

*From Plato's Greece
to modern Estonia the
power of music has
been recognised and
harnessed.*

*Now more than ever,
argue Chuck Holdeman
and Alastair McIntosh,
the world needs
that power*

The environmental holocaust with its human implications is already here. An equivalent of 100 jumbo jets full of people die from lack of nutrition every day. Between ten and 25 plant and animal species go extinct every day, compared with a natural rate of just one every 10,000 years. For living standards in the third world to catch up with those of western Europe by the year 2010, global iron and steel production alone would have to increase 140 fold. This would exhaust remaining known world oil reserves in just 11 years, and so cannot happen.

Something has to give or change. It is possible that nature's time-honoured recourse to war, famine and pestilence with the added dimensions of potential climatic change will redress the balance by gearing up the frequency and scale of catastrophe. Alternatively, it is just conceivable that we can achieve sustainable livelihood by drawing on the fullest resources of our intelligence, creativity and love.

To reach such a point requires recognition that the present crisis of western-style development is not primarily economic or technical, but cultural and spiritual. The prevailing myth that human development is primarily a function of economic growth has been likened to a neutron bomb, destroying the soul of cultures while leaving outward structures intact. Since President Truman first used the term 'underdeveloped areas' in his 1949 Congressional inauguration speech, thereby defining people by what they do not have rather than by what they are, most nations have leapt aboard a hell's merry-go-round of industrialisation and agricultural intensification.

We are goaded on in the race for material prosperity by the fear of being trampled from behind. Yet the poor remain even more with us. The Earth is sickening with unprecedented rapidity, and values, such as relationship, sense of place and community, which cannot be given a price,



a sound ec

are dismissed by most economists because they are not measurable. Such is the development of culture bequeathed to us by the culture of development.

Recently in Edinburgh University we completed a study looking at how to 'green' undergraduate education, so that all students could see how their discipline impinges on matters of environmental concern. Opinions vary as to whether developments in science and technology are capable of coming up with lasting solutions to global problems. Interestingly, it was the scientists more than their colleagues in other faculties who saw greatest hope in such areas as the arts, humanities and music. This surprised and encouraged some who had not previously recognised the global import of their field. Our report on the faculty of music, which was drafted with the dean, said:

'If one views environmental education in a narrow sense, the role in it for music is not immediately apparent. But if one reflects for a moment on such myths and legends as those associated with Orpheus or with the Music of the Spheres, or indeed on the meaning of such commonly used words as "concord", "harmony", "compose" (though perhaps not "orchestrate"!), it rapidly becomes

apparent that the place of music in the total order of things is potentially more significant than is always recognised. Musical composition involves little cost in terms of the consumption of natural resources and the healing powers of music - its capacity to "compose the soul", as well as to liberate human creativity - have come to be widely recognised.' (Environmental Education for Adaptation, Centre for Human Ecology, 1991)

It is our view that music has a central role in addressing contemporary problems of the human condition. This derives from its ability qualitatively to affect consciousness, to stimulate creativity, as well as from the very structure of music. It is important for musicians and music educators to understand and be affirmed in this. We would suggest that to help change the world musicians should develop some understanding of ecology, and vice versa.

A pond, meadow or wood is considered to be an ecosystem on account of the complex relationships between the component species. Natural cycles of plants and animals harmonise with nutrient cycles, seasonal cycles, energy flows and so on, the whole system being in



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its optimal or 'climax' state when all available niches are filled. After fire, an area of woodland will quickly be re-occupied, first by pioneer species such as fireweed and birch, later by oaks, holly and other climax species, subsequently with dependent life forms such as mistletoe and squirrels. Relationship is central, success being not so much about survival of the fittest as survival of the most fitting.

Music, similarly, can be thought of as an *ecology of sound*. The way sounds find their place within the eternity of silence, interweaving harmonies to a melody, conforming to fundamental rhythms, dying back and resurging, metamorphosing: here we have a fine metaphor for nature at work. Here is insight into the deep process of reality, what the great cross-cultural thinker Raimon Panikkar describes as 'the non-dualist integration of movement and quiet', adding that 'Rhythm is the deepest nature of Reality, the very Becoming of Being' (Nine Sutras on Peace, Interculture 110, 1991).

We ask, might this ecology of sound be central to communicating and motivating ways of Being consistent with a sound human ecology? To claim so would require demonstration of music's capacity to invoke change at both the inner (personal)

and outer (political) levels of human experience. Let us look at this.

In American musical history, one of the most powerful developments has been the blues, which was not invented to make us sad but to lift us out of that sadness. In tracing much contemporary music to the post-slavery amalgam of African spirituality, writing in *Whole Earth Review*, Michael Ventura addresses the roots of western sadness, asserting that, 'All of them - the many Africans who created Voodoo... would have their revenge. Jazz and rock 'n' roll would evolve from Voodoo, carrying within them the metaphysical antidote that would aid many a 20th-century westerner from both the ravages of the mind/body split codified by Christianity, and the onslaught of technology. The 20th century would dance as no other had, and, through that dance, secrets would be passed. First, North America, then the whole world, would - like the old blues says - "hear that long snake moan".' (*Whole Earth Review* Nos 54/55, USA, 1987)

So the desperation of slavery and its aftermath, with a ground of African culture, called forth this great healing music, with such strength and poignancy that it entered the overall fabric of musical life, combining with other trends in popular music and evolving jazz and rock. This healing/spiritual music linked with the general cultural revolutions of the Fifties and Sixties and with the need for physical/sexual expression, which went on to join the 'consciousness expansion' ethos of the late Sixties and early Seventies.

Musical energy/group phenomena such as Woodstock, the Fillmore, and later the Live Aid concert and the Amnesty tour, have continued the role of music in cultural evolution and the search for social justice. The 1991 film *The Commitments*, set in Dublin, uses a transformation of American

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soul music as a flashpoint for a grassroots band formation, directed at the economic and cultural dislocation of modern urban life. This blight existed, and still does, in Detroit, Chicago, and New York when the movie's 'ideal' James Brown gave his answer to it all. We now perceive this cultural need in virtually all modern cities.

These musics may be said to have subverted an up-tight cultural establishment, and in various parts of the world actual political subversion has been seen as a goal. This was why Elizabeth I ordered Irish musicians to be hanged wherever found, and why post-1745 ('Bonnie Prince Charlie') Rebellion acts, such as the 1746 Act for the Abolition and Proscription of the Highland Dress and the Disarmament Act, effectively treated Scottish bagpipes as banned weapons of

war, their use punishable by death.

A contemporary case in point is the role played by folk-rock music in dismantling the Soviet Union. Western-influenced Soviet bands drawing on rich cultural roots were able to use 'glasnost rock' to start making their own cultural statements. This was particularly apparent in Estonia. In the early 1980s Soviet geologists confirmed the existence of Europe's largest phosphate deposits under Estonia, and plans were set in motion to import 20,000 Russian labourers and dig up 25% of the entire Estonian land area. In 1987 Estonia's top rock and pop performers recorded, in 'We Are The World' fashion, 'Ei Ole', which was an effort to alert people to the cultural and ecological havoc which the mining plan would create.

Banned on state radio, it was given its first public performance at the Tartu Music Festival in Estonia's second-largest city and thereafter regularly broadcast from Finland's Radio One. As opposition to Russian domination grew in the late Eighties, the presence of Estonian bands became such a dominant feature at rallies that their revolution has been dubbed 'the singing revolution'. Protests grew from 80,000 people on 10 June 1988, when the Republic of Estonia flag was first flown, to almost one-third of the Estonian population, 300,000 people, at a mass gathering on 11 September at the culmination of 'rock summer'.

Writing in the Estonian cultural weekly, *Sirp ja Vasar*, Heinz Valk said: 'Participating in that celebration compensated for suffering decades of humiliation and denial of one's true nature. It was the most magnificent demonstration, the likes of which I've never seen in films, television, in my dreams or in real life. A singing and rhythmically moving mass of happy people, tens and tens of waving national flags, smiling faces, unanimity, no anger, no enmity, in their hearts but one word: Estonia... People who make a revolution singing and smiling should be a noble model for everyone.' (*Whole Earth Review* No 65, USA, 1989)

In the realm of art music, several Americans have become identified with change and a shift of consciousness. An early leader and still vibrant exponent is John Cage. His reaction to the enormous level of intellectual complexity in western art music led him to embrace chance and 'disorder' in sound, derived from the philosophy of the far east, particularly using the I Ching method of chance discovery.

Pauline Oliveros is another American composer whose fascination has been devising procedures, rituals one might say, to unlock a group intuition for musical discovery. Still other composers like Steve Reich have immersed themselves in African drumming or Indonesian gamelan as a means of discovering the ceremonial and meditational sides of musical consciousness, in contrast to the

expository, event A leads to B leads to C, mindset of most European-based classical music.

Another American, Paul Winter, sometimes touted as a founder of 'new age' music, has established major concerts at the changing of the seasons, solstices and equinoxes, as well as using whale or wolf 'songs', overtly embracing Earth themes to generate music.

So we see that there is much to suggest the musical experience can bring musicians and listeners to a common plane of emotional or spiritual excitation or relaxation. While some music referred to may have overt political or social meaning in its lyrics, non-verbal sonic qualities also have a powerful emotional sweep which may be pleasurable, upsetting or inspiring. Plato's grounds for censoring the arts in his ideal state, *The Republic*, was that 'Rhythm and harmony penetrate most powerfully into the innermost part of the soul and lay forcible hands upon it, bearing grace with them, so making graceful him who is rightly trained, and him who is not, the reverse.' (Book 3, 401, trans A D Lindsay, Dent, 1935)

Pythagoras, according to Porphyry, saw music as being able to exercise 'a healing, purifying influence on human actions and passions, restoring the pristine harmony of the soul's faculties'. (*De Vita Pythagorae*, Edit A Nauck, Leipzig, 1885)

On a personal level, finding a way to express one's predicament or ideals through musical creativity or other artistic means can free the spirit. The need for freedom or love, or anger at oppression, can find a necessary outlet. Barbara Swetina of the innovative community Findhorn has suggested that singing is as important to health as brushing your teeth: do it at least twice a day!

The British composer Nigel Osborne, a developer of the 'community music' initiative, gives two examples of transformational music in prison life:

'one, a prisoner rendered temporarily unable to speak by prolonged solitary confinement found musical release in creating a John Cage-like "soundscape" to accompany his text, a collection of aural events evoking the great significance of sound in his experience of enforced silence; and two, an in-prison three-day festival of African Yoruba music, based on the ethnic background of some prisoners, was able to bridge and effectively erase the explosive racial tension which existed before the festival.'

Reality, as we daily experience it, comprises only nature and art. Perhaps art is what happens when the inner nature of our being acknowledges outer nature. This fusion of subjective and objective changes both. It is the very process of creation; a matter of taking the outer world as we find it, holding with it in solidarity, becoming vulnerable so as not to hold back, and

thereby allowing the magic of touch to happen. Through art in all its forms we actually call one another into being, creating relationship, ecology, community, between the Earth and its peoples.

A liberating factor of contemporary musical life is the fascinating diversity of styles we have. World music with its myriad folk traditions and hybrids has been brought to our attention by recordings and touring groups. Within western 'serious music' in the classical and jazz traditions there is tremendous variety: we no longer have a situation in which creative 'contenders' have to write atonal music or to keep up with the particular innovations of the late Miles Davis. While the most commercial music urges conformity on those who aspire to its type of success, success in other musical genres can happen in myriad ways; while music criticism has an undeniable need to categorise, the creation of new categories is an ever-present possibility.

A related phenomenon in the world of European-type classical music is the seeming disappearance of the 'genius/romantic hero' composer or conductor. There is a greater anonymity of musical talent, looking at the range of

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activity. The very talented have a more specific audience, limited in number.

It would also appear that another 'supergroup' like the Beatles is unlikely. A pop group or artist may have great popularity for a time, like Tracy Chapman or Lionel Richie, and then an ongoing limited following, like the Grateful Dead, Peter Gabriel or Sting.

Similarly, accomplishments in scientific areas such as space exploration are now made by teams of relatively anonymous researchers rather than by geniuses. It seems that history has thrust upon us the necessity of collaboration, the imperative of community in contemporary life. Perhaps what we most need now are linkages: between individuals, between cultural groups, between performers and listeners as 'collaborators'. Super individuality, as hero or genius, seems passé.

We see that current musical culture is not exclusive. A million tastes and genres co-exist, and we need not fear the expert, who has lost the genius/god-like status 'he' once had (and we do mean the 'he' of yesterday, not the 's/he' we now aspire to). As educators we must teach our students the essential skills of music, but we must also give them the musical materials, pulse, sonority, mode, and the habit of making things up, trusting the subjective, learning to make variations spontaneously, and to

use memory or notation to keep what we like. We also owe students the knowledge and experience of other cultures, because they are beautiful and because we need to communicate with these cultures if we are to save what we treasure on the planet.

We also propose music and the other arts as an alternative to what Maxwell MacLeod has termed 'retail therapy', our tendency to go out and buy something when we are feeling down. Getting our frustrations and emotional needs expressed, especially in a sympathetic group, is spiritually freeing. We need more contexts for this and on a regular basis. It can happen at private gatherings or school-centred functions. We need to invigorate our churches, community and art centres with collaborations between ethnic musicians, composers and improvisors, dancers, actors, artists, and the public.

We advocate 'the active', doing music yourself, or responding actively by dancing, or by writing or drawing or speaking a response, with a workable context for this activity. In contrast, the passivity encouraged by some concerts, carried to the ultimate in the passive 'arts' experience of TV watching, as well as the consumer mentality, have contributed to a spiritual crisis of poor mental health, escapism, and frustration, displacing deep human needs with a surrogate junkie world of material objects and accoutrements which cannot be supported by our ecosphere.

We do not pretend or aspire to eliminate computers, cassette tapes or synthesisers, but to shift the focus from these items to the human exchange, which they were intended to encourage but have often supplanted instead. It would be interesting to know, through psychological testing, the effects on work satisfaction of a person singing while doing a job compared with listening to tapes or the radio.

So, in our groups, we say 'show us what you've made' or 'let's hear your sounds'. This year's Human Ecology midwinter ceilidh comprises all home-grown entertainment under the caption, 'What we are is what we get!' You may feel embarrassed or vulnerable, that your own music is not good enough, but only by releasing our deepest longings, for understanding, for community, for our children's futures, can we change ourselves and dance over the Earth in a way worth singing about.

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