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Sounds Australian

Journal of Australian music



AN EMOTIONAL GEOGRAPHY OF AUSTRALIAN COMPOSITION II

with 50 composer 'credos'

PLUS

- Bent Perspectives: The Gentle Art of Autobiography and Self-promotion
- Article: Grainger's Free Music and Free Music Machines; A Living Tradition
- Reviews

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AN EMOTIONAL GEOGRAPHY OF AUSTRALIAN COMPOSITION II

THE WINTER 1992 edition of **Sounds Australian** was partly given over to what became known as 'An Emotional Geography of Australian Composition'. Originally intended as a one-off exercise, we made a selection of composers, as unbiasedly as we could, and requested that they provide 'credos' of no more than 300 words. Such 'credos' had of course been published previously - but not collectively. Predictably, some composers complied enthusiastically, some declined, and some ignored us. Nonetheless, the outcome - a broad cross-section of often remarkable creative declarations - seemed to be of considerable interest to this journal's readers.

At the end of what has become 'Emotional Geography I', we remarked that "perhaps someone else might like to repeat our exercise with those left out this time". As no-one has done so in the intervening three years, we decided to continue the series ourselves. Our hope was that some other editor, with a different background and connections, might have assembled a very different list of contributors; lacking this fresh perspective, we nevertheless tried to make this second installment as unbiased as the first, accepting that others may see a slant we failed to notice. We approached a much larger number of composers, and obtained responses from a fair proportion of them (and so any apparent slant is at least partly a product of the reply sample) covering a gratifyingly wide range of idiom and opinion. In the first issue, we organized the 'credos' by approach; in retrospect, although this made for a structured overall read, it made locating particular entries slow: for this issue, we have adopted an alphabetic format.

With the appearance of monographs such as **Sound Ideas**, readers are able to obtain in-depth portraits of many Australian composers. Our intent, in compiling these collections, was not to compete with these more specific publications, but to provide a broad, succinct, group portrait. It would not surprise us if eventually an 'Emotional Geography III' appears; new composers are always declaring themselves, and some who missed our deadlines on these first two occasions may find the space to contribute in future. Only one of the editors felt inclined to compose an entry herein; the other felt that he had nothing to add to what had already been said by our 49 contributors - except to agree with Julian Yu, whose sage remarks close the collection.

- Chris Dench and Ian Shanahan

Stephen Adam

People always seem to suggest that I should do film work. That's exactly what I do - except there's usually no film. And quite often not even a performer. Even if there were a film, then I suspect most 'listeners' would be 'viewers' and viewers don't listen like an 'audience'.

Electroacoustics is not a single style; it is a broad category which implies the incorporation of ANY sound into a 'musical work' and the use of sound manipulation and reproduction technology. A common thread through a large part of the territory of electroacoustic music is its reliance on the 'principles' of organised sound, reduced listening and metaphor. I believe that if there is any potential for a future 'universal style', it is likely to be found within this realm.

For me, this domain offers the potential for exploring ideas that are not practical or even possible by more traditional means: ideas involving space, motion, the temporal evolution and

transformation of sounds, not to mention the potential for exacting specification of the standard musical parameters (or alternately, a complete ignorance of them). Yet all this does not come without a price. Equipment needs to be accessed, often via an institution, if at all. Performance opportunities, while on the increase, are still slim. There is perhaps an 'electroacoustic language' but there is no 'alphabet'. As a consequence one cannot 'write' a piece as much as realise it. (This may not be perceived as a problem for many: post-literacy!)

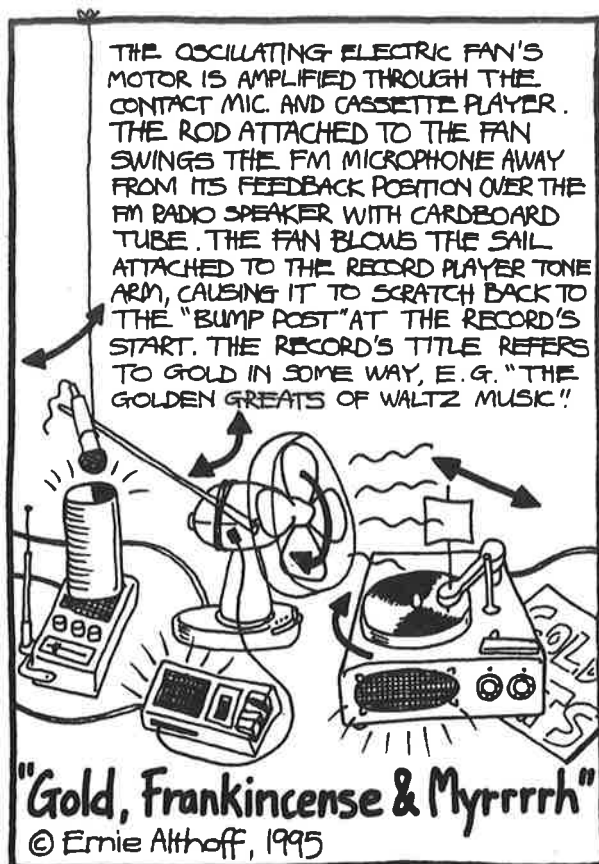
Whether we like it or not, technology has changed the name of the game. Not just within the musical universe but all around it as well. While we cannot afford to forget the inheritance of our musical past(s), we equally must embrace the means that lead to its future(s).

Ernie Althoff

My definition that music is "a social activity involving the concept of sound" is delightfully broad, and gives me lots of leeway. I like to find out things I don't yet know, and my systems - chance determinations, installations, graphic

notations, improvisations and improvisatory frameworks - seem to work quite well for this purpose.

I think that an awareness of and an interest in a variety of things outside one's music greatly assists the pursuit of one's music. These 'things' don't need to be musically-related artforms either. I find it stimulating to have a community of accurately succinct and lucid workers around me who may (or may not) share my interests. Let's hear it for pluralism, or even just a friendly chat over a coffee or two!



Newton Armstrong

Adaptable Dogma (1-4)

1. Composition is the assemblage of context. Context is where the contingency of self to other is articulated.
2. Context is where information goes to play. Play is a definition of the degree to which a system is allowed to dysfunction. Dysfunction can be a definition of the degree to which a system functions.
3. Composition is a process through which we change the way we think. It is where we formulate arguments against the grammars which we argue with.
4. Music is always a by-product.

Ros Bandt

Artistic Statement

Sound is vibration and energy, a malleable, elastic, complicated tissue. As an artist, I am constantly exploring sound as substance, as mass, and as moving matter. Found sound-environments, acoustic spaces and acoustic ecologies are my research library. Sound in acoustic space is my primary material for designing, shaping, and creating three-dimensional forms through time and space. Sound is magical, ephemeral, existing in the ether and then in the memory. The act of listening marks out a section of life's existence by inhabiting time. It belongs to people in a given time and place. I'm trying to make works which are sensitive to the site and time of occurrence. I'm interested in the limits and restrictions set for each art work, and how much freedom is left open for interpretation.

Composing and Performing

The activities of composing and performing capture and recreate some of these special moments, for oneself and for others (solo concerts and performances). Collaborative composing extends the aesthetic decisions through the talents of a group of artists which can be socially satisfying and create new

forms of non-verbal communication (**LIME**, the cross-cultural **Back to Back Zithers**, improvisations of **La Romanesca**). Recording is a shaping craft in itself, but may also be a by-product of these events (collaborations with studio technicians at MOVE, ABC, WDR, and ORF).

Sound Sculptures and Installations

My sound sculptures aim to present sound in different ways and habitats. These electronic and mixed-media works include wind-driven aeolian harps, the glass sculptural flagong, conceptual sound boxes, life-size talking characters, and installations. Compositions are rarely fixed entities. I prefer to make audience-interactive moving compositions, which become like sound-forests with multitracked sound-continuum sliding in relation to each other and the people present. I created the SSIIPP, an audience-triggered multichannel playback system in order to effect this. Sounds float about, like clouds. We hear only a tiny part of the potential of each work, but it is a personal and intimate part. The works then have a life of their own, and become animate with their own audible cycles of sound-vibration over long time-spans, working themselves out as do the patterns in nature. Chaos has an inner logic.

Michael Barkl

I desire that:

my music speaks with figures which glide between the body of the performer and the physicality of the instrument;

my music is articulated and blended by the peculiar timbres and

textures of instrumental tessitura; my music unfolds with a counterpoint between vertical and horizontal form.

Kirsty Beilharz

Describing my Compositional Aesthetic

Toru Takemitsu relates a situation in which he once sat in an underground train in Tokyo listening to the noises surrounding him, and it occurred to him that:

Composition gives meaning to the stream of sound that runs through our world ... The abundant sounds in our environment must live inside our music.

I embrace this aesthetic in my own music and in my attitude to composing music. I believe the creative process in music provides a controlled context, an exploratory ground, in which a meaningful correlation between events, sounds, emotions, and gestures in our life-experience becomes manifest in *musical semantics*. Composition collects and relates aspects not just of one's sound-world, but aspects natural, social, political, and so on, of our diabolical contemporaneous world. This *symbiosis* is evident in the ways that the world around us - social, humane, ecological, and sonic - informs and generates the *substance* and subject of the composer's work. It is, hopefully, a reciprocation in which one person's reflections and descriptions bear out

enough truths and insights to be meaningful and communicative to others. In this light, I believe it necessary to use a musical language that is *relevant* and meaningful to *contemporary society*.

I believe the specificity of harmonic language and musical style can only be secondary considerations to *communication*, to *humanity* and *feeling*. No matter how intellectual, complex, simplex, or otherwise the superficial level of music is, it only lives when it transcends trivialities.

For creator and listener alike, composition is fulfilling in its multifacetedness, delivering expression and articulation at levels emotional, intellectual, sometimes academic, sometimes physical, auditory and visual. Its interpretation can have planes of universality and individuality, in that creating music and hearing it can be deeply personal.

I do not set out to write my music for anyone else, but rather by sincerely adhering to my compositional intentions and not being compromised by other considerations, I anticipate that my expression will be absorbed and conveyed by performers and *felt* in the audience. I seek organic and natural structural forms to bond sounds, timbres, pitches, instruments, rhythm, articulation, and dynamics, all inseparably interrelated in the communication process.

Notwithstanding compositional altruism, the performers of my work rank highly as my next consideration. Being my medium for delivery, I have a particular regard for performers' capabilities, specialties, competence etc., and the distinctive features of their instruments. I conceive of pitches and rhythms through this filter of the physicality of performance. Having this filter does not in any way eliminate or restrict creativity, rather it characterises individual strands.

Gerard Brophy

Foreword

During the last number of years, two very exciting developments have come to pass in my music. One has been the influence of cross-culturalism on my creative persona; the other has been the incorporation of electronics and the use of computers in my pieces. With regard to digital technology, I speak specifically then of works such as **La Domaine Enchantée** for ensemble with live sound-processing and sound-design, and **Vox Angelica** for percussion and string quartet with live sound-processing. Aside from being extremely successful in their own right (each has had multiple performances both in Australia and abroad, and they

have been recorded for CD), these works have previewed the direction that some of my music will take in the immediate future. One such piece is a commission I am currently working on - a large-scale composition for Synergy (who will play, almost exclusively, Japanese percussion instruments), samplers/sound-design and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

The impact of cross-culturalism on my music has been profound but has only now begun to bear fruit in the form of my last two works, **Umbigada, obrigado!** for percussion quartet which uses exclusively Brazilian percussion instruments, and **The room of the saints** which is scored for violin and *darabuka* drum.

As is to be expected, my compositional geography is in a constant state of flux, but I believe that these two exciting influences have brought my dream of composing my own folk music a little closer.

Colin Brumby

A manifesto, rather like a prison record (or so I imagine), is something that people will never allow you completely to forget, and that has a nasty habit of resurfacing at the most unexpected moments.

At parties, for instance, usually well into the evening and invariably after an ominously long pause in the conversation, Predictable Percy can normally be relied upon to ask: "And tell me, old chap, what exactly did you mean thirty years ago when you (hic-burp) wrote ...?".

And think what a godsend your manifesto will be for the reviewer, who, finding your latest work even more baffling than the previous ones, writes: "Despite the apparent advance that this work represents in X's output, and the extension and refinement of his expressive language that it clearly exemplifies, nevertheless one would be advised to approach it in the context of his manifesto, written thirty years ago, when he wrote ...".

Likewise, you will be cited as a footnote in the growing numbers of student theses, especially with



Brigid Burke

Judith Clingan

I find it very difficult to express a succinct compositional *raison d'être*. Partly, this is because I am largely a self-taught composer, and so have not been exposed to the jargons of composition departments; partly, because I am evolving, and am no longer the same person I was when I last wrote a major work, three years ago.

I think it is still true that I am most excited by the human voice, and by the coming together of words and music: vocal music, choral music and music theatre remain my favourite genres. I still prefer small ensembles of unusual instrumental combinations to standard orchestral sound. I still find beauty a meaningful concept. I also cling mulishly to the hope that there is meaning in the universe, and therefore I try to find and express meaning in every compositional situation that presents itself.

The musics that have most influenced me, and remain important, are medieval European music, the folk musics of Eastern Europe, Aboriginal music, and the compositions of Britten, Messiaen, Rautavaara, Donald Hollier, and Anne Boyd. I love sparseness of texture, interesting sound combinations and effects such as a bowed dulcimer, didjeridu with handbells, and extended vocal techniques in children's voices with unusual percussion.

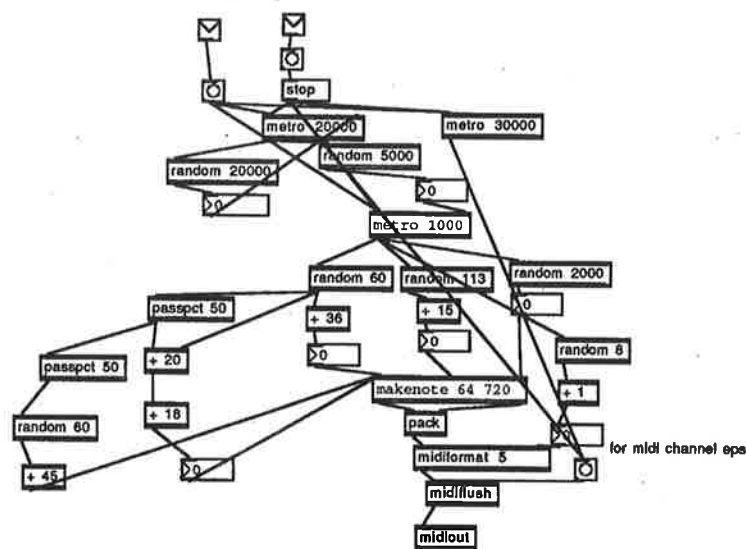
Structurally, I avoid stasis. I have, at times, used a tight mathematical logic, and at other times, a totally instinctive, unstructured approach leaning more on verbal and other non-musical stimuli. I often weave fragments of folk melodies or hymn tunes into my pieces, and often use canon, organum,

polytonality and inversion. I am fond of the seven (diatonic) modes and of the whole-tone scale, and the tritone appears to be my favourite interval.

I believe that music is a language, joining spirit to matter. As such, it must communicate. I therefore try to express myself in such a way that the average listener would, I hope, become involved, be moved, and feel that a communication has been made.

Brendan Colbert

My purpose? To pursue the continued development/evolution of my personal language. Early works, such as *Murderers of Calm* (1987) and *Altered States* (1988), are already only distantly related to more recent works like *Parallaxis* (1993), *Entfernt* (1994), and *Sphinx* (1995 - in progress). I am currently preoccupied with the notion of balance - particularly that of the intellectual and emotional content of my work. I have a strong, perhaps even irrational, dislike (distrust?) of contemporary music that is too close to either extreme. I compose because I must - I'm certainly not in it for the money - and am content to let others form their own opinions of my work.



Roger Dean: 'from machine- (computer-) to organism-generated.'

Robert Davidson

It is important to me to remain true to the 'call' to music, to what motivated me to become a composer in the first place, and to my intuition. Systems, methods, styles (etc.) are secondary considerations, and without the core of honest representation of musical intuition, they are nothing. I therefore work hard at listening to what's going on in my inner ear and trying to capture the magical, living, breathing sound which is the *raison d'être* of my efforts as a composer. It is the sound-moment which attracts me most in music - more than the dramatic, linear, overtly expressive or other wonderful powers of music. Minimalism, which along with musique *concrète* is, I believe, in its infancy, makes its most valuable contribution in this regard, in its focus on *getting into the sound*, exploring the infinite qualities of the extended moment. My approach is to use this attitude with counterpoint, which operates in my music to transform forward-moving melody into static harmony. A favourite technique is what I call 'frozen counterpoint', in which sonorities that in traditional Western music are functional and sequential - say, the triads of I, IV and V - are superimposed, made to sound simultaneously as a single extended

moment. There are many other ways of doing this, which I enjoy exploring for their effect, which seems to me ecstatic.

I believe that my greatest responsibility as a composer is to create *honestly*, to make work which I can love, assuming that I will not be alone in this. It is not my chief aim to confront, disturb, or subvert, though these elements may enter my work. As main motivations

though, I find them tedious, and an obsolete throwback to the age of the avant-garde (ca.1870-1970).

Innovation is not necessarily a big aim either, for this will come naturally if I am true to my inner voice. Music does not share with science and technology the quality of continual advance, but evolves through diversification and change; it is fallacious to talk of 'research and development' in the arts. The healthiest music scene is one in which composers are free to be themselves.

Roger Dean

I might call my work 'comprovisation'. I plunder this term from the U.S., where it was pioneered a few years ago to refer to composing for improvisors. I bowdlerise it to indicate my concern with the multiple spectra of music generation approaches, from improvisation to composition, from word to less referential sound, from machine- (computer-) to organism-generated. I am interested in initiating an emotive impression in a listener; though less concerned with its relation to my own pre- or simultaneously-conceived expression. Precision of impact is one of my objectives in science and in analytical discourse in the humanities, but not in sound art. There, multiplicity of device, output and impact, appeal more to me.

On the other hand, precision of generation, interpretation and performance, within the dimensions of definition of the improvisational structure, are very important to me. With this goes my interest in developing frameworks, procedures, and structures, which at several levels of detail have novelty to me. And also my enthusiasm for creative collaboration with others (particularly in improvisation) or with computers (in real-time interactions, or sound generation or manipulation).

How do one's fundamental beliefs about those concerning sound art? If one shares a socialist ideal, or strives for intellectual advances which can be made available to everyone, must these endeavours have a close parallel in one's

music? I think not: but hope that they are amongst the 'polysemy' of my sound art.

Jim Denley

Firstly, I'm not sure I should be interested in what I think I'm searching for musically. The 'not knowing' seems important. (Which is why teaching is so hard.) But anyway, here goes...

I'm interested in the soap operas of bands. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank **Machine for Making Sense, Mind Body Split, Chris Burn's Ensemble, Relative Band, Oz Cobra**, and too many *ad hoc* groupings to mention, for providing character actors of unbelievable richness (if, at times, a little over the top) to share my creative life.

This sharing of the creative act is very important.

Increasingly, I'm interested in what my 'music instinct' might learn from language.

The amplification and filtering of sound through the larynx and mouth and its resulting resonance through my instruments - the projection of aspects of the musicality of speech into a musical syntax, fascinates me. For instance:

There are clicks produced by the lips, tongue tip, and tongue body, any of which can be nasalized or not, voiced or not, and so on, as many as 48 click sounds in all.
- from **The Language Instinct**, by Stephen Pinbar.

This is sexy stuff.

As a soloist, I've recently been performing **The Tangents**, permutations of ongoing work for myself and two randomly accessed mini discs. The sounds (and silences) on disc all derive from my instrumental/vocal sounds. My job is to make sense of the clumsy and elegant juxtaposition of random sequences. The difference between working with these neutral (stupid and insensitive) machines and the strategies I'm usually engaged in, with quick, intelligent, sensitive musicians, interests me.

With all of these explorations and interests, I see no need for distinctions between my work as an instrumentalist, improviser and composer.

Kent Farbach

Credo

Instead of trying to define my artistic beliefs, I thought that I would include a portion of a poem by Chick Corea which represents my own aesthetic. Before doing this, however, I will briefly add that I trace my need to 'create' back to a large abstract painting which used to hang in our family home. The painting, entitled **Spatial Totem** by Don Ross, often reinvented itself by suggesting different images. This created a constant source of wonderment for me as a child.

In recent works, I am trying to come closer to the spirit that existed in the painting: that is, to write something that might continue to 'live' or reinvent itself on subsequent hearings. Anyway, here's the poem:

The World of Artists:

Each one makes his own melodies
his own way
Each one creates the beauty
he sees

With your own genuine interest
Receive their beauties
You like what you like
You don't what you don't
Only you know

It's your own artistic freedom
To like what you like
And do it your way
This is your native freedom

See what he does
Observe the rules he makes
Try them if you like
Draw what you want
Leave the rest
- Chick Corea, in **Children's Songs**, Schott edition.

Mary Finsterer

Statement of aesthetic

There being no set criteria in approaching composition, one recurring principle underlying the process is simply to wait and listen. Answers to musical dilemmas and situations will arrive of their own volition once there is a purpose for

them to exist - once there is space in time for them. The idea of sustaining a sense of theatre within the music through time is a fascination for me. At times I will treat instruments or motivic material as one would characters of a play - to give them particular mannerisms that will initiate reactions according to their situation or context. In asking questions of them, a natural course is set whereby they will rebound, collide or synchronise with one another just as people do in life situations.

Alternatively, sometimes I approach composition in a purely abstract way - thinking only of what is 'inside' the sound itself that energises and propels it through time. Composition is about the posing of questions; technique - the vehicle for the journey.

Jim Franklin

Music-making as an act of loving-kindness

For me, music-making is an innately spiritual activity, an approach to the numinous, immanent, transcendent. I see my work in being a composer/performer as one element of the broader work of being a whole person.



Russell Gilmour

Working with sound is a means of exploring my fundamental nature; this occurs for me as composer and as performer. Focussing deeply on the 'here and now' of each sound in each moment can thin the boundary between 'me' and 'the rest of the universe'. Here, I find the idea of live performance fundamental: in a sense, I compose in order to have something to perform. Recordings move me only to the extent that they recall the experience of performance. Although I sometimes use electronic technology, I try to perform with it, rather than to present recordings on stage.

On the (rare) occasions when I'm truly present with music, the blurring or collapse of the

distinction between myself and the audience lets the immanent, numinous become more clearly present. This seems to be a source of energy, peace and well-being for myself and for the audience. I try to compose music which facilitates this effect.

Three genres, defined by three instruments, have become prominent in my activities. Each has limitations, which I accept as the boundaries within which I am able to create: music for shakuhachi, for piano, and for live electronics, separately or in combination. Part of my ongoing compositional work is to explore the apparent contradiction of the technological extremes of the three. This exploration will probably never end.

In the meantime, I hope through music to do some good in my corner of the world. May all beings be well and happy, and free from suffering. May the music I make contribute to this well-being.

Russell Gilmour

As one not given to self-analysis, I offer the following

Credo.

Music remains my principal source of intellectual and emotional nourishment. For me, the *desire* to compose music is compulsive - and mysterious. The *act* of composition itself (at once social and personal) and the deliberate dissemination of my music, represents an attempt to participate in, and contribute to, the wider musical discourse of 'this place' in these times.

Sounds Australian

Back Issues of the **Sounds Australian** journal are Available

Issue No 15, Music Theatre. 16, Various. 17, Contemporary Jazz. 18, New Music in Melbourne. 19, Music and Technology. 20, Virtuosity. 21, The Woman Composer. 22, The Music, The Dance - (do they need each other?). 23, Various. 24, Tertiary Music Education: the Incredible Steam Music Machine. 25, Composing for Film and Theatre. 26, Australian Composers and Their Influences. 27, The Expatriate Composer. 28, Style Wars - the "New Complexity". 29, Sound and Script - more on the New Complexity. 30, Appropriation - Tradition - Borrowing - Theft. 31, Why Analysis? 32, Eleven Views of Improvisation. 33, Postmodernism: What is it? 34, An Emotional Geography of Australian Composition; and the Best Possible Music Station. 35, To Criticise the Critic. 36, Accessibility and Innovation - Are They Mutually Exclusive? 37, Various. 38, Performance - New Music and the Politics of Change. 39, Education and Training. 40, The Woman's Issue. 41, Heritage Australia. 42, Choral Music in Australia. 43, Music Education - Some New Directions; and Music Funding in Australia. 44, Take 23 - Twenty-Three Comments on the Australian Recording Industry. 45, Sound Music Noise - Music and Sound Art in Australia.

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Gerald Glynn

Earthling Answer to Martian Question

Having surveyed the bewildering variety of activities performed by Earthlings, the Martian approached one who spent many hours enclosed carefully putting oval dots on ruled paper, joining some, separating others, often adding a diagonal or vertical

Waiting patiently for a pause the Martian managed to convey the question "Why are you doing what you are doing?" The Earthling smiled and turning said: "You may as well ask the fruit tree why it bears, but I'll try and explain ...

These dots and lines," he began, indicating a maze on the pages nearby, "if and when performed as intended, could raise towers and castles in the air, invisible but vibrant, pregnant in the cathedral space between the ears

I dream and devise, I plan and build, inserting beams and wedges for strength, smoothing curves and arabesques, placing arches to unify; into the nooks and crannies I carve niches for the architect to leave his seal or small print name

Some of this, it must be said, is an antidote to the horrors that occur when people and countries clash, and a partial cure to the slow advance of the only cancer that cannot be stopped, the one that most call Time ...

Some say the battle is *perdue d'avance*, that many have tried before and failed; whether this is cause for comfort, or seen as a deterrent, it is clear that the more that has been written the less there is to write ...

If you shape these dots for long enough, there is a chance that before you make the music of your own *Totentanz* you receive a grace and favour visit from the fickle twins, Fame and Fortune, much in demand on the circus round.

Should they be sipping champagne elsewhere they'll delegate one of their paler siblings, a slender wraith of reluctant wall-flower who sidles up to the rocking chair for a last nostalgic pull on the pipe

After the farewell puff of smoke and whiff of incense, she vanishes leaving the chair empty, the blunt pencil sprawled across the lines, the last dots unconnected, scattered like leaves on a lawn ..."

Non-committal the Martian departed leaving a written reply:

"What you are doing is subtle, complex, fascinating even; it keeps you off the streets; but the more you do it, the less you live, and why are so few of the others listening? at worst you run the double risk of piles and solitude ..."

- Gerald Glynn 5/95

Sheila Guymer (Learmonth)

Credo: to be an agent for quality ... to share 'soul', to enrich those I contact with/through my music, whether they are audiences, or fellow artists involved in the creative process. Quality isn't simply what I 'like', it's tempered in the crucible of experience and awareness, it's 'gutsy'. And it involves honestly confronting my self, 'warts and all' - sometimes (often) I don't 'like' what I find, but the process of exploration/examination (like editing!) is vital - and revitalising.

Some philosophical wheels I keep reinventing: As a musician, my primary medium is sound. Music is a temporal artform: the perception of the passage/disjunction/memory of time influences my musical structures. Music is sensuous: ears are critical; bodies move. Making music and making love have a lot in common. Music is 'about' relationships. I am thankful for performers dedicated to their art. Some topics can be discussed in/through the arts that are taboo in other social contexts.

My worst nightmare was when I dreamed my hands were cut off (I am a pianist). My hands: channels of my creativity and im/expression. I am fascinated by touch, by texture: perhaps because of my training as a pianist, composing is a

tactile, physical experience to me: I *feel* the material in my hands, like a sculptor working with clay: harmonies and rhythms have more correspondence to 'shapes' within the muscles of my hands and the kinetics of my body than to ink marks on a page.

My cultural idols include: Stravinsky, Harry Partch, Cage, Jung, Matisse, André Kertész (photographer), Luce Irigaray, Peter Greenaway, Drusilla Modjeska: their works captivate me, inspire me, reprove me.

Some details of my life that profoundly affect me, although 'how' I cannot yet define: the story in my family that my grandmother (an excellent pianist and after whom I was named) was part-Aboriginal; the textured, abstract aesthetics of

rural and outback Australian landscapes; that I grew up in the bush (and had a pet Kurrawong for a musical collaborator).

I am grateful to my maternal ancestors for the oral history given down to me, mother to daughter, through generations of storytellers. I come from a family of strong women. Little wonder I am intrigued by the music of speech; and that I explore feminist issues in my work.

Why I'm now a composer: my mother drove me 100 miles every Saturday for 11 years so I could have music lessons at all, and let me skip school to play piano and be a child (curiosity unbounded); the ABC exists (a cultural umbilical cord for a bush kid).

Elliott Gyger

Why?

- in quest of that extraordinary moment when the music transcends and the hearer is caught up in its beauty and intensity.
- for myself: for the intellectual challenge of creation and order; for the satisfaction to be found in exercising an intricate craft; for the resonant ambiguities of the nexus between abstract idea (in thought), visual score (in space), and aural realization (in time).
- for the performers: for the many hours of preparation and rehearsal (the score should not yield its secrets too quickly, but those secrets must be worthy of the time and energy expended by the musicians); for the bond of collaboration and the sense of shared excitement in discovery.
- for the audience: for all those prepared to *listen*, to be challenged or beguiled (the work should be accessible, in the sense that the composer has created a way into it for the listener; this accessibility is quite independent of style, and has nothing to do with degrees of simplicity/complexity).

How?

- through the interaction of impulse and restriction at every level:
- as initial response to external or practical stimuli (e.g. a text, a title, a combination of instruments, a particular performer);
- in formulation of one central conception (the piece's guiding idea);
- via creation of a background vocabulary (different for each work), which binds the music together, while allowing for plenty of flexibility in surface detail;
- by establishing patterns and processes on a local level, facilitating the unfurling of an idea or the gradual transformation of one musical object into another;
- guided, in the final analysis, by personal taste:
 - does this chord sound good?
 - is momentum maintained?
 - how should this melodic phrase be shaped?
 - how does it suit the instrument?
 - DO I LIKE IT?

Matthew Hindson

Surely the essential motivation of a composer to write music is because they enjoy doing so, and enjoy hearing the results. This is certainly true in my case, with the aim to evoke an exciting, stimulating and emotive response that I will enjoy feeling/hearing again and again.

Popular culture influences my work, especially aspects of the 'death-metal' and 'techno' genres. The reason for this is that I enjoy the overall experience created by much of this music, especially the sense of virtuosity and theatricality that is imparted. Also, as an Australian composer living at the end of the twentieth century, it's important that music reflects (and adds to) contemporary Australian culture and society. Perhaps my interest in the two vibrant and almost hedonistic musical styles listed above can also be linked to this.

Allied to this is a disregard for writing music 'for history'. It seems pointless to even consider that your

Elliott Gyger: *Lush* (1993) for piccolo and piano excerpt

music may be better appreciated after you are dead. The probability of anyone being hailed as another Mozart is extremely small, so why worry? If I am lucky enough to experience my 15 minutes of fame, I would rather let it be whilst I am around to enjoy it!

The final point concerns compositional integrity. On a personal level; I consistently find that pieces able to stimulate the greatest amounts of pleasure are those which seem to be heartfelt and unashamedly truthful to the composer's ideals, whatever they may be. They are often intensely personal and original in ideas and presentation, and yet seem to have something - a concept, a narrative, an emotional framework - to emphatically communicate to the listener. If we are all true to our own heartfelt musical ideas (whatever they may be), the result will almost certainly be one that is worth experiencing.

Dulcie Holland

It seems clear to me that music is one of the most civilizing and enriching elements in our lives. It uplifts us and sustains us, it consoles us in times of sorrow, calms us in times of stress, and delights us in times of joyful celebration. There is music for all seasons, boundless in its variety.

Great music never diminishes in value; such masterworks as the passion music of Bach and the symphonies of Beethoven are as true and beautiful today as they were when they were composed. But new dimensions are being added all the time, and one never exhausts their possibilities.

To be involved in music in any way is to be fascinated and enslaved by it.

And so I feel very grateful for a lifetime's involvement and for the wealth of music I have experienced over the years;

for the encouragement of parents and the opportunity of studying with such musicians as Frank Hutchens, Alfred Hill, Roy Agnew, John Ireland, and Matyas Seiber;

for winning an award or two at

times when I needed justification for what I was trying to do;

for having a sympathetic marriage partner with whom to share many rewarding musical experiences, especially in the field of community music-making;

for having lived in a peaceful and stable environment where it has been possible to write, untroubled by restrictions or political directives;

by feeling the stimulus to write music in many categories, chamber and orchestral music, film scores, solo and ensemble pieces, and to hear many of them performed;

and for seeing the blossoming of technology and the vast improvements in sound-recording of recent years, and to enjoy their advantages.

No doubt it is every composer's dream to add something of value, no matter how small, to the great volume of music already composed - and to leave the world better thereby.

Such is certainly my hope.

Sarah Hopkins

As a composer, my desire is to create music which is nourishing and uplifting. I compose solo, ensemble and choral music of a holistic nature which draws upon the natural beauty of string instruments, voices, bells and whirly instruments (corrugated plastic tubes which play incredibly pure harmonic overtones when whirled around).

For the past ten years or so, I've been describing my music as *Holistic Music* because I'm consciously wanting to acknowledge and celebrate all aspects of our being - physical, mental, emotional and spiritual - through my music. I believe that it's time to reclaim and celebrate many of life's almost forgotten simple yet profound truths, and to amplify *positive life force* whenever and wherever we are able to.

Reclaiming the Spirit (1993) for clarinet, viola, cello, soprano and whirly instrument is a good example of my recent ensemble music. It is a lyrical, meditative piece which embraces and celebrates the multifaceted spirit of music.



Dulcie Holland

This piece gives voice to the music of nature with the opening cellistic bird calls, the sonic light rays from the clarinet, voice and viola plus the deep earthy drones which continue throughout most of the piece. It celebrates the music of indigenous Australia with rich pulsations from the *didjeridu* cello bowing. (For me, the sound of the *didjeridu* is akin to the sound of the earth.) It reclaims the dancing spirit of folk music with a lively jig played on the 'fiddle', and towards the end of the piece it embraces the haunting ethereal melodies of the spirit whirly instrument which rise up through the tapestry of sonic colour provided by the other instruments.

Reclaiming the Spirit is the title track from my latest CD released by New World Productions in 1994. It also contains my recent music for a *cappella* choir, cello, harmonic overtone singing, bells, whirly instruments and synthesiser.

Miriam Hyde

Dear Ian,

By all means quote the final paragraph from my autobiography **Complete Accord**, which enunciates my 'compositional purpose'; the paragraph which follows it is an addition I would like to make. I also enclose an extract from the slow movement of my **Piano Concerto No.2**. This passage feels 'closer' to me than any other that I have written, even though 61 years have passed since I put it on paper. It's something about that high-rising B-flat octave!...

[illegible]

Miriam Hyde: Piano Concerto No. 2 excerpt

It is very evident that music often reflects its own era. This seems to be the expectation of the critics and historians. However, if the present age is predominantly materialistic, abounding in awesome technological development and international strife - and few could refute this - I like to feel that music, and my music, can be a refuge for what beauty and peace can still be omnipresent; in other words, the triumph of good over evil. I make no apologies for writing 'from the heart', with such craftsmanship as I have acquired through earnest study and a foundation of academic discipline.

- from **Complete Accord** (1991), Sydney: Currency Press, p.153. Quoted with the permission of the publisher.

Only in one act of daring, during 1966, prompted by Marjorie Hesse after we had attended a lecture on contemporary music, did I submit to the relevant ABC Committee for reviewing manuscripts a tongue-in-cheek piano piece called **Trends**, and headed *molto affettuoso*. They lapped it up, and I found courage to use it in a broadcast, even putting a touch of chalk on the low A-flat string of the Steinway, for easy location (twanging it to a rhythmic pattern) - although aesthetically, any other final note would have done just as well.

Douglas Knehans

I have always been interested in balancing the expressive aspects of composition with rigorous structural approaches and a progressive musical language. Since 1991, I have been pursuing these twin, complementary goals. Stratified structural approaches have always appealed to me and my first experiment with this method was a 1986 work for **ELISION** entitled **exiles**. Since that time, I have explored the technical means through which to successfully establish a stratified structural argument. Most recently, in my latest work, **time processional** (for 46 solo players), I have associated centric pitch elements with a

stratified pulse field that spans the sonic space of the entire composition. Yielding dense polyphonies and extravagant, interlocked gestures that sometimes span several strata at once, this technique moves ever closer to an expressive language and musical world that I find simultaneously powerful and gesturally striking, yet replete with subtle veiled motions and obliquely poignant tensions and structural cross-relations.

Tim Kreger

The Way of the Egg: some questions on human expression

Nature is numbers, music is numbers, language is numbers.

But what are numbers? Are they an abstract representation of the universe in which we are domiciled or are they the mother tongue encoded in our wetware during the days of amoebic slime? Is numerical expression linguistic or is language just another abstract numerical system?

Genetic codes are the mother tongue.

Does our DNA govern linguistic and cognitive processes or do our words and thoughts determine the evolutionary paths to come? Why can't we fully understand the tongues of our ancestors or other species? Why do we consider the machine an alien competitor rather than a construct of the human mind? Is our DNA abandoning the warm and slimy hospice of carbon architecture or is it prototyping mutations 'in silico' for variant carbon species to come? Do we learn from our genes or do they learn from us?

We are not history, history is us.

Do we carry history in our minds or in the chemical structures within our blood and bones? Do we carry a genetic memory which is shielded from our consciousness or are we a temporally non-specific autonomous collection of matter which emerges and submerges once and only once on the time

continuum? Would we express our thoughts or sounds in the same way if Pythagoras or the monks of Pope Gregory hadn't generated their formal and sonic paradigms previously?

Life is a collection of algorithms.

Why do bifurcating algorithms exhibit similar behaviour to the onset of epileptic seizures? Why can we synthesize visual representations of plants from generative structures similar to the grammatical models of Noam Chomsky? Why do abstract mathematical algorithms produce patterns reminiscent of coastlines, mountains, and '70s acid rock posters?

Georges Lentz

Music, for me, is religion, in its original etymological sense: that which connects man to the Divine. All of my music grows out of this (very broadly defined) religious belief, as well as out of my fascination with astronomy. Musically, the latter has opened up new possibilities for me, such as the integration of silence into my music. The artistic openness and tolerance in Australia has had a liberating effect upon me, too. My musical training in Luxembourg and Paris was extremely strict and traditional - I enjoyed my first non-Classical music only at the age of 19. From childhood to this day, the greatest composer for me has always been J. S. Bach: the perfect balance of heart and mind found in his works is something that, I think, is still worth striving for in late-20th-century music.

Becky Llewellyn

As a South Australian woman composing music in the 1990s, I feel enthusiastic about our vibrant cultural context and privileged to have received a musical education that allows me to express my inner visions in music.



Becky Llewellyn

I use music as a symbolic language imbued with a rich classical tradition both as a way of reflecting upon my own inner journey and to express emotional, political and aesthetic concerns. I particularly love the ethereal nature of live performance and exploring the mystery of how we listen. I gain much from performances, which create a feedback loop between my own hearing and that of performers, audiences and critics.

I have been interested for some time in writing a 'music of place' - discovering techniques of representation of where we live, how we live, what we value, how we question life. My compositions attempt to map the inner landscapes echoed in outer spaces, finding the beauty in our fears, our joys, our tenderness, our vulnerability and sense of humour.

What are the rewards of being a composer? A major one is actually writing. Working with talented, dedicated performers and conductors is also high on my list. Getting to hear the music and making friends with other composers is also a continuing source of inspiration and mentoring.

Composers exhibit rare combinations of intelligence, idealism, passion, sensitivity and creativity. I feel that as a group we also lack confidence, perhaps because we are rarely paid with money, the usual means by which

society gives value and appreciation for work done. My latest response to the dilemma of wanting to write music but also wanting to earn a living is to apply some of the skills and talents I've gathered as a composer to other allied creative arenas.

Michael Lonsdale

Composers create magic, in its truest sense. We are magicians of time - the modern shamans!

- Ian Shanahan: **Nirvana** tonight, 26/6/93, 9.30 pm, Sydney, Radio Northern Beaches (92.1 and 93.7 MHz)

Ian Shanahan, my dear friend, swung this statement in my direction during one of our regular chats on matters fundamental to religion (existence) and music (creation). I want to confess that his statement has stayed with me through many reflections, despite my initial reaction to it being completely anti - that it could well be self-deluded and potential fraud. But it has come to rest upon me better as time has moved across. You see, it's Ian's sense of transcendence that I misunderstood. (And no doubt I'm not the first, and I'm a good friend ... you would think I'd be used to him by now!) On that we do concur. Ian's is

obviously music/cosmocentric. Mine is, too; though more to do with the re-creation of 'the cosmic struggle' which we face day by day, from time to time.

Words, meaning and context are very important to me. They remain illicit tools for the making of the 'completely abstract'. Cypher, codes, meaning are a potency cocktail to savour. Indulgence, distortion and derangement are sextants to sail by. Honesty, self-perspectives and poetics are moving parts in the operation. Commitment, space and close friendships are thumbprints for blacklisting...

I believe in indulgence. I believe in derangement as method. I believe in style, content and idea as 'the three jewels'. I believe in many paths. I hear and see distortion as reflection; (nostalgia is treatable: Prozac). I don't believe in rules; they are the trademark of cowards. People fascinate me - some more than others. I believe expression is almost everything. I think systems are cruel, convention is divisive, and ignorance is our society's preferred position. I believe in joy, compassion, and frankness.

My music is a diary of my inner world, squeezed onto paper - washed - hair combed: open the curtain, thanks.

David Lumsdaine

A Statement on Composing

So what's the special nature of composing for me? In silence, listening. Listening for what arises of its own accord. Listening to this sound, discrete and particular, letting it grow in its own way. Transcribing the sound, following its shape with a pencil, is not a separate thing. Composition is the activity of listening. Listening, not before, not after. Now.

No separate thought of audience, of players. The listener is players and audience.

Too often, we think of music as a score that a composer presents to a player, saying: 'Here's my music. Take it (the music) away, learn it (the music) and play it (the music)'. But music is an activity, not a piece



David Lumsdaine: *Kali Dances* excerpt.

of paper.

In his introduction to *The Raw and the Cooked*, Lévi-Strauss wrote: 'Music becomes actual, ... through and by the listener ... Music has its being in me, and I listen to myself through it'.

I could say: 'Music has its being in me and I perform myself through it' or, 'Music has its being in me and I compose myself through it'.

The vision I'm listening to might have become a poem. The sound I see might have become a painting. Inside the activity of composing, I see and feel the sounds around me. Everything is tangible, everything is fluid, dynamic. Yet everything is also *itself*. And everything is myself.

This quiet in which I compose is not a different part of my world, set apart in contrast to noise, bustle and contradictions of the rest. The quiet is the focal point in which everything stills, becomes transparent; and I can listen, not only to what I know, but also to what I don't know I know.

Chris Mann

On composure:

Language is the mechanism whereby you understand what I'm thinking better than I do. (Where 'I' is defined by those changes for which I am required.)

A working hypothesis, a

composer, is that without which something would not have happened. For something to have happened a distinction must be made. A distinction is other than more of the same. Composition is, therefore, of differences. Style, like *midi*, is about transparency. Music is a style of composition, public science. It was translated into Japanese. But out of what?

(The only reason the twentieth century was in favour of music is because music molests children. It is also, and not incidentally, the only drug available free on the National Health.)

Thomas Meadowcroft

on the way to work

Composers have too much time:

- because, in its frightening irreducibility, solitude is time's domain, but not its arrow. The composer in repose knows at *that* moment the work has nothing to do with writing. It is merely how the world sees him. Moreover, this conception of time owes little to the Romantic ideal of an immobile and self-affirming present which takes 'eternity' as its name, and takes an eternity to thief from the past and recuperate itself. The solitude of the composer is not an unhappy

consciousness, because initiative, unlike solitude, is not necessary, and because with solitude, unlike initiative, nothing begins. The degraded history of theft is hardly the concern of thieves.

- because time has never been voluntary for the one who is alone. Writing is never addressed to anyone in particular. It is never You and I. This gets you out of one trap; the self-authenticating or alienated subject as the representative voice or consciousness. It gets you out of the middle of the century. Still, with what are we left? Art as experience? Art as a parody of catharsis? Art as some fucked-up code for living, necessarily implying that the work is difficult because each note corresponds to a life exhausted? There is much at stake in imagining a history of solutions. You cannot pack up and move somewhere else.

- Artaud: "BODIES that ate, digested, slept, snored once a night, *shat* between 25 and 30,000 times and in exchange for 30 or 40 thousand meals, 40 thousand sleeps, 40 thousand snores, 40 thousand sour and bitter morning mouths, have to show some 50 poems apiece (or some orchestral pieces, a few string quartets, songs, possibly an opera). Really it is not enough."

- to imagine *your* death, to construct the master narrative of *your* four symphonies, *your* string quartet cycle, correspondence and journal entries (entries which record a life by the same mechanism that tears your subjectivity to threads: writing) is nothing but an attempt to begin the work. Death here is not conceived as a solely negative phenomenon, but an implacable necessity that is your relationship to the work. It is not an anticipation but a kind of exhaustion of the subject, leaving you alone, but not there.

- kept awake during the day by notation, writing the sounds down in order to hear them (instead of hearing the sounds and writing them down).

- When work takes off on the art line, when it is time to go back to work although there are lots of writers out of work, the young and inexperienced composer needs to maintain a relationship with himself,

for the image-repertoire, although born of replenishment, is on the wane today. Hence all the neuroses and paranoid moments (feeling like the pervert in the city, the hunter in the forest) where one tampers with other identities. Although a flirtation with decadence, these are moments of amnesia. And what is decadence if not the precursor to askesis?

1 ed. Sontag, Susan (1976) **Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings** (trans. Helen Weaver), Berkeley, California: University of California Press, p.516.

Michele Morgan

I am interested in the song form and in improvisation. Jazz and folk practices have given me the opportunity to integrate and explore both.

The strong vocal origins of jazz phrasing and the perception in jazz that music shouts, preaches, moans and praises informs both my song making and my improvisation. This seems to me to relate to the functionality of music: the power of music to communicate and investigate ideas and states; to explore and celebrate individual and community identity. The powerful developments that jazz instrumentalists have introduced through the century opens an abstract sound-world to me while retaining a quality of speaking for itself and to the listener.

I am interested in the capacity of music to capture, shift and represent time and timescale. The dimensions and organization of the stage are used in Noh drama to signify psychic and actual space. In a similar way, the music materials and the way they are organized create a particular time-world in a piece which the performer both enters, and shapes and creates in performance.

The power of a song to delineate a particular moment in time and the perception of the rate of flow of time finds a natural complement for me in improvisation. The experience of the present is a central preoccupation in improvisation. The interplay between the highly structured song form and an improvised form allows me as much

scope as I want to explore perceptions of time and also of timelessness.

I find that it is seldom useful to separate being a composer from being a performer.

As a composer working with the song form, it is useful to me to consider words as music and music as text. I admit words from beginning to end as musical material and accept their contribution to the compositional process. The core of a song presents itself to me almost invariably as melody, rhythm and text inextricably fused.

Peter Schaefer

My aesthetic priority is with the conception of art, in its myriad forms, as the expression of wholeness. For me, this focusses on the relation between the infinite number of points, so to speak, along the continuum between the apparently material and non-material.

In practice, this manifests itself as a seeking of essences within, and common to, many seemingly contrasting or conflicting modes of expression - be they various cultural mores, artistic styles, philosophical or technological priorities, etc. (There is no end to this list!)

In music (however this word is to be defined), these concerns delineate my concept of meaning and beauty. A given conceptual or sonic essence can be clothed in many forms, and it is the relation between the quality of the essence and the quality of its expression in form which determines its aesthetic

potency -

beyond politics,
beyond fashion,
even beyond culture.

In terms of method, for me the most true touchstone in seeking fusion of these endless dualities is intuition.

Andrew Schultz

Purity?

Although it is difficult and probably unwise to be conclusive about creative impulses, two ideas have emerged as important for me lately: irreconcilable synchronicities, and water.

Irreconcilable synchronicities

The collision of cultures apparent when standing at Circular Quay, with duelling buskers playing the gum leaf and the *er-hu* against the backdrop of the Sydney Opera House, is always striking. This sort of galvanizing and inspiring cultural contradiction is crystallized in my music by the use of interleaved stories ("Mephisto"), epigrammatic forms (**Suspended Preludes**) and discontinuous structures (**The Devil's Music**).

Water

The consciousness of water and its absence is embedded in the Australian psyche; water embodies a sense of threat through its presence or potential absence, and sets the horizon. Water as symbol is more important to me than water as object. It can represent important life experiences such as aloneness (**Sea-Change**), transitions (**Barren**

SOME THINGS HAVE NO CADENCES

My life is one.

My days do not resolve in a sonorous shower
do not come home to port,
come home to roost,
come home at all.

Perhaps this means I am contemporary.

- Michelle Morgan



Andrew Schultz (Photo: Robert Fretwell.
Courtesy of Eric Myers, *APRA Yearbook* Editor 1993.)

Ground), sex (Ekstasis), or death (Dead Songs); that is why water, especially the sea, occupies a metaphoric rather than a literal space in my imagination.

Irreconcilable synchronicities/ Water

The two concepts may be the same. The Yirkalla community has a concept of *Gapu* for the exchange of cultures: salt water and fresh water mix where a river joins the sea. However, this melding goes beyond what I am ready for creatively: for the moment, I am happy for the contradictions to coexist. In a number of pieces (Respiro/Simple Ground, Black River and Calling Music) the contrast of materials becomes the structural premise for the work. If there is one prevailing artistic certainty of our time and place it is that the idea of musical purity is open to challenge.

Ian Shanahan

The view from my laboratory, April 1995

As a heretic in a decadent 'civilization' that is plummeting headlong towards an infinitely fractured, adversarial, nonliterate

bureaucratic cesspool-like Dark Age, I aspire to the creation of a profound music supersaturated with true originality, colour, richness, maximal intelligence - 'mind' - and unity: a spiritual/transcendental music, a *musica humana* that also pours forth the unified patterns of nature, the universe, and beyond.

"True" originality?: one mediated through *gnosis*.

{I emphatically assert that this currently anathematized notion is alive and well; originality is dead only for those for whom it is dead (e.g. advocates of the emperor's new-clothes line that a rehash

of 'old' is somehow 'new'). Puissant composerly 'R & D' ever endures ...}

Example: Because of my ongoing love affair with Hermetism, pure mathematics and (meta)physics (etc.), I've become obsessed with unique permutational sacred-proportionalized holographic structures and with new musical schemata that extend beyond the corporeal manifestation of the artwork itself: diversity embraced in unity - *rapprochement* and interreferentiality in deep conceptual abstraction, beyond superficial, fictitious dualisms.

{Some will label me a 'complexist'. OK ... if they really must. But I'm definitely not a

trendy 'postmodernist'.

Postmodernism - aesthetically oxymoronic, and therefore chimerical? - is just an academe-centred grab for power whose lexicon is no less obfuscatory than any it seeks to supplant. And the canons are still firing precisely because some of them are now stigmatized. Postmodernism has become, predominantly, a façade appropriated by 'Neo-Capitulationists' through which exudes intolerant reactionariness: its espousal of pluralism is a lie.}

Ah! - audiences. I refuse to arrogate to myself the deluded, condescending, smug desire 'to give "the" audience what "they" want' (as if some 'ubiquitous taste' exists and one could genuinely discern it ... not that such a common dilettantish vanity matters in the slightest, anyhow). For it remains a most efficacious *fait accompli* that art of quality and substance mysteriously generates its own sustained public demand, however small. {Community appreciation of art is never reducible to a simplistic 'numbers game': slavish head-counting belongs in the dungeon of nescient (pseudo)populism.} In any case, our audiences nowadays are almost always to be found listening, in private, to music projected through loudspeakers. And one cannot honestly know who or how many hit the *off* button (let alone what music provokes such a response). Alas, it is increasingly the concert halls and opera houses - *passé* contexts? - that are, *per se*, elitist: ticket prices for live events often exclude the poor; CDs don't. (I'm CD-friendly.)

11 As fast as possible - emphatic: the Universal Axis; the 'Navel of the Earth'.
Infinitely fluid.

1 second
0 = 39.
4.4

Ian Shanahan: *Gate of Remembrance*:
12 Hypostases for Solo Piano (1993-95) excerpt

circ - cum - scribed circus ring seeks

certain serpenthead two-timed serpent sex

perced surface skin purple painting spills

inscribe inscape insert insight

a head of him deadly venom smell

split sense screams

exitex - citmentex - cretionex

Hazel Smith: 'Collaboration with musicians and visual artists
is central to my artistic outlook...'

{So the populist bums-on-seats arguments, dogmatized to discredit the musically adventurous, no longer cut it. Integrity and exploration do.}

Anyway, my various musical activities (together with the composing of chess problems and an enthusiastic absorption of arcana) help me to make sense of, and find purpose in, a world gone mad; these pursuits serve to keep me sane (although some might question whether such endeavours succeed in this).

{PS. I also greatly enjoy listening to the musics of: Delius, Jennifer Fowler, Chick Corea, Tibetan lamas and other Buddhists (shōmyō), ...}

Matthew Shlomowitz

I would like to write without impetus. If I could, I would never produce another schematic. I would just sit down at my desk and begin writing immediately. But I can't reach that ascetic state, and even if I could, I doubt I would write music. So instead, I accept pre-composition as something which is necessary for me to begin. However, the more of a piece I write, the further I distance myself from my sketchbook. I am not sure if I can completely escape my sketches.

Perhaps the essence of the concepts will be inherent in the piece. No matter: gradually I forget what I set myself to do, and grapple with the balance, scale and proportion in what I have done. Rather than realizing an objective, my process of composition becomes one of continual definition - the form and the material being composed in synchronicity.

Hazel Smith

Statement

My work revolves around the creation of new languages, the interrogation of linguistic and literary conventions, and the resituating of narrative as oral event. A central aspect of these endeavours for me is extending the concept of meaning through the intersection of language and sound. I do not regard myself as a composer (I would be more likely to call myself a poet). But my writing frequently employs aspects of musical composition such as rhythmic notation, and often requires performance for its completion. I am also excited by the possibilities for transforming and subverting language which digital technologies offer. I believe that we are nearing the death of poetry as words only on the written page, and that the exciting areas for writers now are performance, improvisation, technology and multimedia events. Recently, I have referred to my work as feminist performance linguistics, because it activates the relationship between linguistic exploration, vocal/verbal dynamics and the politics of gender.

The creative process fascinates me and I believe that it is possible to approach writing in a systematic and analytical way. I am dedicated to demystifying this process (through publication and teaching), and to making it less elitist. My own creative processes involve numerous strategies to induce poetic composition: for example, I exploit linguistic play to generate meanings.

Collaboration with musicians and visual artists is central to my artistic outlook and is my main means of artistic extension, not only technically but also conceptually. When I collaborate, I hope that my collaborator and I will arrive at a

new creative approach, but I also always ask - "What would you like the piece to be about?"

Colin Spiers

Art, in all its manifestations, is concerned with many aspects of the human condition, but its most important role encompasses the continuing redefinition of reality. As an artist, my desire to discover what this 'reality' might be is personal on the creative level, but collective when the outcome of this creativity (the music) on the listener is considered.

Reality, embracing as it does so many different concepts of perception and the aspect from which these may be initiated, will probably always defy our best efforts at elucidation. This, nevertheless, is what makes my role as an artist so fascinating, for I am in the enviable position of being able to comment on the 'outer' reality of the world by creating an alternative 'inner' reality. Since music is my art-form, I am in the doubly privileged position of working with a truly abstract medium (sound) in a truly 'relativistic' dimension (time).

Because of this abstraction, music is ideally suited as a means of appealing directly to the listener's emotions, and because it is principally expressed as a function of time, it is the perfect medium with which our perception of this key element of reality may be defined. When I write a piece of music, I am therefore most concerned that the material (regardless of style), balances its rate of unfolding. It's my belief that the closer these match, the more the listener's 'normal' temporal perceptions are suspended, and the conditions of timelessness so often associated with the greatest masterpieces of our musical literature are approached.

On one level, music is just a set of aural images apprehended in time. However, on another, it can become something greater than the sum of its parts if the composer's skill is adequate enough. For me there is no greater goal to which to aspire.

Amanda Stewart

Dear Ian,

Hi! ... I hope the statement is O.K. It's very 'poety' for a composer's statement and I haven't apologised for or qualified this. In some ways, Chris Mann 'composes with language', and I do too, in a sense, as well as with nonverbal vocal material. My strength and my weakness seems to be that my work is half-way between poetry and music. It's a bit of a lonely place to be sometimes. I've certainly had a lot more in common with composers in the last 7 - 8 years than with my old poetry mates. Anyway, if you're concerned that my emphasis on language does not illuminate my 'compositional' position - please let me know and I could, perhaps, add in something about why or how my work could be called musical (i.e.: 'I compose with language and nonverbal vocal material').

All the best with your new piano piece. It was great to talk ideas on the phone with you, as always! See you soon...

- Amanda

composingpurposeaherocircumnavigatesitsownposteriorimapstautologiesof conquesttomakemakinginothers

I'm interested in language and its relationship to the voice.

verbalvocalgrammarsnonverbalvocalsystemsarticulationsunsaidfieldresonances notations

For some time, I've been interested in how musico-poetic systems work within discourse. I researched particular discourses to try and see how they were interarticulated by various people and institutions using specific syntax, vocabulary and mythic structures, as well as certain intonational, rhythmic, timbral and pitch systems. I wanted to hear what sort of subject a specific mode of address assumed, the paradigms it was capable of invoking and how it set up its connections.

disjunctioncontradictionimpassebetweenthespokentheheardtherememberedthe writtenthemade

Now, I'm more interested in oral grammars, the mesh of complex systems at work within Australian speech and associated utterances and nonverbal forms, and in fields of memory inscription. For example, recently I've been focusing on the disjunction between aural and visual forms of inscription (i.e. modes of memory). In a piece for amplified voice and tape, *(i x it)²*, which deals with subject-verb-object relations, the performer (x) is caught between two sets of texts (i/it). One pair of texts is recorded (split left and right) on tape. The other pair is written (split left and right) on paper. The performer listens to the aural texts while reading the written texts and must generate a third text simultaneously. She or he is subject to multiple fields of potential engagement as different dimensions of inscription and notation are ignited and overlaid.

extrainterdeterminatextraintersubjectivecontextfielduseotherexchangespeechtime

As many of the conceptual possibilities of recent technologies decompose into virtual real estate or interlaxative utopias, I'm increasingly interested in working with simple systems which can generate complexity in a multi-lateral (or multi-paradigmatic) way through specificity of context and clear fields of proposed use.

intimatedistancesensitivedoubtabsencestensionstherubofparadigmgapsthe dynamic ofrelationbetweenquestionsnotknowing

on criticism :

THIS

The Legend

I	=	the critic
IT	=	the object of criticism
THIS	=	the resulting critical work
ITS	=	the voices of the object
YOU	=	the subject of the critical work

1. The Author

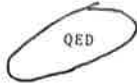
I = THIS
IT

2. The Voices of the Object

IT = THIS
ITS

3. The Return of the Subject

YOU(I x ~~IT~~) = YOU.I = THIS
~~IT~~ ITS ITS



Amanda Stewart: I compose with language and nonverbal vocal material.

Derek Strahan

The problem with the use of the term 'emotion' is that the word itself is old-fashioned to the point of being useless. It belongs to an era when doctors spoke of 'humours' to explain the human condition. I do not believe there is such an event/thing as a pure emotion. But there *are* thoughts, concepts which evoke a visceral reaction. Traumatic personal experience has forced me to conclude that humans constantly, at a subconscious level, exchange thought/emotions between each other *often at a distance*. One of the

functions of music appears (to me) to be to define and codify such thought/emotion-events in a communicable form through the manipulation of sound waves painted on a canvas torn from the fabric of time. The motive to so define and codify is to arrogate to yourself control of forces which commonly in your life control you.

Two conclusions follow: (1) Since 'emotion' is always evoked in response to a 'thought', then an intrinsic quality of 'emotional' music is that it will always also evoke thought-forms. (2) Provided that the compositional impulse is generated by a strongly defined trauma (wound), the following process may (be allowed to) occur: an 'idea' is provoked into existence;

so in this germ lies the basis of a 'composition'; then - paradoxically - the more structured, the more abstract, the more cerebral, and the more contrapuntal the development of/from this germ, the more 'emotional' will be the ensuing work. The end result of this process is to achieve what all 'games' aim at: the enjoyment (through music) of dangerous life-experiences in a situational context where there is no danger to life, but where one can experience the danger of being alive without incurring a lethal consequence. Thus defined, music is seen as the most ancient and most seductive form of virtual reality.

Carolyn Szeto

It took a lot of encouragement, from one of the editors, for me to agree to write about my music. My immediate response was that it was too difficult. I believe that words about music should enhance it and not detract from it. The uncertainty of whether I am able to improve the understanding of my music is mostly why I am apprehensive about documenting my thoughts.

Expression of musical thoughts with words, rather than with music, requires an extra and indirect approach to music. Some musical thoughts cannot be satisfactorily verbalized, and some attempts to explain music have resulted in inexact representations of intentions. Yet on the contrary, there have been some eloquent explanations of music which have ameliorated the appreciation of music. The main purpose of writing about music is to better communicate musical intentions. Communication is the very essence of composition.

One's music *is* one's thoughts. What and how one thinks is a reflection, to a large extent, of one's interactions in life. Therefore, one's music *is* oneself. Music, if you will, is an aesthetic extension of oneself.

My overwhelming passion for music compels me to compose. To put it simply, although it is a very complicated process, I try to compose 'good' music: good for me, good for the performers, and good for the audience.

At present, I am composing mostly concert music. That is, music which is ultimately for interpretation by an audience, communicated via the artistic skills of performers. Therefore, my music must be comprehensible to the audience. If my music was only for myself, then there would be no need to notate it.

An interviewer once suggested to me that my accommodating performers and audiences in my compositions may compromise my musical integrity. Again, this is a result of the pursuit of 'good' music. Compromising in music does not necessarily conflict with musical sincerity, and it would be most pertinent in certain circumstances, especially film music, where the sounds must 'fit' the visual aspects. Music, in many ways, is a compromise. Music, like language, is idiomatic. It reflects, or is dictated by, the medium for which it is intended.

Inspiration for my music is manifold. Recently, a rich source of inspiration for my music has come from Chinese culture. It has not always been directly from Chinese music, but rather from elements of Chinese culture. Such elements include Chinese concepts and aesthetics, poetry, and various structural devices. These are employed within the idiom of Western music.

Peter Tahourdin

Writing in the final years of the twentieth century, I am alarmed and disturbed by the present trend to trivialise and emasculate the arts by emphasising commercial viability, novelty and immediate appeal at the expense of substance. Those works of art that have stayed in my mind,

which have affected my understanding of life and the world around me, have seldom been those that are easily assimilated and yield up their treasure at the first encounter - whether they are old or new.

Art, I believe, should not be confused with popular entertainment. It should confront and astonish, though that does not mean it cannot entertain as well; nor does it mean it must be shocking, or elaborate in structure - though it may well be either, or both. Rather, it should enlighten and enrich by a confrontation with another person's vision and perception of life. This is as true of Shakespeare, J. S. Bach or Rembrandt as it is of Picasso, Patrick White, Messiaen or John Cage.

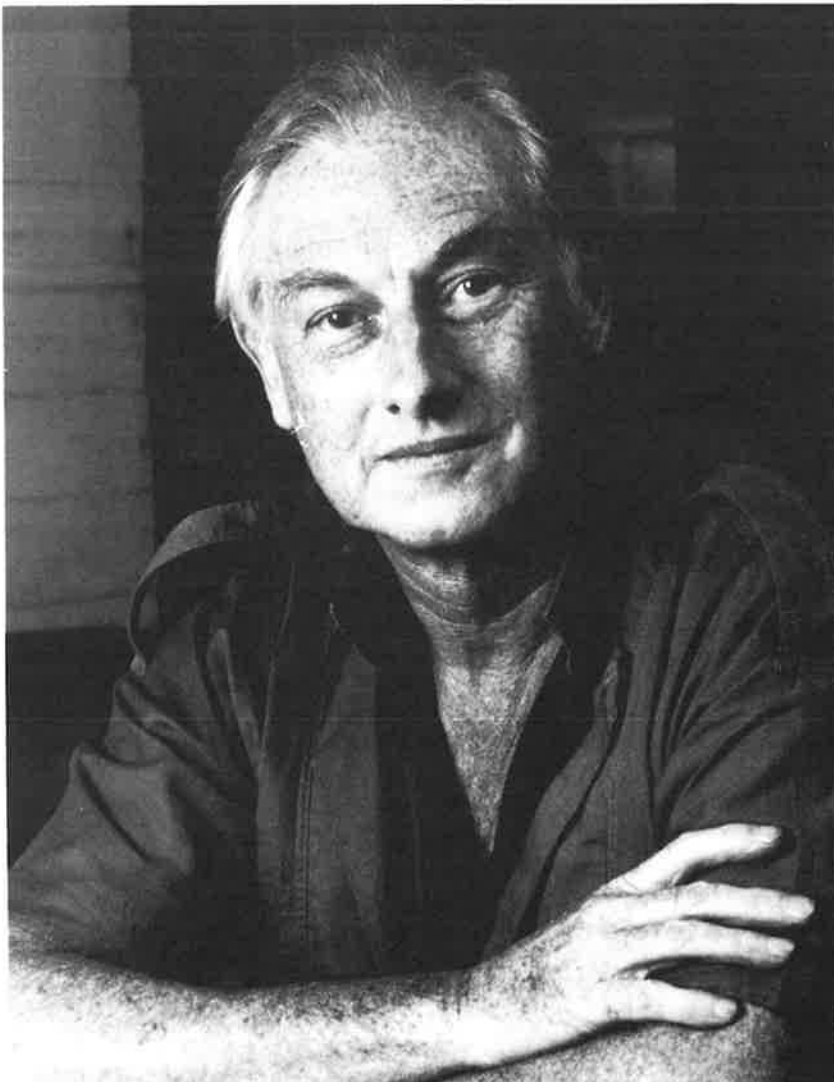
I would refer the aspiring artist to Shakespeare's injunction, "to thine own self be true", adding, "and know thyself". While to the politicians and bureaucrats, so intent on hijacking the arts in the cause of commerce, political correctness and a self-seeking and spurious form of nationalism, I would cite Webern's words of almost seventy years ago in *The Path to the New Music*, that works of art must be approached "with the necessary awe at the secrets they are based on, at the mystery they contain".

Little changes, does it?

Benjamin Thorn

When I listen to my own music and when I perform it I get a real buzz. Part of this is due to the music itself and its effect on my ego but part of it is also caused by observing the involvement of the audience and the performers. For me it is vital that both performers and audience should enjoy themselves.

Rhythmic energy is one way to grab an audience as is the use of blatant melodic gestures. These both lie close to the centre of my compositional strategy. They are not however essential: one of my favourite pieces as a performer, and one that generally enthral almost any audience is Berio's *Gesti*, which for the most part totally lacks what is usually thought of as



Peter Tahourdin

melody, rhythm and harmony. Using the full timbral possibilities of an instrument is always tempting and can electrify an audience.

Humour is also very important, though sometimes adults are worried about enjoying themselves; children are less inhibited. Something that you laugh at can't be seriously intended and must therefore be frivolous. I've never been able to understand this attitude, perhaps because I come from a family that laughs at all the 'wrong' places (as well as the right ones) in plays and films. Laughter enables you to let go and become a sheep, a cow or even a lettuce in my **Farmyard** piece. My music does however have a serious intent. Humour is based on seeing the world in an alternative way and through humour it is possible to create new sonic vistas and potentialities that seduce an audience.

Caroline Wilkins

The main thing I am concerned with in my music is the play of time between past and present. It is possible for music to travel through several kinds of time quite freely, by sliding through different contexts and juxtaposing different influences next to each other. I am interested in what has gone before, and in seeing these origins (whether instrumental, performative or within sound-recording practice) in relation to now.

Take for example a performance where a pianist plays on one piano together with another imaginary pianist on a reproducing piano: there is a collision of two different realities. Or the sound of a

phonograph needle, a circular hiss that spirals backwards into time, through which we hear the actual moment of the recording combined with that of a live performer.

What I am concerned with here

influenced my compositional thought. Although I am not 'anti-performer' in any way, my scores are highly proscriptive. In my old-fashioned *Weltanschauung*, I feel that, as one who calls oneself a



Caroline Wilkins (Photo: CSF Köln)

is a suspension of time limitations, a confinement within our own era. To hear the body of a sound means to acknowledge its physical source, its context, its presence as such, from which comes its particular diction or enunciation.

Adam Yee

I don't have an 'artistic creed' *per se*: I am twenty-one, straight out of university, and have completed at most half-a-dozen pieces of which I am proud. Nonetheless, I do welcome the opportunity to share some of my more lingering obsessions.

Firstly, my music is highly polyphonic, densely detailed, and complex: it exhibits richness and interconnectivity. So, I am a modernist - yet not of the 'experimental' variety; I am by no means anti-historical. I regard myself as belonging to a European/Western tradition; non-Western or vernacular musics have not overtly

composer, my primary duty is to write music, to know why everything in my music is there, and to be able to communicate that to performers.

I am more of a 'clockwork' than a 'computational' structuralist. I make formal plans in order to engender working environments wherein I can shape surface details in a comparatively *ad hoc* manner, while still delineating larger architectonics. At that foreground level, I seem to spend most of my time patterning pitches, and then creating melodic strands which are reactive to their own and their instruments' expressive possibilities.

The logic of musical instruments - in their physiology and accretive performance traditions - is the constant point of reference in my work. For some time now, I have indeed had the good fortune to be associated with **Libra Contemporary Ensemble**; I can honestly say that without their inspirational example, both as

Adam Yee: *reshit HoHma yir'at adonai* (1995)

promoters and interpreters of new music, I would be years behind where I am now.

Lastly, my music of the past 18 months (and for the foreseeable future) is intimately related to my ongoing study of the Hebrew language, and its attendant philosophical, cantorial and exegetical traditions. I see composition as a deeply spiritual act: the creation of an autonomous world in which the vastly labyrinthine strata of meaning in Biblical text (and post-Biblical homiletics) can be revealed, and enabled to comment on and inform one another, so as - hopefully - to create new 'truth'.

Julian Jing-Jun Yu

I believe that quality and beauty in music come from something much deeper than the sound effect produced; they lie in the pattern of thought, the inner laws or structure, and it is this inner pattern that gives to music integrity and individual character. The sound is only a result, a physical phenomenon, and the inner pattern is not always readily discernible at first hearing.

Notation is another physical form reflecting the musical idea. The written form is a surer guide to the quality of a piece of music than its sound, as the ear always lags behind the eye and needs to be guided by intellect and/or intuition.

I see value in writing music that I cannot 'hear', in order gradually to broaden my limits of aural comprehension - provided that what I am writing 'makes sense' on some inner plane.

The guest editors:

Chris Dench is a Canberra-based composer who has recently completed works for Synergy and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

Ian Shanahan is a composer, recorder player and teacher who lives in Sydney. He has almost completed a large-scale piano solo, *Gate of Remembrance*.

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