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Collaborative Music Making

by Anne Norman

A musician living in the 1990s in Australia, a society open to ideas and influences from every corner of the globe, cannot help but be influenced by the sounds and ideas which surround our daily lives. The coming together of musicians, each versed in music of a particular culture, tradition, era or style, inevitably gives birth to a new breed of music. This new music does not obliterate the music traditions from which it sprang. It is not a compromise, it is not a threat. Both co-exist, and indeed the latter needs the former as a frame of reference, and the former benefits from the latter in bringing new audiences to its attention. Music is a living and vital part of our human interactions, naturally reflecting our increasingly global culture, where we are all constantly moving around and engaging with one another.

Music has been my life from childhood through to a BMus in flute at Melbourne University, some informal music study in SE Asia and Japan, an MA in ethnomusicology at Monash and some more study in *shakuhachi* performance at the Tokyo University of Fine Art and Music. It wasn't until my return from Tokyo in 1992 that I began to experiment with collaborative improvisation and composition. It was a period of personal darkness and ill health in which I discovered the freeing experience of improvisation within theatre and with dancers and musicians. My moments of peace and centeredness were found in weaving new creations on stage with other artists. An unexpected movement of a dancer would elicit a sonic response from me which stunned me in its freshness of technique and form. Playing by myself, these sounds would never have emerged. Likewise, in my collaborations with musicians, their musical backgrounds and sensibilities would make me play in styles and modes I had not previously approached. These collaborations were my therapy and have brought me back to health. The following is a brief introduction to three of these collaborations:

Nadoya Music and Dance Company had its beginnings in 1993, and over the years, has grown to include three dancers and four musicians creating theatrical music and dance works displaying a fusion of elements derivative of several styles, a number of which are Japanese. Our members include: dancers Yumi Umiumare (*neo-butoh*), Lynne Santos (*butoh*, physical theatre & modern dance) and Tony Yap (*butoh*, physical theatre and Malaysian trance dance); and musicians Satsuki Odamura (*koto*), Peter Neville (steel drum and percussion), Michael Hewes (bass guitar and processing) and myself on *shakuhachi* and a range of other wind instruments and small percussion.

Financial support from the Australia Council enabled the group to develop material leading to a two week season of our show *Kagome* in 1996. Each of the members of Nadoya contribute to the work through several creative processes. We discuss themes as a group, and then begin to improvise, feeding off each other, dancers and musicians responding to what we are seeing and hearing. Sometimes the music and dance are workshopped separately and then brought together in a kind of show and tell. Sometimes our work is music driven and sometimes the music is purely accompanying the dancers. It has not been easy. We have had arguments over misunderstandings in approach and occasional language problems. There is always someone who is not listening at a crucial point in our feedback sessions. Members must express patience as some points need translating before proceeding. It is tempting to revert to the model of the despot who dictates the shots, but I don't believe this brings out the same

potential from the artists involved, who all have such strong skills and artistry and who know better than anyone else what they can offer.¹

Jouissance is a post-modern quintet focusing on early European chant. The members of the ensemble are Tyrone Landau (tenor), Kathleen Southall-Casey (soprano), Nick Tsiavos (bassist), Peter Neville (percussionist) and myself on *shakuhachi* (and occasionally *ken tieu* - a Vietnamese oboe). We work under the musical direction of Nick Tsiavos, who gathered us together and did most of the arrangements of our early work, although all members now contribute to the process. Our scores, based on transcriptions of the original neumes, consist of clear frameworks and moments of prescriptive notation, interspersed by directions which leave the specific material up to the artist.

To an adherent of authenticity, our work may appear irreverent, but to those of us in Jouissance, it is a process of absolute respect for the material we are sourcing. The group's investigations of the music of Hildegard von Bingen (a feminist mystic of the 12th century) and the sensual poetry and music of the French theologian Peter Abelard is complemented by a journey into Nick's Greek Orthodox heritage through the exploration of Byzantine chant. Our relationship to these chant traditions is interactive, the two discourses constantly working on each other. While entering into the spirit of this pre-harmonic chant, we in turn bring it into our own world, ourselves being 'deconstructed' in the process of recontextualising the music.

Such a cross-fertilisation of ideas is not merely a post-modern phenomenon. The creative processes applied by Jouissance form a continuum with the cultural migrations of early Europe and the Middle East, and likewise of the music cultures associated with the migration of Buddhism across the east end of the same continent and into Japan. The *shakuhachi* served for many centuries in Japan as a tool for meditation known as 'blowing Zen', serving a similar function to chanting the sutra, and indeed the chanting of holy texts in Christendom. Not surprisingly then, the combination of the expressive voices of Tyrone and Kath with the *shakuhachi*, Arabic drums, Buddhist prayer bells and gongs, the restrained purity of Pyrex bowls and the extended techniques of the double bass, create a beautiful ethereal world which belongs both here and now as well as to more ancient times and places.²

Breath is the name by which my duo with Greg Dikmans has come to be known.

Greg plays European wooden flutes and recorders from the 16th to 18th centuries and directs the Elysium Ensemble which performs mainly Baroque music. Greg has long had an interest in Zen philosophy and its parallels in the performance practices of Renaissance and Baroque music, such as the 17th century concept of *sprezzatura* (noble negligence), a lightning-like energy which carries a boldness and spontaneity. This 'spontaneity' is only possible after years of training and practice, as in the Zen arts.³ It was therefore not surprising that Greg approached me, influenced by my *shakuhachi* education in Japan which included practising meditation in a Zen temple.

On the premise that the flute (of whatever type or tradition) is a meditative and spiritual instrument, capable of transcending the everyday and transporting the listener, our collaboration was born. Our performances present works side by side from our respective traditions, featuring pieces which demonstrate a connection. We compliment these with new works of our own, bringing the traditions together in a new synthesis. The finale of our first concert was one such work entitled *Daphne-bushi*. This opens with the recorder playing Renaissance divisions on the tune of a Japanese folk song *Tanko-bushi* against the simple *shakuhachi* line. The result was beautiful, and from there we extended into flights of pure fancy, eventually ending the piece in a different mode and quoting the English folk melody *Daphne* on which Greg had opened the concert with a set of variations by the Dutch composer Jacob van Eyke (c.1590–1657). This performance led to the recording of a CD (Anne Norman, Greg

Dikmans: Breath of Creation. Move MD3163), the cover of which contains a quote encapsulating the spirit of this collaboration:

It is probably true quite generally that in the history of human thinking the most fruitful developments frequently take place at those points where two different lines of thought meet. These lines may have their roots in quite different parts of human culture, in different times or different cultural environments or different religious traditions: Hence if they actually meet, that is, if they are at least so much related to each other that a real interaction can take place, then one may hope that new and interesting developments may follow.⁴

These ensembles are representative of the kind of expressions of ‘cross-fertilisation’ in which I am constantly involved. Each of them has elicited quite a different performance style from me, and I have grown as a musician. One of the rewarding results of concerts by these groups is the new interest sparked in the audience members. Baroque fans attending *shakuhachi* concerts; early music fans discovering the contemporary repertoire of the double bass, and dance enthusiasts taking an interest in *koto*. In other words, we are witnessing a cross-fertilisation of our audiences.

Endnotes

- 1 Nadoya is currently researching its next project entitled *Quake* which will be a collaboration with actors and script writers from both Melbourne and Kobe, Japan.
- 2 Jouissance has given live broadcasts for the ABC and performed throughout Victoria and rural NSW. We are currently recording our second CD.
- 3 See ‘Elysium, or, Zen and the art of Early Music’, ABC Radio 24 hours, March 1995.
- 4 Werner Heisenberg, physicist and pioneer of quantum mechanics, quoted by Fritjof Capra in ‘The Tao of Physics’.

Anne Norman lives in Melbourne. In addition to her performances, Anne also teaches *shakuhachi* and conducts a visiting ‘Japanese Music in Schools’ program. She has written a bilingual musical for Primary Schools and is occasionally engaged as Artist in Residence.