

# Mind Moon Circle

*Journal of the Sydney Zen Centre*



***SOUNDS OF SANGHA***  
AUTUMN 2016



## SOUNDS OF SANGHA

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**Cover:** Glenys Jackson *MEDITATION ON A THEME*

**Editor:** Brian Gutkin

NEXT ISSUE of *Mind Moon Circle* (Winter 2016) will be edited by Philip Long. The theme will be *Zen and the Shadow*. How does the *Shadow* as the forgotten side of psyche relate to Zen training which tends to be pre-occupied with the relationship between form and emptiness? Is the *Shadow* an illusion? What is the nature of “character work” which we are often encouraged to undertake in Zen? How have you experienced all this in your life and practice?

Please get your contributions in by 30<sup>th</sup> June and email them to [philiplong@bigpond.com](mailto:philiplong@bigpond.com).

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*Sounds of Sangha Listening* SZC BENEFIT CONCERT 2016

From your MMC MC.....In the beginning the word had got around...WANTED SOUNDS OF SANGHA! .....long silence...palpable...days weeks..... just this silence.... empty or full.....I cannot say.....then WHOOSH!.....pregnant pause.....PING! ....., success.... emails emerge from the ether ...one by one they come.....poem, picture, photo, prose...sounds of sangha.....pew!!....one relieved mc...one, two.....three.... how many articles does it take to fill a Zen journal...? WRONG! NEXT!... but listen listen!!.... sound of polar ice melting.... someone drilling a hole next door...my Dublin vernacular...nex-tore!... listen no birds...a car whizzzes by.... yes... ok Siri I'll add it to the dictionary.... sounds of sangha...aaah..... the fridge sings in d minor....and me singing...'*Zen Zen Zen I like to do it now and then*'! ...*Guanyin* listening to the whole cacophony.....white noise of the universe tuning in on itself...BUT WAIT! WAIT it's here!!.... COME IN COME IN eine kleine sangha musik... here's your emmm MMC!!! .... now just turn to front cover...sound of one page turning.... SEE! the perfect chord played to please the Lord....no Leonard it's Handel!!.... Hallelujah Glenys gassho.... now open to sound of our perfect teacher.... deep bows to Paul coming forth in perfect harmony. *the singer and the song*.... then Caroline's Conch Shell wakes us.....listen... the great ocean.... thanks so much Caroline....then dear Maggie teaches us *the tune no one understands*....in the hope that no one is listening.... deepest bows Maggie...next, thanks Philip, for your sparkling nickelodium ...brim full of cute little vinyl sweethearts dutifully dropping every three minutes.... plop! ...*sweet music here that softly falls like petals from blown roses on the grass*.... can you hear?... Piaf Piaf! ... such sibilance.... that mantra ... om... om rien....om...*je ne regrette rien*.....and next up Peter's beautiful drawing preaches volumes, thanks so much Peter...and on to Allan, just returned from a walking pilgrimage on Shikoku, who uses all his hands and eyes to deliver a wonderful teisho on *sounds of sangha*.....thank you Allan for so skilfully completing this fresh off the boat, like reaching for your pillow at night indeed....and then Janet delights us with sounds of *birds in her backyard* deep bows to you and to the birds of Australia who kindly allow this annually online extravaganza.... now sounds of Sally....reminding me of childhood memories of gramophone needles deftly clacking across my Dad's long play 78's..... thanks Sally for such rich reflections....and also for your meditation on sweet sounds.... Sally Sally.... my mother's name too.... then Jane, consummate musician and composer that she is, delivers us a sweet piece on Zen and musicianship...how much practice is enough indeed...thanks so much Jane.... the muso's are in full flight now, or should I say fugue, as Drew takes his solo with an explication on Watazumi and Cage and that brilliant drummer Drew Bourgeois, truly ...and Jill thank you so much for acquainting us with some of our neighbours at Kodoji, Barking Owl, Bookbook and Sugar Glider...and for the beaut photos... and yes I can hear them too right now, as the evening Cockie's and Kookaburra's burst forth in perfect harmony and my stomach rumbles for *food glorious food*...and thanks so much Diane for *the sounds of the world in Haiku*....so evocative...HAIKUeeeeee!!!....and oh yeh yeh yeh.... Brendon rocks in and switches us on to the sound of *Van the Man* and what a wonderful night for a mind moon dance circle indeed... Brendon give me five!!...and now for the sublime sound of single voice vaulting through ancient stone as *accidental chorister* John flips off his bike somewhere in Northern Italy landing plumb in the middle of a 34-piece choir, plus one.... thanks John for this awesome piece...and last to sound is Alex, two beautiful poems on just playing and just sitting, thanks so much Alex.

Also I hope you enjoy the photos, peppered about, from the SZC benefit concert two years ago, which the wonders of new software have enabled me to extract from some videos... so please enjoy *sounds of sangha*,

Gassho, Brian

# THE SINGER AND THE SONG

Paul Maloney

David Loy tells us that the inability to find satisfaction in our lives has its root in a basic “awareness of non-self --- the intuition that ‘I am not real’ which we become conscious of as a sense of lack infecting our empty core.” Most of us, I believe, can identify with this deep sense that; “something is wrong with me, that something is missing in my life.” So we set out to fill this felt void, each in our own way. But somehow, nothing seems to work. No matter how successful we may appear to be on the surface, no matter how much we accumulate, we continue to feel empty.

When material pursuits don’t bring satisfaction, we try other tactics. A spiritual practice can hold out the promise of filling the inner void. Some people may approach zazen with the mind of a poker machine player. Each breath is an investment. They take a deep breath, pull the handle, so to speak, and wait for the jackpot to tumble out – the great pay-off. They expect the heavens to open up and a great shower of light will fill their inner void.

But the biggest strategy of all is to postulate the existence of an Absolute Being, or Godhead. For some, that is what Buddha-nature represents; a substantial ground upon which we can construct a fulfilled life, if only we can make contact with it. Then our practice is characterised by various attempts bore down and down, through the shifting sands of thought, seeking to find the bedrock of Buddha-nature. This gold mining activity is undertaken with the expectation we will achieve something special, or find some permanent resting place, where the self can dwell in peace.

But, according to the Buddhist account, this is a fruitless endeavour. The sense of existential unsatisfactoriness that pervades our lives arises from a mistaken notion about the nature of who or what we are. Basically, the great delusion is to consider the self as a detached observer residing in some notional transcendental realm beyond change. In particular, we identify the ego as our self. In the Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, Sogyal Rinpoche defines ego as “*the absence of true knowledge of who we really are, together with its result; a doomed clutching on, at all costs, to a cobbled together and makeshift image of ourselves*” that has to keep changing in order to “*keep alive the fiction of its existence.*”

It is to be noted that Ego is not some *thing* that grasps; it is the grasping. So our practice is not a matter of struggling with a substantial ego that we have to overcome. Rather the goal is to see through it. To see that it is a fabrication, a set of ideas and attitudes that have frozen into a rigid form. It is the concepts we have developed about who we are, and what the world is, that hinder us, “the one thing that stands between us and our true nature.” Fundamentally the problem is not that there is something missing in our lives. As such, the feeling of emptiness that we experience should not be regarded as some pathology to be cured. We don’t take up this practice to gain something. Rather it is about losing something. Not even some thing, but some belief. The belief that I am here and you are there, two material entities separated by space.

You see the Buddha steals away to which we cling so desperately. Rather than providing us with something to fill the gap in our self, he takes away the self too!

The Diamond Sutra records that the Buddha Shakyamuni said to Subhuti,

*Subhuti, those who desire inferior doctrines are attached to the idea of an ego, a person, a being, and a soul.*

*If a Bodhisattva retains the thought of an ego, a person, a being, or a soul, he is no more a Bodhisattva.*

It can't be much clearer than that! Not only is there no ground upon which to stand, there is also no one to do the standing!

At the heart of the Buddhadharma is the Buddha's insight into the structure of reality that is revealed as "interdependent arising." To understand interdependent arising is to understand the Buddhadharma. Interdependent arising describes a world that consists of an infinite web of interacting causes and conditions in which there are no permanently existing, self-sustaining phenomena. Phenomena do not exist in and of themselves but only in relationship to each other and the entire universe. Whenever one phenomenon is empirically present the others invisibly participate in its presence.

*"When a flower blooms the whole world blooms into spring."*

Furthermore, as the determinateness of phenomena is found only in their relational dependence on other phenomena, their existence is radically contingent. As such, they cannot be said to have a definite nature, or self-essence, so they are considered "empty". This is the basis of the doctrine of "no-self." Considered negatively "emptiness" signifies the absence of particularity, the non-existence of self-sustained individuals. Positively it is the constant flux of becoming that makes salvation possible. It does not indicate nihilism or absolute nothingness. Phenomena are internally related such that when they interact they mutually determine each other, thereby determining the form of the world. This means that all phenomena are to be thought of as the transformation, or the self-determination of one world. And this world is, in turn, both impermanent and insubstantial. The Buddhadharma presents a world consisting of infinitely complex processes that consists of events not substantial beings.

As an analogy, consider a whirlpool in a river. While it can be distinguished, and said to exist, its nature is such that it cannot be separated from the river, for it has no core centre, no "self", that remains apart and unchanging. Its existence is totally dependent on the river, for it is in fact not other than the river. Rather it is to be regarded as a condition of the river, one of the river's features. As the river is constantly changing so is the whirlpool, because the whirlpool is dependently arisen.

The Buddhist view is that our existence in relation to Buddha-nature is analogous to that of the whirlpool. Which is to say, just as the whirlpool is a condition, or feature of the river, so is each individual thing (be it a human being, a worm, a leaf, or an atom) a feature of the one reality that is Buddha Nature. Having no self-being, not being other than my circumstances, means that my fundamental nature is characterized not by being, but emptiness. The self does not attain union with Buddha-nature, for Buddha-nature is not another with which it could be united. Salvation is a matter of regaining our original nature, and it is also a realization that this nature had never been lost. Buddha Nature is not something to be attained in the future, following a period of sustained practice. Buddha Nature reveals itself as the absolute present moment.

This is why Dōgen rejects the conventional idea that Buddha-nature is permanent. Rather, he asserts that impermanence is Buddha-nature, and vice versa.

*On this account, plants, trees, and woods are impermanent, and hence the Buddha-nature. Human bodies and minds are transient - such is the Buddha-nature. Countries, mountains, and rivers are evanescent, because they are the Buddha-nature.*

Buddha-nature actualizes itself as coeval and co-essential with what we act out and give expression to. Prior to this the Buddha-nature cannot be said to exist or subsist. Buddha-nature gives birth to a new creation from moment to moment, sharing the fate of the universe. The Buddha-nature of expression and the Buddha-nature of activity are inevitably impermanent and temporal, ultimately leading to death. There is no way out of this ultimate limitation, for it is not a mere sentiment but a fact of life that the world is as fleeting and transient as a dewdrop in the morning. Being and becoming are not two separate metaphysical realities but one and the same in the process of impermanence. Dōgen is hereby able to uphold the truth that the mind and body are one, and the non-duality of reality and appearance. That is why he says that it is against reason to assert that the mind survives the disintegration of the body. (SBZ Vol. 1 p. 156 "Bendowa")

In the Mahayana Buddhist tradition that which brings liberation is not getting something, but insight into Emptiness (shūnyatā). To realize Emptiness means to attain liberation. As we read in the Heart Sutra,

*Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, practising deep Prajna Paramita,  
clearly saw that all five skandhas are empty, transforming anguish and distress.*

And the Heart Sutra goes on to say,

*Since there is nothing to attain, the Bodhisattva lives by Prajna Paramita,  
with no hindrance in the mind; no hindrance and therefore no fear;  
far beyond delusive thinking, right here is Nirvana.*

To be liberated from anguish and distress is not to leave this world behind and find refuge in a heaven that lies in some Absolute Elsewhere. To be liberated, to Awaken, is to find one self at home, just where one is, right now.

In the SHODOKA we read:

*When we see truly, there is nothing at all.  
There is no person; there is no Buddha.  
Innumerable things of the universe  
Are just bubbles on the sea?*

*In our dream we see the six levels of illusion clearly;  
After we awaken the whole universe is empty.*

The only reality that things have is like that of a pattern woven into a cloth. Unravel the threads and the pattern goes. As the Diamond Sutra says,

*All composite things are like a dream, a phantasm, a bubble and a shadow, are  
like a dew drop and a flash of lightning; they are thus to be regarded.*

At first glance, this might seem to be a rather depressing, or even nihilistic, prospect. From my perspective, however, it is anything but. For many years I had heard, and read about "impermanence," but until recently, I had not really comprehended its



significance. In March this year, I participated in a nine-day retreat taught by my old friend, and Satipatthana teacher, Patrick Kearney. During the course of the retreat Patrick quoted these words of the Buddha:

*“When you develop the perception of impermanence, then the conceit of ‘I AM’ will be abandoned.”*

These words set off a process of transformation that worked on me during Patrick’s retreat, and continued through the course of the five-day autumn sesshin taught by Subhana and Allan. To put this into context, you need to understand that just before Christmas an MRI revealed that I had very aggressive prostate cancer. There is nothing quite like being told, “You have aggressive cancer” to focus the mind on impermanence, and the contingency of life. Subsequently, when being interviewed for radiation therapy, I told the specialist that I wanted to put off starting until I had finished the upcoming retreat and sesshin. It proved to be a very good decision indeed.

During this period of intense meditation, while not preoccupied with my illness, as such, the awareness of my impermanence was working its magic deep in my heart. And notes that I kept during Patrick’s retreat, referred to the fact that I had been carefully circling around the question of the cancer and what it meant to me. And it became intertwined with the “conceit of I AM.” On the last morning of Patrick’s retreat, while sitting before breakfast, I went to my room in order to sit alone. I sat down on my chair, and in that moment there was no one sitting! I was gone and there was no room as such, just a vast openness filled with the sounds of the morning. The sense of “I AM” was absent, yet not entirely. Somewhere way, way off in the back of my awareness the “I AM” was hovering, like a ghost, straining to be recognized and brought to the front. I don’t know how long this state lasted, and I slowly “returned.” That morning breakfast was really delicious!

A few days later I started the autumn sesshin, again sitting with the feeling of impermanence, without anything seeming to happen. One day followed the other without incident. Then, in the closing moments of the autumn sesshin that the whole question of my impermanence was somehow resolved in a rush, when Subhana and then Allan, in turn, spoke to me, and my heart broke open.

This is what I wrote to Subhana and Allan following the sesshin.

*Dear Subhana and Allan,*

*I am writing to thank each of you for your warm and generous words to me at the close of sesshin. They really tore me open, in the best of ways. Perhaps for the first time in my life, I was able to allow positive words about me, and my actions into my heart. Whatever happened to open me up is still processing. I occasionally have glimpses of this process of transformation, although I can't put it into words. The best I can say, at this time, is if I allow the thought "I Am (dying)", there is a sense of inconsolable grief. Yet if I open, and clearly see into impermanence, then "the conceit of I Am is relinquished," and I feel nothing but gratitude and great peace. When there is no I Am, there is no past and no future, no birth and no death, no arising or passing away. My only reality is this moment, in all its beauty and mystery.*

This sense of gratitude and peace has continued to grow. I feel grateful to have the privilege of participating, no matter however so briefly, in the amazing Cosmos within which I dwell. I feel gratitude to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha in the



broadest possible sense of what they are. Now each moment is sufficiently fulfilling in itself, and I don't feel the need for the next one.

And I notice how the trees this autumn are the most beautiful I have ever experienced! They just catch and hold, filling me with an immense, quiet joy. With the realization of interdependent arising, and emptiness of self, every event is seen as unique, and precious. It is this moment, the "here-now," that constitutes my life, and the lives of each of us. So if we miss this moment, we miss our life. And in this moment, there is both gratitude for the past, and responsibility for the future. My life is not about me. To think so is delusion. It is not that I am alive, rather that I am life. And these words of the Shōdōka remind me that,

*All things are transient and completely empty;  
This is the great awakening of the Tathagata.  
Transience, emptiness, awakening --*

The challenge for all of us, I believe, is to have faith in this triple doctrine of transience, emptiness and enlightenment, and then to give expression to it in our everyday lives.

Dōgen taught that our ability to attain the Way depends entirely on our resolve and attitude for practice. While some may have more talent than others, and so progress faster, all can attain if they resolve to do so and practice regularly. As we are not things but processes without essences, we have to choose who and how we are to be. This means that realizing, making real, our Buddha nature is an existential challenge to each of us, something that we face every day. We have a responsibility to tune ourselves, fashion our body/mind – to bring forth the music that is Buddha-nature. That is why zazen is awakening. Zazen refines us, polishes us.

Dharma practice is process of growing up, maturing as a human being. And we do this by opening ourselves to life. Because the practice is about growing up, it is something that we must freely choose to do. In the face of the transitoriness of life, we are responsible for using the passing opportunities to actualize our potential and to realize values. In other words, we are responsible for what to do, whom to love, and how to suffer. We have to hold our life the way we would hold a butterfly, unrestrained, with an open hand. We must risk it flying away – risk losing it any moment. And that is how we need to hold the people whom we love, leaving them the freedom to depart at the moment of their choosing. Life is its own fulfilment, just the self, being the self. This is the basic Buddhist belief that the self, just as it is, is living out the life that pervades the whole universe. This worldly body itself, which appears and disappears like a phantom in this world, is nothing other than the reality of life.

Buddha-nature does not reveal itself IN the world but AS the world. The Currawong's evening song is the voice of Buddha-nature, the gold of the Wattle its colour, and the sandstone cliffs its form. The Cosmos in which we dwell is Emptiness/Buddha-nature singing itself as the green valley, the stars and the sky such that,

*Birds and trees and we ourselves come forth in perfect harmony.*

Buddha-nature sings itself as you and me – each of us is a phrase, some short some long, in the great symphony of life. We are the singers and the song, the dancers and the dance.

Just as the phrases in a piece of music succeed one another from moment to moment, coming from nowhere and going nowhere, so the point instants of existence succeed one another. As the Cosmos, and all that is in it, is a song, it can only be experienced as the present moment. And, like a song, it has no substance. It just is when it is. So when the Paul "note" stops, I will no longer exist. Not that I will go anywhere, any more than the sound of the bell goes anywhere when it fades away.

And, perhaps, we can gain a new perspective on the statements, "All is change," "all is empty," "all is without self," "all is such as it is." This describes a cosmos that is all music and only music, a music that spontaneously comes forth from Emptiness.

The great Taoist master Chuang Tzu tells us that the goal of life is to return to one's nature, to "touch ultimate emptiness." This results in absolute freedom, for "once you grasp the great Form without form, you will roam where you will."

Then we realise the truth of Hakuin's words that,

*Nirvana is right here before our eyes  
This very place is the Lotus Land  
This very body the Buddha.*

That, in essence, is the theory. What follows is a wonderful example of the living experience. Anne Buescher was a resident of the Sydney Zen Centre for some years. After being diagnosed with cancer, she chose to have no treatment, allowing the condition to take its course. Despite being told by her oncologist that she had only three months to live, Anne kept going for some years. During that time, she began koan work with me. Because of the pain, Anne also did a lot of walking meditation, and had wonderful insights, some of which she would report to me. What follows speaks for itself.

Letter from Anne Buescher 28-01-06

*Dear Paul,*

*On Friday morning a sentence popped suddenly into my mind: "**Life lives itself on its own terms**". Over the following hours these seven words gained such a strength that they literally pushed every other thought aside. And then, in the afternoon, something happened.*

*While walking down Victoria Road there was this something called "I", that wasn't "I" or an entity at all, but just a part of the huge flow or better the huge 'being-ness' it moved through or just was in. This "I" knew that it was breathed by life, that its heart was pumped by life, that every organ, every single cell was operated by life, that this "I" didn't have anything else to do than to move life or be life because it was life. And there was this constant hammering in my head: 'Life lives itself on its own terms' and a huge sense of relief and freedom and happiness came with it. This "I" didn't have to do anything because in fact "I" couldn't do anything except just being this GIGANTIC life. There were no obligations to any set rules or conventions but just this deep knowing that the only but most challenging and most binding obligation there is, is towards life.*

*On the other hand, there was a heightened awareness of this person called ....., who was certainly separate from everything that surrounded her, people and cars and trees and more people. We were all separate entities but then on the other hand no entities at all. Everything was expression of LIFE. Everything had the same value, be it a car, a leaf, a*

*person, a dog or a teapot, but everything was at the same time totally different from each other, a different and unique expression of life. I felt like skipping and shouting: Life lives itself on its own terms! On the other hand, there was this gratitude and seriousness and an overwhelming sense of devotion because everything was so simple but then so complex at the same time.*

*In the evening my housemates and I went to the cinema. We saw Ang Lee's new movie about two cowboys falling in love with each other at the age of 19 in the early sixties in the US. It is one of these stories where love just hits and people struggle and fight and try everything to get rid of these feelings that seem so inappropriate, but all the fighting is so useless because Life lives itself on its own terms. And I saw why all our ideas of control of feelings, thoughts, people, situations, are so utterly ridiculous because Life is such a powerful force.*

*After the movie I felt like wandering off by myself and huge waves of tears came. Love in all its facets is not only the fabric everything is made out of but for the first time I saw the duality in it so very clearly. The enormous beauty and the enormous pain that comes with it. Not love and hate are the opposites but duality sits in love itself. It sits in everything itself, everything is form and emptiness, is bliss and pain. We perceive the world as dual but actually duality is only a concept, in reality it doesn't exist.*

*I hope it doesn't sound too confusing.... There was more, but that seems to be even more difficult to talk about.*

*Will you have time for a coffee on Wednesday around 10.30? Ann*  
As Hakuin reminds us:

*Singing and dancing are the voice of the Law*



**SZC BENEFIT CONCERT 2014**

## CONCH SHELL POEM – *after Bhutan trip*

Caroline Josephs

### **Right-coiled White Conch**

*The white conch which coils to the right symbolizes the deep, far-reaching and melodious sound of the Dharma teachings, which being appropriate to different natures, predispositions and aspirations of disciples, awakens them from the deep slumber of ignorance and urges them to accomplish their own and others' welfare.*

### **Begin here**

With the sound of  
the Shofar,  
the sound of  
the conch shell --  
deep, insistent,  
drawing the faithful  
to synagogue,  
to temple, church,  
to monastery. Just  
that sound --  
touches a heart,  
resounds in  
the belly,  
evokes a  
millennia,  
resounds Infinity --  
not just *Om*  
Not just *Elohim*,  
not just the  
*First* word,  
just the First  
*Sound* in the  
Universe --  
sound of  
the First baby  
cry, the sound  
of anguish  
too deep  
to be  
spoken --  
the sound of  
the world  
coming  
into Being,  
the sound  
of the world  
dying.



Caroline Josephs

October 2015

[www.carolinejosephs.com](http://www.carolinejosephs.com)

## THE TUNE NO ONE UNDRSTANDS    *Maggie Gluek*

*I must wake in the morning  
And listen on high  
Till the grey dawn comes trailing  
And night shadows fly.  
'Tis the king's call, oh list  
Oh heart of mine, keep tryst, keep tryst,  
Keep tryst or die.*

*When that call comes I'll answer  
Though danger be nigh  
To each perilous mission  
I must reply.  
'Tis the king's call, oh list  
Oh heart of mine, keep tryst, keep tryst,  
Keep tryst or die.*

You won't know this song although you may know its English folk tune setting, *I Gave My Love an Apple*. It was written for a primary school musical based on *The Once and Future King*, TH White's magical imagining of the boy who will become King Arthur and his apprenticeship with Merlin. The drama teacher never cast me in plays. "Your voice is too nasal for the stage," she said, one of those devastating throwaway lines received as a child that stay with you for life. But I was given this song to sing as a solo from the chorus bleachers on behalf of the young Arthur, aka Wart, and it too has stayed with me for life.

When I sing it aloud or to myself, I am not in the school auditorium but in a castle turret, leaning out the stone window, breathing the fresh air of the English countryside, seeing hawks circle, listening intently and watching. *Be faithful, be faithful*. I return to it as an expression of utter commitment, being true to whatever comes. Perhaps there are songs that set your life on a course.

And perhaps that early experience also set singing as a course. In my early forties I took up formal voice study. Since then it has been an (almost) daily discipline. A practice, with no end of challenges: learning to understand vocal physiology, to improve tone, to increase breath control, to refine interpretation. Training is essential. Frustration and failure of course part of the process. But, in singing as in *zazen*, when effort is naturally incorporated as no-effort, letting go, and letting go of letting go, there is ease and joy. Nothing to do with you, those wonderful and unpredictable moments when the song sings itself.

Not that you have to be trained. Nor have a reason. My mother told me that my grandmother used to sing through the day, at home. It was who she was. Then, after her son was killed in the 1944 Normandy invasion, she stopped singing altogether. I wish she could have learned to sing the blues, to lose, or find, herself in that deep well. I find making music to be an interesting balance of left and right brain functions. On the one hand, music is inexorably temporal. It moves in time and then it is finished. Gone. In

performance, one must learn to *keep* time, note by note, as the sequence progresses, monitoring, computing. This ability comes to the fore in singing polyphony, where voice parts move not together but separately, and correct counting is crucial. I sing with a small church choir that performs this kind of sacred music. If it works, it's magic. If someone loses count and does not recover, a harmonic train wreck may ensue. Oh, to be rhythmically mindful!

And then there is the dimension where time is irrelevant. "Sing your heart out!" was a friend's recent wise exhortation, as this recent Easter week with its powerful and intense liturgies approached. On Saturday evening I found myself alone at the front of a church, standing in darkness but with a sea of candles before me, chanting the *Exultet*, an ancient proclamation of joy. Terror vanished. Inside the song, each note was perfect and whole. No external commentary. Just the beautiful words of the text, the rising and falling musical phrases. Truly alone, inside out. And, together with everyone, held in the body of love.

Singing sustains communities. Within cultures, from the earliest times, there has been a shared language of lullabies, work ballads, romantic airs, dirges, ceremonial music, to name only some forms. Oxytocin is a hormone connected with empathy. And a recent ABC TV program, *Catalyst*, presented research finding that when people sing together blood oxytocin levels rise. Singing connects individuals. Tuning in, really listening to one another, means sidestepping a separate self and blending as one. What a marvelous coinciding, where the whole is so much greater than the sum of its parts.

In chanting sutras before and after zazen the sangha raises its collective voice, *coming forth in perfect harmony*, and raises the energetic vibration as well. Singing lifts spirits. Aitken Roshi was delighted with the way the Sydney Zen Centre had played with chanting, layering it, ornamenting it, making it more tuneful. And he insisted that Soen Roshi would have been delighted too! This twentieth century Japanese teacher, a Dharma ancestor, was one to play, and a great lover of classical music. Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with its Ode to Joy was a particular favorite.

What about non-human communities? I bow to the bird sangha, those original musicians, who make a living out of song. Whose Dharma of sound teaches and inspires us, brings us home. One note will do. Frogs too, those redoubtable choristers! And it turns out, though one may not hear them, that lots of animal species make some kind of music. Whales, dolphins, bats, a mouse. The spheres themselves, I once read, resonate in the key of B flat. I don't know that everything is not being sung all the time. The tickle on your nose no less. This is Hsueh Tou's verse to case 37 of the *Blue Cliff Record*:

*There is nothing in the triple world;  
Where can mind be found?  
The white clouds form a canopy;  
The flowing spring makes a lute—  
One tune, two tunes; no one understands.*

*When the rain has passed, the autumn water is deep in the evening pond*

No one is listening, comments Hakuin, so no one understands. Apropos of nothing. Who is singing that song?



## A SOUND TRACK OF MY LIFE

Philip Long

Recently, I made a firm resolve to carry out a project which I had been planning for many years. I am a long time classical music listener and am often deeply moved by certain kinds of classical music. But for many people this is rarified strata; I, myself, still struggle to get hold of some of J. S. Bach's more esoteric keyboard music. My favourite classical music is that written by the so-called impressionists, particularly Debussy and Ravel. Among other delights the sense of impermanence conveyed by this music is for me reminiscent of our own Zen experience of impermanence.

My project, however did not relate to classical music but to what I call popular music (rock, pop, blues, folk, jazz, film music, show tunes, etc.). It concerned the idea that some music can serve as a soundtrack to our lives, something which the movies often use to great effect. This was brought home to me in a forceful way by the production for television of Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective* (Them bones, them bones, them dry bones). The link between the music in that show and the story it told was to my mind seamless.

After attending my first sesshin with all its challenges and privations, I plonked myself down in front of my million-dollar hi-fi system and played Enrico Morricone's music for the film *The Mission*. Suddenly, swept away by the music in the piece called The Falls, I cried out: "It is all a mixture of pleasure and pain." (Which reminds me of the number by Chrissie Amphlett and the Divinyls, It's a fine line between *Pleasure and Pain*.)

Music has the power to by-pass words and convey a truth which again reminds me of aspects of my Practice. The Project. Over the years I have developed a list of my favourite popular music songs. This list was only semi-conscious and often included songs of which all I knew were the title, the tune (most moving and most important) and a few scattered lyrics. In the last few years my predominant artistic interest, music, has yielded somewhat to the visual arts and song lyrics. In relation to lyrics in particular I started exploring the missing lyrics from all my favourite popular songs and found to my surprise that I had in some intuitive way absorbed the main intent of the lyrics without knowing it. However, there were subtleties and stories that had completely by-passed me and which were crowded with mondegreens (the name some, including the television show Spicks and Specks, give to misheard lyrics). I discovered a whole new world of meaning, searching online lyrics sites and relearning the intent of so many half-heard masterpieces.

As I spoke with my therapist about this we found we had a mutual respect for the writers of these lyrics which often showed a deep insight into the important inner aspects of our lives. My therapist retired last November due to a diagnosis of advanced prostate cancer and I promised him that I would complete my project and send him a copy of the CDs and printed lyrics that were its outcome. This issue of MMC is a timely reminder.

Well, you ask, what are the songs and what do they convey? Along with online lyrics sites there are also sites which explain the meaning of songs, some more impressive than others. The list is long. Staying only with the most favourite it numbers as follows:

Ballads	42
Dance Beat	12
Middle of the Road	37
Shows and Films	23

The ballads include: The Fool on the Hill, Blackbird, Both Sides Now, At Seventeen, The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face, Gamble Everything For Love, Secret



Garden, Babylon, Let It Be, Wondering Where the Lions Are, Into My Arms, Fields of Gold, Hallelujah, Into White, Don't Be Shy, True Colours, Moonshadow, The Circle Game, Everybody's Talkin', Father and Son, Strong Enough, Beautiful Boy and My Sweet Lord.

The dance beat tracks include Eye In The Sky, Jump, We Will Rock You, Wannabe, Girls Just Want To Have Fun, Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da, Pleasure and Pain, Little Sister, Honey Don't, Get Back and Two Of Us.

The MORs include Young At Heart, Smile, It's All In The Game, La Mer, Non Je Ne Regrette Rien, La Vie En Rose, Parlami D'Amore Mariu, What A Wonderful World, It Never Entered My Mind, Is That All There Is, Where Or When, Nature Boy, Clancy Of the Overflow, Red Red Robin, Fever, Don't Get Around Much Anymore, My Blue Heaven, The Blue Bird Of Happiness, The Last Time I Saw Paris, Music Music Music, Smoke Gets In Your Eyes, Boum! and Milord.

The show tunes and Film Music include Send In The Clowns (A Little Night Music), Wild Theme (Local Hero), Not While I'm Around (Sweeney Todd), No One Is Alone (Into The Woods), One Good Reason (unpublished, by my friend and colleague, Judge George Palmer), The Lord Is My Shepherd (The Vicar Of Dibley), Schlinder's List (Theme), Falls (The Mission), You'll Never Walk Alone (Carousel), True Love (High Society), Don't Cry For Me Argentina (Evita) and Bring Him Home (Les Miserables).

This is only a selection from a selection but hopefully it will give you a taste of what I am attracted to. As for my top 6 and the reasons for picking those:

***Bring Him Home:*** (Les Miserables). In my view the best version is that by Anthony Warlow, sung fairly straight and without too much superimposed emotion. A paean to a father's love for his son, although the singer is not the father of the child referred to.

*You can take  
You can give  
Let him be  
Let him live  
If I die, let me die  
Let him live  
Bring him home*

In similar vein Nature Boy, Father and Son, Beautiful Boy.

***At Seventeen.*** Was Janis Ian remembering her own torturous years as a teenager? There is certainly a part of me that resonates with her. As an awkward wooden teenager I longed to be like the popular sports jocks. My saving grace was that I was academically gifted but I wanted most to be loved rather than respected, although we all deserve both.

*We all play the game and when we dare  
To cheat ourselves at solitaire  
Inventing lovers on the phone  
Repenting other lives unknown  
That call and say, "Come dance with me"  
And murmur vague obscenities  
At ugly girls like me at seventeen*

***Secret Garden*** by Bruce Springsteen. Is it about the secret garden that every woman possesses? It is certainly the most beautiful song I know about deep intimacy and the mysterious nature of what each of us keeps hidden from the other.

*She's got a secret garden  
Where everything you want  
Where everything you need  
Will always stay  
A million miles away.*

**Smile** written by Charlie Chaplin for the movie Modern Times is about keeping afloat when all hope is lost. This is not the “positive thinking” of the New Age but more like the half-smile of Thich Nhat Hahn, more like a balancing act of courage in the face of danger. Hear it sung by the most beautiful voice in the kingdom, Nat King Cole.

*Smile though your heart is aching  
Smile even though it's breaking*

See also Pleasure and Pain.

**No One is Alone.** “Now you're on your own... but No one is alone.” Deals with the paradox that we are all alone in the Universe together.

*Hard to see the light now  
Just don't let it go  
Things will turn out right now  
That's the best I know  
Someone is on your side  
No one is alone.*

**Don't Be Shy** by Cat Stevens is about being true to our feelings, about letting them be and letting them go. Have the courage, give it a try and let others do the same.

*Don't be shy just let your feelings roll on by  
Don't wear fear or no-one will know you're there”*

See also True Colours and Babylon. What colours are you?

A whole genre for me is the songs I, like Dennis Potter, remember from my childhood that were favourites of my parents or grandparents. My Dad would often sing: “Missed the Saturday Dance” (from *Don't Get Around Much Any More*). I wonder what he was really missing. A favourite of my maternal grandmother was *Red Robin* (“When the red, red robin comes bob, bob bobbin' along”). She also loved *The Last Time I Saw Paris* and *The Blue Bird of Happiness*. (As an aside, I remember in my teenage years there was a greeting card, very large, foolscap size. On the front was a beautiful appliqué bluebird and the words “May the Bluebird of Happiness ... When one opened the card, however, the message completed “... Crap All Over Your Birthday Cake.” Ah well, we were all young then.) My parents loved Teresa Brewer's Music, Music, Music:

*Put another nickel in  
In the nickelodeon  
All I want is loving you  
And music, music, music.*

And then, what about John Cage's 4 minutes 33 seconds? Is that music? Could that be the soundtrack to our lives?



**BASSUI ZENJI PRACTICING: ‘*Who is hearing*’**  
*Drawing by Peter Thompson*

## SOUNDS OF SANGHA: *together with all we sing*

Allan Marett

One of my favourite stories about sound appears in Case 25 of the *Wumenguan*, where we meet Yangshan Huiji (807-883). It is a story that points to the power of sound to liberate us.

*Yangshan dreamed he went to Maitreya's realm and was led to the third seat. A senior monk struck the stand with a gavel and announced, "Today, the one in the third seat will preach."*

*Yangshan arose, struck the stand with the gavel, and said, "The truth of the Mahayana is beyond the Four Propositions and transcends the Hundred Negations. Listen, listen."*

"Rap. Rap!" "Listen, listen." Just that "rap." Just that "listen!" Yangshan's "rap" is Shakyamuni's morning star. It takes everything away and at the same time fills the entire universe. It sweeps away delusion and allows our true nature to shine through.

In *The Mind of Clover*, Aitken Roshi introduces us to three levels of understanding: the essential, the literal and the compassionate.<sup>1</sup> The story of Yangshan's dream points to the 'essential' or the 'Buddha-nature view,'<sup>2</sup> and so does the enlightenment story of another ninth-century master, Xiangyan Zhixian.

One day as Xiangyan was scything grass, a small piece of tile flew through the air and struck a stalk of bamboo. Upon hearing the sound of the tile hitting the bamboo, "tok," Xiangyan woke up! He then composed a poem, which begins: "One strike and all knowledge is forgotten."

The second level of Aitken Roshi's analysis is 'the compassionate.' This brings to mind the Bodhisattva of Compassion, whose name—Guanyin in Chinese; Kannon in Japanese—means 'the one who perceives sound.' Guanyin is the one who hears the cries of the world and in our practice we seek Guanyin within ourselves so that we are able to open heartedly hear the cries and attend to the suffering of others: to the cries of the refugees; to the suffering of the indigenous people of this continent; to the suffering of our family and friends, to the suffering of our companions of the Way, to the suffering of our stressed and imperilled planet.

But these two levels—the essential and the compassionate—are not separate. The realisation of our vast and boundless essential nature is precisely what liberates us—is

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<sup>1</sup> In *The Mind of Clover*, Aitken Roshi uses these elements in reverse order to frame a discussion of the precepts. I have also found them useful in discussing other elements of our practice, such as—in the present case—the sounds of sangha.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Aitken, *The Mind of Clover*. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984, p.16.

precisely what provides the spaciousness—to allow us to engage the compassionate hands, eyes and ears of the bodhisattva, and to work ceaselessly to ease the suffering in the world.

There is a wonderful case in the Blue Cliff Record (Case 89) where two monks discuss the place of compassion in Zen practice.

*Yunyan asked Daowu. “How does the Bodhisattva Guanyin use all those many hands and eyes?”*

*Daowu answered, “It is like someone in the middle of the night groping for a pillow.”*

*Yunyan said, “I understand.”*

*Daowu said, “How do you understand it?”*

*Yunyan said, “The whole body is hand and eye.”*

*Daowu said, “That is very well expressed, but it is only eight-tenth of the answer.”*

*Yunyan said, “How would you say it elder Brother?”*

*Daowu said, “Pervading the body, hand and eye.”<sup>3</sup>*

I have just come back from walking pilgrimage in Shikoku. There, in my temple rituals I repeatedly encountered the bodhisattva Guanyin in many guises: as the baby-holding Guanyin, as the eleven-faced Guanyin, as the thousand-armed Guanyin, as the horse-headed Guanyin (who is the protector of animals), as the fish-basket Guanyin (who protects fishermen), as the Maria Kannon (which is a Christian form used during the period of the persecution of the ‘hidden Christians’). Compassion takes so many forms, and my interactions with Guanyin in the temples reminded me, as I walked the pilgrim path, to keep my ears and eyes open to each manifestation of the bodhisattva as she appeared on the Way. Sometimes this was an opportunity to practice compassion—to offer and encouraging word to struggling pilgrim, for example. Sometimes it was an opportunity to receive compassion—a welcome present of cold water on a hot afternoon; and sometimes it was simply the sound of the wind in the trees or the cool breeze in the morning.

The final element of Aitken Roshi’s analysis is ‘the literal.’ When I think about this in terms of ‘sounds of sangha,’ it brings to mind our practice of chanting together, which is a key way that we build our sense of community—that we build our sangha. It operates on many levels. The words of our sutras are a shared treasure, which we contemplate alone and together. We can, for example, take a phrase from the Heart Sutra—‘far beyond delusive thinking right here is nirvana’—to enrich our own practice and that of others, through discussion and shared reflection. But it is the very act of singing together—of our voices mingling with those of our dharma brothers and sisters—that for me most profoundly creates the deep intimacy of sangha. Of all the elements of our practice—meditating together, working together, supporting and comforting one another,

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<sup>3</sup> I’ve retranslated this line. In our version we have, “Throughout the body, the hand and eye.”

managing the business of the sangha—it is chanting that seems to have an almost magical power to unite us as one.

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Over the past couple of decades, we have brought into our liturgy a new chant, *Ancient Ground*, which is unique to our sangha. When we sing ‘Ancient Ground’ together, it not only draws us into the Ancient Ground of our own being, but also opens us out into relationship with the indigenous people of this ancient land.

I’ve written elsewhere about the processes by which ‘Ancient Ground’ came into being over time through interaction with Aboriginal elders of the Daly region. One of the most important of these interactions was the occasion when I was able to play what we sing to Frank Dumoo, the elder who authorised our singing of ‘Ancient Ground.’ For several decades, Frank had supervised my interactions with the Aboriginal ceremonial world, and helped me develop the deepening intimacy with those traditions that gave birth to ‘Ancient Ground.’

Back in 2012 several members of our sangha gathered at the ABC to make a studio recording of ‘Ancient Ground’ as part of an Encounter program produced by Kerry Stewart.<sup>4</sup> On a subsequent visit to Darwin, I was able to play the recording to Frank Dumoo. Frank listened intently to the recording and then enthusiastically expressed his approval – “that’s really good, son,” he said. He was clearly moved by what he had just heard. I then explained to him and his wife Rosie about our Ancient Ground Temple and showed him several photographs of the temple and of us practicing there. Although I had, over the years, kept Frank abreast of the evolution of ‘Ancient Ground’ from the *wangga*<sup>5</sup> song, ‘Yendili,’ this was the first time I was able to play him a good recording. This is how our creation and performance of ‘Ancient Ground’ was authorised by the most senior Aboriginal elder concerned.

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<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Kerry for arranging the recording and making it available as a CD, and to other sangha members who participated in making the recording: Max Baker, Jean Brick, Peter Bursky, Maggie Gluek, Janet Selby and Brendon Stewart.

<sup>5</sup> *Wangga* is a genre of public song that is given to the living by the dead, and which is sung primarily in ceremonies associated with death and the making of young boys into men.



Frank Dumoo and Allan Marett listen to the ABC recording of *Ancient Ground*

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Let me conclude with a brief reflection of the role of song in Aboriginal ritual, which I'll attempt to align with my previous discussion of Aitken Roshi's three levels. In 1988 I went to the *kapuk* —the final rites—for the teenage daughter of someone I subsequently came to know pretty well: he was in fact the brother of my teacher, Frank Dumoo. As they farewelled the young woman at the small outstation of Nadirri—which sits a little back from Truwu beach—among crying and other expressions of grief, the following song was sung over and over.

*Karra walakandha purangang kuwavapa truwu nidin-ngina walakandha.  
Kerri mun.gum kimalaguwa kerri-verrilhi truwu nidin-ngina walakandha*

The waves are crashing on the Walakandha [in this case the living] at Truwu beach, my beloved country, Walakandha.

A Walakandha [in this case one of the dead] called Mun.gum is peeping out from behind a beach hibiscus. Truwu, my beloved country, Walakandha.

The song expresses the sympathy and compassion that the ancestral world—the deceased ancestors of the girl whom the living call 'Walakandha'—feel for the suffering



of their living descendants, whom the dead call ‘Walakandha.’<sup>6</sup> The crashing of the waves represents the exigencies of life—and in particular, at this time and on this occasion, the loss of a loved one—that crash down on us repeatedly.

Thinking back, I now see the combined actions of the living and the dead as doing Guanyin’s work. Everything—the country, the singing and dancing, the dead and the living—gently held the spirit of the girl and at the same time consoled her parents, siblings and grandparents, all of whom were present, along with the ancestral dead, who also made a rare appearance. Through the singing of ceremonial songs, the heart was able to open into the boundless spaciousness of living country and living relationships, and found its comfort there. All three elements that we discussed earlier are present: the essential (the opening of the heart into the boundlessness of country), the compassionate (the sympathetic grief of the ancestors, and the living and the dead working together to give comfort to one another) and the practical (the sense of community that is created by singing together). Perhaps what happens in Aboriginal ceremonies of this type is not so different from what we do when we chant together.

In other places, particularly in Central Australia, songs are performed not by individual singers (as is the case for the *wangga* tradition to which ‘Truwu’ belonged) but by groups of men, or groups of women, or groups of men and women singing together. Singing goes on for hours and hours, often for weeks on end, and it is through this process of constant singing that the insubstantiality of song reveals the insubstantiality of all things. I invoked this in my 1989 Noh play, Eliza:

*The dancing ground  
Set back behind the headland on the sunrise side  
Saturated with sea sound.  
We came by evening and remained there through the night  
The sound of singing mingles with the sea sound  
Boomerang and song sweep up the substance of the world  
The very ground on which we sit shimmers now  
As insubstantial as a syllable of song.*

When we repeat, ‘Ancient Ground, Ancient Ground, you will look after it/Ancient Ground, Ancient Ground, it will look after you,’ we reference this sort of group singing, and in so doing access the power of these repeated couplets to sweep up the substance of the world, to open the heart and to unite us as a community.

The ancient ground of our essential being holds us (looks after us), whether we know it or not; and it is through our practice (looking after it) that we cultivate this ancient ground. Singing opens our hearts to the ancient ground of our essential natures and creates the intimacy and compassion that unites us as a sangha.

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Walakandha’ is a reciprocal term used by the dead to mean ‘living descendants’ and by the living to mean ‘the ancestral dead.’ The use of the word in this way is usually confined to ceremonial contexts, and describes a deep intimacy between the living and the dead.

## MANJUSRI ROCK

Incomparable roar of the lion, flowers, rocks and trees.

*Watercolour by Janet Selby*



## **BIRDS IN BACKYARDS**

*Janet Selby*

Once a year I participate in an online survey through [birdsinyard.net](http://birdsinyard.net). They ask the general public to download the app and set aside 20 minutes in one place to record as many birds as they can. The data is collated to see any trends happening in different environments.

People from all over Australia participate. The app has a map to see if there are any local participants doing the same thing and shows what they recorded and when. It's a bit like meditation with an iPad.

Listen, listen to the layers of sounds, occasionally interrupted by a train, a car, a plane.

I found myself becoming quietly competitive with other anonymous participants. How sharp are their ears? Surely my background in Zen practice ensures I have the acuity to hear more deeply?

Listen to myself! Who is it that is comparing? Isn't it the whole suburb - birds, dogs, mosquitoes - all listening, just this moment?

I don't have the results of the last count but I do it each morning anyway, again and again; not comparing, not counting, not analysing - just enjoying. Each morning I hear at least nine species, all waking up to each moment, singing.

## **MEDITATIONS ON THIS LIFE** *Sally Hopkins*

This life we call ours-  
This song  
that is song  
that hears song  
that responds to song-  
This nothing that is everything-  
This great mystery, this glory, this horror-  
This song that we all are-  
Here-            Gone.

Michelangelo's Pieta,  
the image of Kuan Yin,  
are beyond words;  
we can say," the one who hears the cries  
is the cries, responds to the cries,"  
but these are words, just words.  
These images embody a truth  
of this fleeting life  
that no words can hold,  
as music can speak  
of what words cannot tell,  
as each life speaks of  
what cannot be uttered:  
only the heart truly knows  
This mystery.... that we call "LIFE."

Recently I was reciting the Torei Zenji Bodhisattva's Vow- "Among us, in our own daily lives, who is not reverently grateful for the protections of life: food, drink and clothing." And on this occasion, perhaps because we had sung a particularly heartfelt version of the Heart Sutra, I thought "and Music!".

"Though they are inanimate things, they are nonetheless the warm flesh and blood, the merciful incarnations of Buddha."

Inanimate? Is Music animate or inanimate?

Pondering this, I could see that Music and all the Arts give us a window on that view of essential nature: - in a form, and yet at the same time, no form.

Music exists, and yet where does it exist? except in this fleeting moment of performers/audience/instruments reflecting each other, and creating together; animate and inanimate as one; the Sangha.

## PRACTICE

My work is as a pianist and composer, so reconciling music and Zen practice has been part of my steps along the Way.

When I first began Zen practice, I found lots of correlations with Music practice. A daily sitting seemed to go perfectly well with the daily set of scales and arpeggios.

I was delighted to find that the first book of koans, the Mumonkan, has 48 koans for study, just as any serious piano student, whether of classical music or jazz, studies the 48 Preludes and Fugues of Bach for technique, harmonic understanding, and emotional expression.

One question always hangs there for beginners: How much practice is enough practice? In *Old Path White Cloud* by Thich Nhat Hanh, there is a beautiful story of the Buddha discussing this with Sona the musician. If you play the sitar with slack strings, you will play out of tune. If you play with too taut strings, the strings will break. So, for zennie and muso, there's no short answer, just a daily discovery, feeling what the instrument of our practice wants.

## INTIMACY

Thomas Merton said "Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time." (Original Blessings, Matthew Fox)

This is the great joy of listening to the instrument, to the other performers, listening to the listening of the audience, and responding without thought. Definitely, without the audience i.e. the Sangha, the music is just notes that have no capacity to move emotionally or create change.

In composing music, you also listen deeply to the emotions and match them to sound shapes and textures.

"You let sounds enter your body, and they recast you, kill you really, and transform you to a new being, who integrates those sounds. You model more and more clearly the character of the universe in your particular Bodhisattva mould." (Robert Aitken, p.223, *The Morning Star*)

## INTEGRATION

For me this has been the most difficult challenge, to integrate Music and Zen practice so they are not two separate things in my mind. However, noticing my perception of them as two separate entities came with more Zen practice as I started to notice the obsessiveness, the deifying (or reifying) of Music, and the clinging to it as a vital part of who I thought I was. It was like a fight between koans and concerts. “I have to totally focus on this concert, otherwise it won’t be good!” You may well ask “What’s good anyway?!”

So, even though ‘good’ is relative and I will never be a Chick Corea and don’t want to be, there is somehow still the knowledge of giving the best you can give and doing all the necessary preparation for that moment of performance. On the other hand, the part-time-life approach just doesn’t work.

So I’ve been exploring the whole-time-moment and discovering that my music practice is my Zen practice if I can just drop the many prima donna elements and start listening more.

Perhaps you may find something similar in your daily work practice, whether you are an artist, accountant, gardener or chef.

Einstein said: “Creativity is contagious. Pass it on.”

In 1952, John Cage composed 4’33 – a piece consisting of 4 minutes and 33 seconds of silence to be performed by orchestra. Everyone puts on his or her nicest clothes, goes to the concert hall, the orchestra practice and tune and sit on stage, and nothing happens at all for 4 minutes and 33 seconds.



SZC BENEFIT CONCERT 2014

## WATAZUMI, JOHN CAGE, DREW BOURGEOIS

*Drew Bourgeois*

In 2015, I saw a YouTube video: part of a documentary about a Japanese Bamboo flute called the shakuhachi. The shakuhachi is closely related to Zen practice in Japan. This documentary featured interviews with Watazumi Dosō Roshi— the *great teacher* of Japanese shakuhachi. He is to shak what Dōgen is to Soto Zen.

After describing his daily ritual of 6 hours of rigorous exercise, Watazumi tells a story about teaching a small class of famous musicians who had travelled from all around the world to meet the great master. Watazumi is known for his philosophy of One Sound. He describes that the sound of birds singing and crying, children playing in the field, soup boiling – all is music.

A student asks him, “What is the One Sound?”

Watazumi replied “It is everywhere around you. Listen for yourself”

The students sat confused. Watazumi gives in, “Alright, if you insist, I will show you the One Sound”. He claps his hands once.

The students still looked worried. He pointed to each of them asking “Do you understand? Do you understand?”. No one understood – not for a million miles - so Watazumi picked up the bamboo and played.

John Cage was at that Dokusan, and years later teaches concert halls that awkward coughs, creaky seats, air conditioner drones – indeed even your own breathing – are all music. That is a pretty serious collision point in music if you ask me. As an improvising musician, I’ve often thought of myself as living in a Cagean revolution – as if this simple step made a space for lots of the music I make.

In 2016 – last week! – I was at the pub with a music teacher of mine. We talked about this story. I told him how significant I thought this was: that the chasm of music I now love seems to have come from Zen. He asked me if I thought John Cage or Watazumi had somehow *invented* this way of playing music – the way that listens to what is there, that makes no distinction between the passing plane and the bass drum drone. Hmmm.

## OUR RESIDENTS AT KODOJI

### The tale of the Barking Owl & Sugar Glider

*Jill Stevenson*

Yip Yip.... Yip Yip.... for years I was mistaken. One night driving up late from Sydney, I saw a marvellous owl with spotty chest, sitting high on a branch overhanging the driveway at Kodoji. S/he was patient enough to let me take a photo before she flew off silently into the night, with those noiseless wingbeats only owls seem to be able to do.

Thrilled with the sighting and identifying her in the book, I was sure she was a Barking Owl, very exciting; not a very common owl and the sound they make is so much like a dog barking. I had heard the sound in the early hours of the morning in Kodoji quite often. Mentioning it to others with an ornithological interest, they agreed we had Barking owls around.

This went on for years, I freely promulgated this (myth) that the sound in the later hours of the night towards dawn ...Yip Yip .... Yip Yip was the Barking owl. The familiar Boobook Owl calls earlier in the night, often starting up on the last sitting period during sesshin (9pm) and determinedly ignoring the invasion of the late night Han ceremony to announce his own ceremony so beautifully ...Boo Book... Boo Book...

Fast forward to January 2016, I was camping on a marvellous mountain top south of Ulladulla. No other campers or anyone, such a precious place. I heard the Yip Yip... Yip Yip.... close by. Ah I know ...the Barking Owl. So I venture to the tree nearby with my spotlight and I was astonished! It was a sugar glider! A marvellous tiny arboreal marsupial mammal, making this tremendously loud noise, his whole body contracting as he bellowed the call Yip Yip.... Yip Yip. How on earth does such a small creature make such a loud noise? I was transfixed. The volume was perfect for carrying his/her message long distances in the quiet of the night. I am yet to discover more re the purpose of the call, if it is to attract a mate or defend a territory, or possibly both. It seems a slightly hazardous activity to advertise their whereabouts so clearly since a sugar glider would seem to be a tasty meal to some!

So there ends the tale of mistaken identity with a thrilling result with a couple of loose ends. There is a small possibility it was never a Barking owl but just a Boobook (also spotty but not like the photo) also a small chance it could be a Squirrel Glider rather than a Sugar Glider, but from all my investigations I think both hypotheses are unlikely. The certainty is, without a doubt we have Gliders around Kodoji – more than likely Sugar Gliders. I have heard them for years, some years not many, and some years a few, but most sesshin I do hear them. I am filled again with pleasure to hear the sound .. we share our wondrous practice home with Sugar Gliders! .....and modern technology, I now have an App for bird identification with their calls, and am less likely to lead myself astray .....? Never astray... Yip Yip.... Yip Yip....

**NOTE:** The Sugar Glider is a small, omnivorous, arboreal, and nocturnal gliding possum (marsupial). They are about the size of a rat, and their tail is thick. Unlike the Squirrel Glider, the Sugar Glider's face is rounder and their tail is thinner and may have a white tip.

The common name refers to its preference for sugary nectareous foods and ability to glide through the air, much like a flying squirrel. The scientific name, *Petaurus breviceps*, translates from Latin as "short-headed rope-dancer", a reference to their canopy acrobatics. Sugar Gliders are characterised by their gliding membrane,



known as the patagium, which extends from their forelegs to hind legs. Gliding serves as an efficient means of both locating food and evading predators. They are covered in soft, pale grey to brown fur, which is lighter in colour on their underside. The Sugar Glider is endemic to mainland Australia, Indonesia, and New Guinea and its surrounding islands; and was probably introduced to Tasmania in the 1830s.



*Barking Owl*



*Southern Boobook*



*Sugar Glider*

## THEY'RE CALLING US

*.... sounds of the world in haiku*

*Diana Levy*

*cockatoos, currawongs, the baby:  
all calling  
at the fall of day*

*hundreds of frogs  
sing an ode  
to La Nina*

*they're calling us  
over and over  
the hidden birds*

*midday heat -  
walker soak up  
the sound of water*

*why in this moment  
does the honeyeater sing?  
Google cannot say*

*the trees conferring  
amongst themselves  
around the spring*

*on our last night  
even your snoring  
is precious*

*cicada sings  
a three-minute  
life story*

# THE QUEEN TURNED NINETY & PRINCE DIES

*Brendon Stewart*

“It’s no use going back to yesterday”, said the queen, “because I was a different person then.”

“Exactly! It seems” said Prince at some time yesterday “that I was busy doing something close to nothing. But different than the day before.”

Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle. For that reason I'm afraid I can't explain myself. Because I am not myself, you see.

Still whoever I am I must keep practicing the repertoire set by my teacher. “Mix *Moon Dance* she suggests in with Bach’s *Prelude in C* and then there’s the James Bond theme and what’s that Syrian folk song, oh yes, *Sari Galin*”.

“Try and channel Van Morrison” she says, “then sing along with your honeyed tones while correctly fingering *Moon Dance* out from the Yamaha on the back verandah. Imagine yourself as the enlightened one walking the freeway of Nirvana, with melody that is old and clear in spirit, and naturally elegant in style”.

*Well it’s a marvelous night for a moondance  
with the stars up above in your eyes.  
A fantabulous night to make romance  
‘neath the cover of October skies*

I keep Van the Man in tune but it’s always been the *Stones* that have had a special place; the opening of *Honkytonk Women* with the soft cowbell that rings like a meditation call, ushered me into a new life.

*I met a gin soaked, bar-room queen in Memphis,  
She tried to take me upstairs for a ride.*

This song made me feel grown up and mean and suggested a dangerous world of drugs and booze and all manner of sin.

*She had to heave me right across her shoulder  
‘Cause I just can't seem to drink you off my mind.*

*It's the honkytonk women  
Gimme, gimme, gimme the honkytonk blues.*

How often have I fallen from the high perch of my zafu with this fantasy?

And yet...

There is the leisurely one,  
Walking the Tao, beyond philosophy,  
Not avoiding fantasy, not seeking truth.

So opens The Shōdōka and I enter the sea to count the sands in vain.  
Whatever...lol  
Right here it is eternally full and serene,  
If you search elsewhere, you cannot see it,  
You cannot grasp it, you cannot reject it.  
In the midst of not gaining,  
In that condition you gain it.

Yes, maybe, not certain but...“well, in our country,” said Prince, still panting a little from yesterday’s effort, “you’d generally get to somewhere else — if you ran very fast for a long time, as we’ve been doing.”

“A slow sort of country!” said the Queen. “Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that.”

Sometimes it takes years to become an overnight success.

"Everyone has their own experience" Prince retorts "That's why we are here, to go through our experience, to learn, to go down those paths and eventually you may have gone down so many paths and learned so much that you don't have to come back again."

Lost on a dark path of ignorance, is that what you mean Prince? Are you looking for a place to lie down and sleep, perhaps to dream? (After 400 years it just slips off the tongue: corny!) ..... Ah, the degenerate materialistic world in which our bodies are the agents of calamity

*Gimme, gimme, gimme the honkytonk blues.*

Being a great elephant in the room full of nothing at all my calamitous body bumps against the real nature of ignorance. And then at a far distance I hear Prince fade away, “there’s no use trying,” he says “one *can*’t believe impossible things.”

“I daresay you haven’t had much practice,” said the Queen. “When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

A little later, around morning tea time Lewis Carroll, three rock’n roll Princes and Yongyi who apparently penned the Shodoka attempted to deplete the twenty kinds of vacancy. Did I notice? Not certain. Their going and coming never seemed astray.

## THE ACCIDENTAL CHORISTER *John Merson*

In the massive vaulted chapel of a 13<sup>th</sup> century Dominican monastery in northern Italy, I stood in awe and profound trepidation as increasing numbers of people came in and took their seats. I was one of a choir of 35 people standing behind the simple stone altar. We were to sing the fiendishly complex *Marine Vespers* by Monteverdi. I was one of only six bases with three parts between us, and I was extremely unsure of my part despite a week of rehearsals.

In front of us was Orpheal van Leer a wonderful Dutch choral master and conductor who had entrusted a mixed choir of amateur and professional singers who have never sung together before, not to wreck this sublime piece of music. We had come from all over the world for a rare event, to sing these vespers in the context for which they were written. At this stage I was thinking I should have stuck to bicycling, the mode of transport I had been enjoying during my stay, but there was no escape now.

Suddenly there was silence and I looked at my score with its scribbled notes in desperation. The altos had begun and I had forgotten to start counting. Suddenly the sound of the male voices around me lifted my voice out of me and we had begun. I had to overcome the tendency of all inexperienced choristers to lock in with the person next to them, or around them, in terms for entrances and exits. However, I had to hold a separate part with only one other base singer who unfortunately wasn't any better than me at holding his part.

But suddenly as the music itself took hold of us, and whatever our individual limitations or accomplishments we were *the music while it lasted*. There was no space for success or failure there was just singing. At times my voice and that of my base partner was a single line holding the precarious tension with the multiple other voices that stretched the harmony as far as Monteverdi could push it, before resolving into a serene melodic unison where one was no longer a singer in the wilderness, but absorbed into a seemingly single voice that vaulted through the ancient stone alcoves with a purity and clarity that transcended both space, time and self. A simple pattern of notes woven into a musical fabric that could reach out in a tender embrace lifting the hearts of those who sat there in that ancient place, as it did for those of us who were for that brief time the music.



*Zen Rocks*  
SZC BENEFIT  
CONCERT 2014

## SHAKUHACHI DIARIES - *part 1 - The Humbling*

*Alex Budlevskis*

The first day, me and the flute face to face.  
All ambition and passion.  
Me “me-ing”, flute “fluting”.  
"Huff", "squeak", "hoot".  
No room for ego here.  
Don't play the flute, actualize the flute.  
A sweet sweet note.  
The flute actualizes me.  
Soft body, soft mind, steady breath, just this.  
Just like sitting, you can't play if you don't experience it for yourself first.  
Any amount of instructions beyond the simple starts putting legs on a snake,  
Go away and practice practice, actualize.  
Deep deep gratitude.  
I play, my master plays, suchness plays.  
All things play.  
"Squeak", "hoot", sweet sweet note.  
You have to learn how to use your voice first if you are to sing.  
You have to learn to move if you are to dance.  
You have to learn to open your own heart if you are to love.  
Sweet sweet note.

### **just sitting:**

*(After last Sesshin, Allan & Paul invited us to deepen through sound & silence)*

Unbind your mind and allow the spacious mind to present,  
The mind that permeates everywhere.  
Let go of all effort to control experience,  
Allow it to be vivid.  
We're all lost, yet if you open your heart to being lost,  
You'll realise you're always home.  
We're all sons and daughters of the great mother - *Mother Earth*.  
We're all the life of stars in the universe.  
Open your heart to the silence.  
The thinking mind cannot appreciate silence,  
*Only the heart can.*  
Listen with your body,  
Where in your body is the central place of listening?  
Finding this, your listening emanates outwards,  
Sounds travel straight through the felt sense of your Being.  
The one controlling experience fades.  
Your heart and your mind melt into the one.  
*Just be* - As the river that all of existence flows through.  
You are the river *and* the whole of existence.  
This is - “just sitting”.

## **FROG LISTENING** Gorricks Run

*Drawing by Janet Selby*





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