# music of the Spirit:

## Asian-Pacific Musical Identity

Edited by Michael Atherton and Bruce Crossman

'I could never have dreamed that [illegible] upon this important subject would one day be published here. [illegible]

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This volume consists of a collection of refereed papers written as part of a practice-based research project entitled 'Music of the Spirit: Investigations into Asian-Pacific Musical Identity within the Western Art Music Tradition' from 8-19 April 2008 and coordinated by University of Western Sydney investigators Dr Bruce Crossman and Professor Michael Atherton, with UWS Visiting Fellow Professor Chinary Ung (University of California, San Diego). The project was funded by grants from the International Research Initiatives Scheme (IRIS) and School of Communication Arts at the University of Western Sydney and the Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong. The research was situated at the Aurora Festival 2008 in collaboration with Dr Matthew Hindson (Festival Director) and took place in Western Sydney at Parramatta Riverside Theatres, Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre and the Campbelltown Arts Centre. The research was also conducted through the Australian Music Centre's online publication *Resonate*, Publications by Wirripang score and compact disc releases, and ABC Classic FM radio broadcasts.

Cover image: Wallace Crossman (art-work), *The Blue Barrier* (1992).

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Street address: Level 4, The Arts Exchange
10 Hickson Rd, The Rocks, Sydney
Phone: +61 2 9247 4677
Toll Free: 1300 651 834 (within Australia)
Fax: +61 2 9241 2873
Email: info@australianmusiccentre.com.au
Internet: www.australianmusiccentre.com.au



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# music of the spirit:

## Asian-Pacific Musical Identity

Australian Music Centre

# Contents

Chapter 2

# Spiritual Essences:

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

Bruce Crossman

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



## A Pacific Philosophy

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

The approach I take to sound is shaped by this Pacific philosophy but is also formulated through practical interactions. My impulses in music are always formed through free piano improvisation as well as an inner sensibility. *Double Resonances* was initially conceived as a duo for percussionist versed in the music of many cultures, Michael Atherton, and pianist Ian Munro. At the Aurora Festival 2006[1] (Hindson 2006), during an intercultural forum Michael and I spontaneously extemporised together on Filipino kulintang percussion and piano. The seeds of an idea were born: non-tempered Filipino gongs versus European tempered piano sounds within an avant-garde jazz sensibility. This short

improvisation spawned into the approximately eighteen minute architecture of the composition *Double Resonances* which was premiered at the Aurora Festival 2008[2] (Hindson, 2008) by pianist Bernadette Balkus and percussionist Claire Edwardes. The work is structured as a set of parallelisms around a still centre. The introductory section deploys slow, distilled half-resonances from prepared and altered piano techniques merged with Thai Temple gong and Korean *samul nori* metal resonances. This is followed by the first jazz-section with bass sounds in shifting, Filipino-inspired ostinato rhythms propelling the piece forward against sudden jazz intrusions based on dissonant interval-colours; these sounds reach a stormy climax punctuated by ringing crotales. The next section provides a still centre for the work and alternates bowed vibraphone with the gong-chime beauty of the Filipino kulintang. It places the sounds within a Chinese modality and uses their shimmering quality and spacing to evoke Australian bell-birds. A second jazz-section reuses the jazz-inspired intrusions and adds a repeated note driver that helps propel the work to its main climax—which includes moments of controlled improvisation. The work concludes with the distilled half-echoes of prepared piano and Thai temple gong sounds of the outset (Crossman, 2008 p. ii). This is illustrated later in this essay with musical examples of metal timbres and spiritual essences from the outset and close of the music, as well as static and architectural jazz excerpts from the second jazz-section, and bush and kulintang sounds from the still central section.

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

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



## Gong Resonances

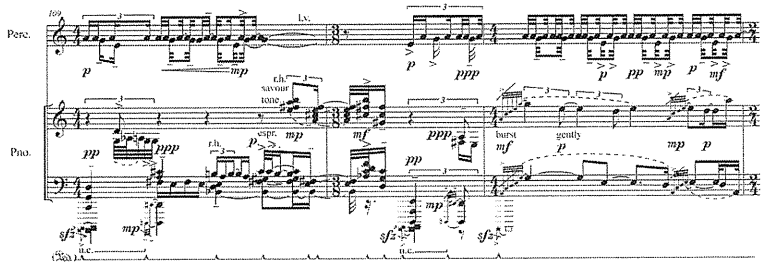
On the timbral level the bronze gong-chime resonance of the kulintang is a distinctive sound amongst the Muslim groups of the Southern Philippines. Islamic scholar, Isaac Donoso Jiménez, summing up scholarship on the matter, describes it as 'an instrument as icon of the indigenous air—the *Kulintang*' (Jiménez, 2008, pp. 2-3). The *kulintang* standard is a set of eight pitched gongs, each with a 'boss', over a wooden frame played with soft wooden sticks (pp. 7-8) emitting a luminous gong-chime beauty from the freely vibrating bronze. In using this iconic Filipino sound as part of the fabric of my own music I was attempting to locate its sound within the Pacific; indeed these gentle undulating sounds weaving through my music transformed its European avant-garde impulse into a more luminous Pacific orientated voice (see Figure 2.1).


**Figure 2.1** Claire Edwardes with kulintang gong-chimes, Performance Space, University of Western Sydney, 5th April 2008. Photo: Ji Yun Lee.

I designed *Double Resonances* around the specific tunings of Atherton's kulintang—an instrument he brought back from the Philippines—and a free jazz extemporisation impulse. A borrowed kulintang scale fragment and alternating pattern from the work *Kuriri* by the Islamic Yakan people of the Southern Philippines (Santos, 1995, pp. 142-43, 145) also reverberates in the textures of my work. This excerpt was transcribed by Filipino ethnomusicologist Ramon Santos who notes that in traditional music of the Philippines the existing materials—motivic ideas—are extemporised on by the performer to give them a unique character to convey different emotions (pp. 144-145). Similarly in my own music I improvise on pre-existent scale and rhythmic fragments—in this case Yakan and Atherton kulintang fragments—to match them to a personally felt quirky

jazz-infused sensibility. In *Resonances* this jazz-infused use of kulintang material includes syncopated ties and off-beat jabs. These fragments are overlaid by personalised avant-garde bluesy licks on piano that chromatically surge towards Korean gayageum-like (Hwang, 1993, Track 3) quick-note figures that energise emergent phrases. These modal phrases in turn form a quasi-counterpoint, a heterophony-like evocation of the Chinese Shang-tiao (Lee, 1978, pp.42-43) mode that in itself is a transposed rotation of the Korean *kyemyŏnjo* mode. The mixture of Filipino, Chinese and Korean modes amongst an extemporised jazz sensibility is designed to evoke the Pacific locale and personality of the composer (see Example 2.1).

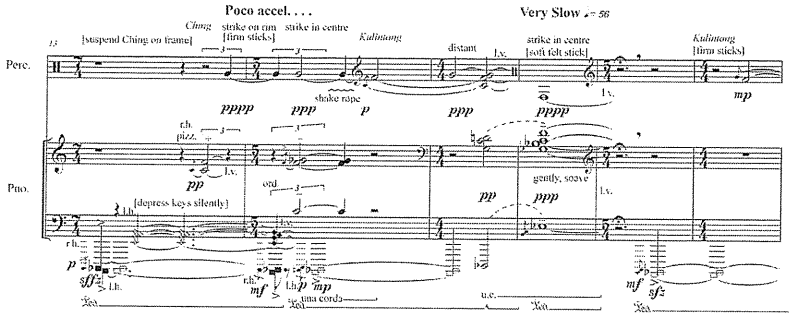
**Example 2.1** Bruce Crossman, *Double Resonances* (Bars 109-111)—Kulintang Sonority and Chinese Heterophony




Pacific gong resonance is also deployed in a broader sense in *Double Resonances* with sonorities from East and Southeast Asia. The Korean enveloping boom of the ching and sharply struck high k'kwaenggwari gongs, merge with Chinese Peking Opera gong glissandi alongside the Filipino kulintang centre in *Resonances*. My use of these gong timbres draws on traditional Asian musical practice. The Korean ching, a medium-large flat gong struck with a soft mallet, is used in *Samul nori* percussion ensembles for its deep shimmering reverberating sounds as a type of long-pulse pedal that unifies the ensemble (Howard, 2002, p. 937). Against this soft-reverb, the small *k'kwaenggwari* gong is struck with a hard wooden striker emitting a harsher sound; the cutting timbre contrast on quick-notes thrusts its syncopations and accelerations into the air in an excited disparity (K.E.C.P.P. Ministry, 1985, side 1: Track 1). In *Double Resonances* there is a hint of this pulse-like drone with repeated ching strokes being used to merge the metallic vibrations of plucked piano strings into the gong-chime sounds of the kulintang (see Example 2.2). The piece revels in undampened vibrations—at once Confucian style *single-tone* entities and Maceda-described mysterious metallic *free-vibrations* born of the Pacific. A biting k'kwaenggwari sound emerges later in the work at momentary climactic peaks as free accelerating patterns whose harsh timbre heightens the climax. The Chinese Peking Opera gong,



**Example 2.2** Bruce Crossman, *Double Resonances* (Bars 13-18)—Pulse-like Merging Metal Timbres




like the *k'kwaenggwari*, has the power to momentarily heighten phrases. In the earlier mentioned Aurora improvisation between Michael Atherton and myself, the Peking Opera gong was used to momentarily articulate syncopated piano phrases. Atherton in a reflective-process essay on his own performance practice notes the Asian *single-entity* character of this small gong in its 'enhancement of a single note, in this case a distinct upward pitch glide' (Atherton, 2006, 'At the edge' p. 84). Inspired by this interaction, my explicitly notated *Resonances* at its outset uses Peking Opera gong bursts to articulate jazz-transformed kulintang rhythms in low rumbling phrases on piano. The approach is simultaneously a blues call and answer dialogue but with Asian rhythmic and *single-entity* sounds. West merges with East in buoyant gong gestures.

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

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

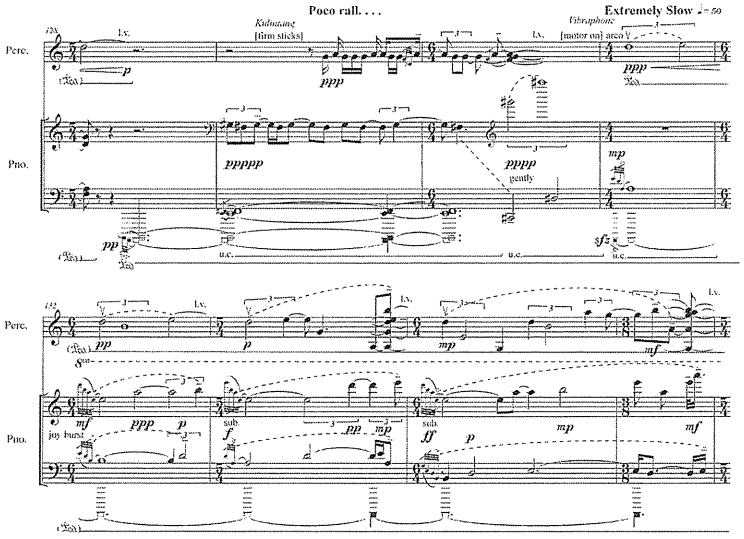
Whilst he acknowledges the universality of these sounds, Maceda saw Southeast Asian sounds and society as distinct from European dictates (Tenzer, p. 101). This differentiation of sound free from European doctrine is common to both our musical practices.

## Bush Cathedral

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

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

**Example 2.3** Bruce Crossman, *Double Resonances* (Bars 128-135)—Bush Cathedral Sounds



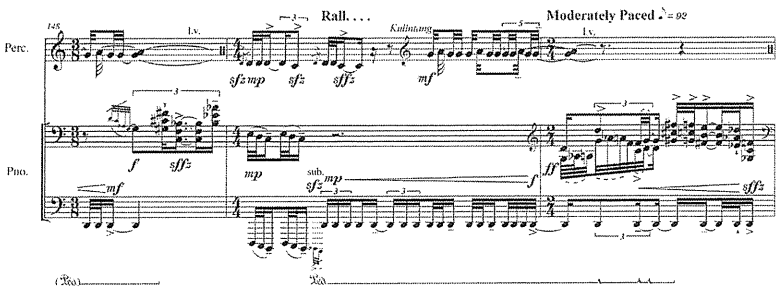



This meditative saturation in the bush sounds of the Australian Eastern seaboard is based on a Buddhist-like contemplation of the environment for the isolated moment (Stanhope, 1994, p. 97). However, in my music the spiritual impetus behind the cathedral-like bush environment is a sense of ecstatic joy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

## Sounds of Personality: Jazz Extemporisation

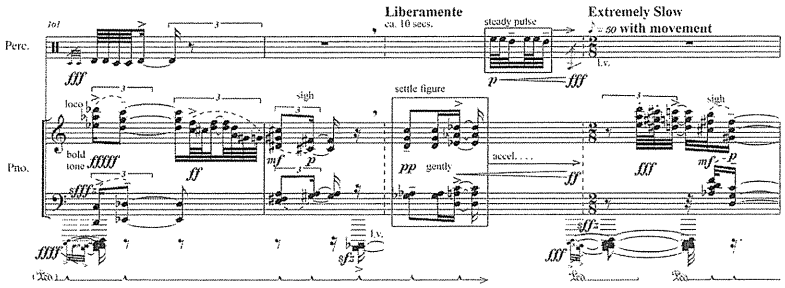
Welling up within my musical being is the urge to improvise. In one sense I see this impulse as a type of ecstatic spiritual release and in another way it is the sonic signature of a jazz-orientated musical personality. It happens spontaneously and intuitively in the moment—as in the earlier mentioned Atherton-Crossman Aurora extemporisation—and yet generates the material for a more architectural exploration within notated composition. Danish jazz pianist Tord Gustavsen embodies both these approaches within extemporisation. In his thesis on the eroticism of improvisation he notes the intensity of the moment but also its architectural unfolding in time (Gustavsen, 1999, p. 12). This European focused approach is not satisfied with an organic moment orientated form but rather requires a musical architecture to make its detail effective. Gustavsen explains: '... improvised music that contains otherwise brilliant ideas and nice little 'happenings', can still be unsatisfactory if the overall flow is missing, and if the form at large isn't compelling' (p. 9). On the other hand American extemporiser Brad Mehldau, in discussing the purposes of music, argues for its autonomy and that autonomous experience as interconnecting people (Mehldau, 2001, pp. 1 and 3). Philosophically, Mehldau's sees his goal as never arriving which thus locks him into the moment in his musical attitude. He puts it this way: 'My claim at truth is posited into a yet unforeseeable future that never arrives, because there is always a better future that can be imagined' (p. 1). Sonically speaking, this attitude develops into moments of suspended musical ecstasy—a point I will develop with regard to Mehldau. However, the point herein is that my own approach draws on both Mehldau and Gustavsen's concepts within improvisation-inspired sections in *Double Resonances*. I use musical gestures caught up within an architectural design as well as suspended sonic moments which stem from the physicality of my own syncopated extemporisation practice. *Resonances's* repeated note agitation that gradually accelerates and expands into blues-like chromatic licks and climactic punctuating voice-led fourths chords to demonstrate this designed-moment approach (see Example 2.4). In this sense it follows Gustavsen: it uses architecture to make the moment telling or climactic. In his music—'Curtains Aside' (Gustavsen Trio, 2004, Track 4)—he makes pungent atonal chordal-stab moments telling through architectural placement within bluesy laced tonal phrases, whereas in my music, there is the interlacing of an avant-garde chromatic language with Filipino Yakan-inspired (Santos, 1995, p. 145) modal fragments, alternating quick-notes and kulintang timbre. In other words, my music is caught between two worlds—jazz extemporisation and Pacific

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




located sound. In contrast to Gustavsen's architectural approach, other moments of *Resonances* explore a suspended ecstatic moment approach to sound more akin to Melhdau's music. Evocative whole-tone and fourths chord amalgamations on piano are allowed to settle in a freely repeated accelerating pattern overlaid by kulintang-derived[3] (Brennan, 1984, Vol. 2: pp. 395-428) rhythmic patterning on skins with a punctuating Peking Opera gong glissando (see Example 2.5). This free-time section allows for static fragments on piano and percussion to settle and build up dynamically as one unit. This static harmonic balm approach in my music was inspired by Mehldau's improvisation in 'Alone Together' (Mehldau, 2001, disc 1: Track 4) where the pianist continually repeats the harmony whilst allowing the percussionist to build an independent architectural solo over the top of it. However, in the premiere of my work at Aurora 2008, the notational freedom of the score was used by pianist Bernadette Balkus and Claire Edwardes to build together as an explosive percussive unit instead of creating an independent sound. This unified utterance was not of a singular jazz language but of Asian-Pacific sounds in tandem with an extemporised vocabulary. The personality in the music is a double resonance of West and East within a physicality of sound.

**Example 2.5** Bruce Crossman, *Double Resonances* (Bars 161-168)—Static Jazz






## Sounds of Spirit: *Essence* and Symbol

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

In *Double Resonances* the embodied *essence* is a colour resonance principle whilst free-ringing percussion sounds are intended symbolically. The closing moments of this work illustrate these issues. Colour resonance is present in whole-tone based fragments of soft major third and second intervals drawn from kulintang scales (Santos, 1995, p. 148; Atherton, 2006, 'At the edge', p. 84)

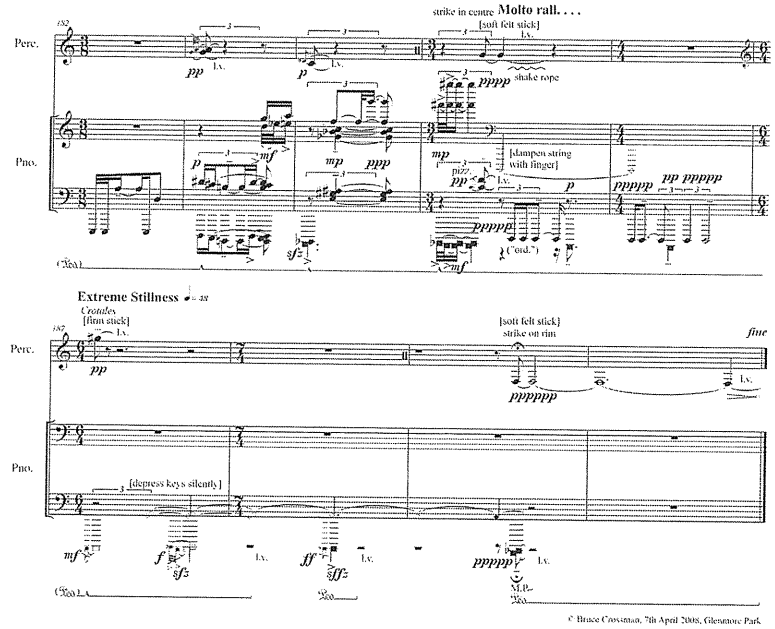
juxtaposed against chromatic-based dissonance in the piano writing. The whole sonority creates a personalised interval-colour gesture. This resonance principle is also present through timbre transformations—especially of the piano through gong-like rubber stopped notes, finger dampened strings, and select undampened strings excited externally (see Example 2.6, Bars 182-190). Pianist Bernadette Balkus (see Figure 2.2) graduated the amount of pitch in the finger-dampened string by gradually sliding the dampening hand closer to the pin inside the piano to create a type of gradual revealing of the pitch within that sound. This Asian *living colour* adjustment to the score was suggested[4] by Cambodian composer Chinary Ung to continue the colour life already present in the score. Surrounding and

**Figure 2.2** Bernadette Balkus, Performance Space, University of Western Sydney, 5 April 2008. Photo: Bruce Crossman.

merging with these sounds are the single strokes of communion bell-like crotales and Thai nipple gong resonances. The small bell-like crotales are intended to invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit as in Catholic communion whilst the Thai Temple gongs speak of a Southeast Asian spiritual resonance. José Maceda, as I mentioned earlier, speaks of the free vibrating systems that are characteristic of Southeast Asian ensembles whilst ethnomusicologist William Malm specifically links Thai knobbed gongs to Buddhist ritual (1996, p. 148). In *Resonances*, its musical heart is not in the jazz-infused climactic sections but the quiet moments of undampened resonances of Judaic-Christian and Southeast Asian sounds. Symbolic resonating metal sounds—Christian communion bell-like crotales merging with Thai Temple gongs—are quiet metaphors of the higher dimension of life (see Example 2.6).



**Example 2.6** Bruce Crossman, *Double Resonances* (Bars 182-190)—Spiritual Essences and Symbols




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

## Pacific-Located Spirit and Sensory Perception

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

## Notes

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



Chapter 3

# Singing Inside *Aura*

Chinary Ung with Adam Greene

## In Retrospect

Looking backward—while vital to a discussion of one's compositional work—is an unnatural activity for me. I prefer to look at the present and toward the future; most of my energy is devoted to the next piece. Composers are not always the best arbiters of their work in the sense of broad stylistic patterns. One seems to either be in the position of reinvention from piece to piece or working along some longer continuum of creative output. For what it is worth, I put myself in the latter category; however, it so happens that there is a natural line of demarcation that orients my recent work into a slightly different notion of creative aspiration than in my earlier works. That line separates works written pre and post-2002.

Many readers of this essay know the history of the genocide in Cambodia. My personal history intersects with world events in the following manner: I went to the United States[1] in 1964 to study music but with the intention of returning after the completion of my degree. As matters grew worse in Cambodia, it became clear that I could not return there safely. Thus, my development as a composer took place almost entirely in the United States. First as an exile, then as a U.S. citizen, it was difficult to be a 'Cambodian composer', although, of course, that is what I am. The fact remains that, owing to these circumstances, my musical identity is not easily described or defined by an ethnic experience.

Nevertheless, it should come as no surprise that I was always hopeful that I would someday return to Cambodia, if not to live there then to interact with the people, places, and culture that had been under such intense trauma for so long. Although official entreaties began to come for me to visit in the early 1990s, it was

11. The composer states, in an email to the author, that this passage was made 'deliberately technically impossible' as part of his mischievous sense of humour and as part of text setting, wanting to literally force the singer to gasp. (Crossman, 2008, p.1) Such a gasp can be heard on the recording of the performance of the work by Lotte Latukefu taken on 29th April at the 2006 Aurora Festival Intercultural Concert, held at the Lennox Theatre, Riverside, Parramatta, NSW.
12. The 'no letting go of breath' (Bars 52-59) represents the build-up of tension in the volcano; 'and listened to his fevered breathing by night breath' (Bars 103-114) leads into a more soft, sensual, section with sexual overtones.
13. The singer is required to sing whispered tones five times in the work: Bar 30 'repeat a crest peak'; Bar 17 'Magayon'; Bar 65 'of all ages'; Bar 107 'listened to'; and Bar 164 'woman'.
14. Every singer has three registers – a lower, middle and upper register and notes which link those registers – the passaggi. There are two – the primo passaggio, or lower passaggio, and secondo or upper passaggio. These linking notes act as a vocal 'bridge' between the registers. It depends on the voice type where the passaggi are. For females, the lower passaggio sits anywhere between C4-G4 and the upper passaggio from C5-G5 (Thurman, Welch, et al., 2000).
15. Including those of Estill, Bagnall and Kayes.
16. Thanks are expressed to Lotte Latukefu for her cooperation in writing this paper, for her time in doing the interview and in reviewing the material presented herein. The frankness with which she shared her performance experience is greatly appreciated.



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# The Authors

**Cathy Aggett** has encompassed many facets of the music profession, including: private teaching of singing, piano and musicianship; music education; presentations at conferences and workshops. She is founder and director of Sydney Singers, an adult chamber choir specialising in contemporary Australian choral repertoire. Cathy graduated with a double major in singing and piano from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in 1979 with a Diploma of Music Education and has since gone on to study singing and is completing her doctorate at the University of Western Sydney.

**Michael Atherton** is Professor of Music and Associate Dean (Research) at the University of Western Sydney. He has made a sustained contribution to the arts, unique in its breadth and originality, for which he is internationally acclaimed. His creative output includes composition, performance and artistic direction in many genres and styles. In 2003 Michael was awarded a Centenary Medal for services to Australian music. He was a featured composer in Aurora Festival 2008.

**Freya Bailes** is a postdoctoral researcher at MARCS Auditory Laboratories at the University of Western Sydney. She holds a doctorate from the University of Sheffield and has a special interest in the perception of affect in music. She won an Australian Research Council Linkage, Infrastructure, Equipment and Facilities grant (2005).

**Anne Bischoff** specialises in teaching music to primary students in the classroom and has had extensive experience working in both primary and secondary education throughout Sydney over the last thirty-five years. Director of Choral Music at SCEGGS Darlinghurst since 1994, she has conducted massed choirs, run choral workshops and prepared students for HSC performances and overseas tours. She is interested in promoting the performance of contemporary Australian repertoire and has sung with the Sydney Chamber Choir and Sydney Philharmonia Motet Choir.