very welcome improvements. In all, the assembly meetings were informative, useful, and collegial. I commend John Davis for his clear and effective leadership, and for his genuine warmth and wit.

In comparison to all of this, the drawbacks to this event were quite minor. The discrepancies in the program order between the booklet and the Swedish paper programs, while understandable, were sometimes confusing to the delegates. We frequently found ourselves consulting with one another to make sure we understood whose piece was being (or had just been) played. We all enjoyed the guided tour very much, but I wish it had happened a little later rather than the day after we arrived. This was probably unavoidable, but after five or six days of concerts, seminars, and meetings, the break would have been even more welcome.

I am probably one of the only delegates who is not an evening person, so the difficulty I had with the late-night concerts was really a fault in me, rather than the festival. Given that many days included back-to-back concerts from noon until almost midnight, I’m sure it would be impossible to avoid such late concerts and still include the required number of representative pieces. It didn’t seem to bother anyone else, though, and I felt a little sorry to have missed some excellent works (and parties) that came after my brain and body had already shut down.

Finally, I turn to the people of Sweden - particularly the three host cities. I put this last as a gesture of the honour they are owed. They welcomed us with such warmth and sincerity. While all three cities had their own character, the genuineness of the people was consistent. I look forward to my next visit to Sweden so that I may sample more of this hospitality.

And so we look to the future. The 2010 ISCM World New Music Days in Sydney is fast approaching – works are already being reviewed and travel plans being made. Visby, Växjö, and Göteborg (and Vilnius, Hong Kong, and many others) have given us yet another model of what this festival can be – an incarnation that was uniquely suited to its setting and resources. I know that Sydney will be different, but memorable in its own way. As I write this report, I am sitting in a hotel in Stockholm, still wearing the clothes I put on in Göteborg, with the echoes of this year’s festival still ringing in my ears. And yet, I confess that I am already eagerly looking forward to see what Matthew Hindson and the other Sydney organisers have in store for us. Whatever else it may be, I’m counting on it to be new, and challenging, and exciting.
ISCM Addresses
ISCM - ITALIAN SECTION
Società Italiana Musica Contemporanea
Davide Anzaghi
via Domenichino, 12
I-20149 MILANO
Italy
39-02-4694839
39-02-468157
danzagh@tin.it; simc@fastwebnet.it
www.novurgia.it

ISCM - JAPANESE SECTION
c/o Japan Society for Cont. Music
Yama-Ichi bldg 501, 2-5-7, Higashi-Gotanda, Shinagawa-ku
TOKYO 141-0022
Japan
81-3-34463506
81-3-34463507
iscm-japanese@jscm.net; gen-on@jscm.net
www.jscm.net

ISCM - KAZAKHSTAN SECTION
Association of Composers of Kazakhstan
Aktoty Raimkulova, composer, secretary
c/o Kazakh National Conservatory
Kazakhstan
370-52120939
370-52349634
vgermana@gmail.com; ruta.staneviciute@gmail.com
www.mic.lt

ISCM - KOREAN SECTION
Hyunsue Chung, General Secretary
Inho Park, President
Janghang-dong 836-7, Ilsandong-gu, Goyang-si
Republic of Korea
382-5-6047733
382-5-6047923
jcordobav@att.net.mx; cammc@att.net.mx
www.sacm.org.mx

ISCM - LUXEMBOURG SECTION
Luxembourg Society for Contemporary Music
Marcel Wengler
PO. Box 828
L-2018 LUXEMBOURG
Luxembourg
352-225821
352-225823
info@lgnm.lu; www.lgnm.lu

ISCM - LITHUANIAN SECTION
c/o Lithuanian Composers Union
President: Vytautas Germanavicius
Vice-president: Ruta Staneviciute
Board: Ruta Gaidamaviciute; Ricardas Kabelis; Rytis Mazulis; Jurgita Miezelyte; Linas Paulauskis
Miečius 29
LT-08117 VILNIUS
Lithuania
370-21996800
nysmusik@nysmusik.no; kristin@nysmusik.no
www.nymusikk.no

ISCM - MEXICAN SECTION
c/o SACM
Jorge Córdoba V.
Mayoralzgo 129, COL. XOCO
C.P.03330 MEXICO D.F.
Mexico
81-3-34463506
81-3-34463507
iscm-japanese@jscm.net; gen-on@jscm.net
www.jscm.net

ISCM - THE NETHERLANDS SECTION
c/o Muziek Centrum Nederland
Fons Willemsen, secretary
Rokin 111
1012 KN Amsterdam
The Netherlands
+31-20-3446064
+31-20-6733588
fwillemsen@mcn.nl; www.mcn.nl

ISCM - NEW ZEALAND SECTION
CANZ, Composers Association of New Zealand, Michael Norris, President
Glenda Keam
P.O. Box 4065, WELLINGTON
New Zealand
3-355-1325
3-355-1315
michael.norris@xtra.co.nz
www.canz.net.nz

ISCM - NORWEGIAN SECTION
c/o Ny Musikk
Kristen Danielsen
Platous gate 18
0190 Oslo
+47 21996800
nymusik@nymusikk.no; kristin@nymusikk.no
www.nymusikk.no

ISCM - POLISH SECTION
c/o Polish Society for Contemporary Music
Maciej Zoltowski, Anna Dorota Wladycka
ul. Mazowiecka 11
PL-00-052 WARSAW
Poland
48-22-8276981
48-22-8277804
ptmw@epistola.pl; arsvitae@wr.onet.pl
www.ptmw.art.pl

ISCM - PORTUGUESE SECTION
Miso Music Portugal
Paula Guimaraes
Rua do Douro 92 - Rebelva
2775-318 PAREDE
Portugal
351-21-4575068
351-21-4587256
misomusic@misomusic.com
www.misomusic.com

ISCM - ROMANIAN SECTION
c/o Union of Romanian Composers and Musicologists
Sorin Lerescu, president
Calea Victoriei 141, sector 1
RO-010071 BUCHAREST
Romania
+40 21 316 79 75
+40 21 305 79 97
srsimc03@yahoo.com; traject@itcnet.ro
www.cimec.ro/Muzica/SNR/default.htm

ISCM - RUSSIAN SECTION
International Association of Composers Organizations (IACO)
Yuri Kasparov
Victoria Korshunova
Bryusov per. 8 / 10, building 1
RUS-125009 MOSCOW
Russia
+007 495 629 71 87
www.iscmrussia.ru; mcne@rambler.ru
www.iscmrussia.ru

ISCM - SOUTH KOREA SECTION
Hyunsue Chung, General Secretary
Inho Park, President
Janghang-dong 836-7, Ilsandong-gu, Goyang-si
Republic of Korea
382-5-6047733
382-5-6047923
jcordobav@att.net.mx; cammc@att.net.mx
www.sacm.org.mx

ISCM - SWEDISH SECTION
c/o Konsertrum Stockholm
Marin Forssell, President
Kungsgatan 24, S-112 32
Sweden
370-21996800
nysmusik@nysmusikk.no; kristin@nymusikk.no
www.nymusikk.no

ISCM - UK SECTION
c/o British Composers Association
General Secretary: Christopher Batterham
23 Old Church Street
London SW1V 4PE
UK
370-21996800
nysmusik@nysmusikk.no; kristin@nymusikk.no
www.nymusikk.no

ISCM - UNITED STATES SECTION
c/o American Society of Composers, Authors & Publishers
Beverly McNeely, Treasurer
2801 Broadway, Suite 500
New York, NY 10025
US
370-21996800
nysmusik@nysmusikk.no; kristin@nymusikk.no
www.nymusikk.no

ISCM - NEW MUSIC MAGAZINE
Le Forum des Compositeurs
Bruno de Cat
39 rue Lebeau
1000 Brussels
Belgium
info@compositeurs.be
www.compositeurs.be
32-497-64 46 62
32-10 84 21 12

National Composers Union of
Ukraine, Kiev Branche
Ludmila Yurina
32-a Pushkinska str.
UKR-02004 KIEV
Ukraine
380-44-2251337
380-44-2248521
yurina2004@list.ru

Society for Contemporary Music,
Russia
c/o Centre for Contemporary Music,
Moscow Tchaikovsky Cons.
Vladimir Tarnopolski
B. Nikitskaya str. 13, of 316
RUS-125009 MOSCOW
Russia
7-095-2905181
info@ccmm.ru; www.ccmm.ru

Stephen F. Austin State University
School of Music, Texas
Stephen Lias
P.O.Box 13043, SFA Station
Nacogdoches TX 75962
U.S.A.
1-936-4684056
slias@sfasu.edu; www.sfasu.edu

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