

Phil Treloar / Feeling to Thought

PHIL TRELOAR

composer, marimba player, percussionist

Phil Treloar is one of the most important figures in Australian creative music. Any one of his areas of endeavor – drummer, percussionist, composer, conceptualist or bandleader – may have been enough to earn him this plaudit. Together they add up to a staggering contribution.

(John Shand, 2009. 'Phil Treloar: Magus', in *Jazz – the Australian Accent*)

In an extensive career devoted to creative pursuit the composer/performer, Phil Treloar, has addressed himself to the problem concerning relationships as these are found at the intersection of notated music-composition and improvisation. In 1987 he coined the term *Collective Autonomy* to signify this endeavor. Born in Sydney, Australia, his creative journey led to Kanazawa, Japan, with this still quite traditional city becoming his home in 1992. Increasingly since the late 1980s, a growing understanding of Buddhist life and practice has become intrinsic to Treloar's expression. In recent years greater access to the exchange and sharing of his creative ideas has been opened up with the advent of Feeling to Thought, an independent record label established for the purpose of documenting his research and collaborations in *Collective Autonomy*.

In November 2009 Feeling to Thought released *of Paradox Once Found*. Conceived of as a unified large-scale structure, this "Work" is a journey through transformations of textual readings and interpretations rendered into the realms of written text and musical form expressed in spontaneous improvisations for solo marimba. This three-and-a-half hour "Work" is the third in Treloar's project, *Pathways of the Mind: exploring sympathetic resonance* – an ongoing series assigned to his solo percussion explorations.

Phil Treloar has never done things by halves. Australia's most significant and influential improvising percussionist has always engaged in the creative process with life-and-death intensity. That the third installment of his *Pathways of the Mind* series is a triple CD of solo marimba improvisations is therefore only mildly surprising.

It often beggars belief that these pieces were not fully composed. The Japan-based Treloar's instinct for real-time devising of form is phenomenal. But form is a hollow shell if the content it encompasses does not engage, move and transport in some combination, and his melodic harmonic content is so lush and multifarious as to be like gazing at a vast field of diverse flowers as they dance in a breeze. Simple ideas, meanwhile, receive complex extrapolations without losing their immediacy.

Binding the work is the magnificently-recorded resonance and warmth of Treloar's marimba and the pervading meditative mood - echoed in an accompanying perceptive, candid and affecting essay on cultural imperialism. (I should disclose that one piece is generously dedicated to myself.)

(John Shand, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, February 27, 2010 – Review, *of Paradox Once Found*)

Dedications have assumed a substantial place in Treloar's oeuvre, beginning in 1974 with *Tribute*, dedicated (modestly) to John Coltrane (recorded on vinyl: Philips 6641 225). In 2002 the premiere of *SHADES: in memoriam Roger Frampton* was performed in The Studio, Sydney Opera House and again the following year, twice, at the Wangaratta Festival of Jazz. Frampton had been a close colleague of Treloar's from the time of their formative years in music and, as Treloar states the case in his Wangaratta program notes, "[*Shades*] seeks to embrace Roger's being, not simply as a memory but more as an experience; as an activity that might recall aspects of the man as he liked to pursue creative endeavor."

Treloar's concert demonstrated how thoughts can be transformed back into feelings during a live performance. [His] sincerity and passion conveyed the essence of Frampton's creative spirit. The work was boldly uncompromising and expressionistic, yet also contained passages of subtle melancholy and delicate beauty...

(Jessica Nicholas, *The Age*, 2003 - Review, *SHADES: in memoriam Roger Frampton*)

For Treloar, 1988 was a year of confluence, one during which his long-term engagement with improvised music and his studies in music composition – B mus degree, composition major, under the guidance of Dr. Graham Hair, Sydney Conservatorium of Music – came together. He was invited to participate in the Australian Bicentennial's September concert series, 'New Direction – a preview of the nineties', presenting a program of his "Works". Significantly, his active association with Simon de Haan and Pipeline began the same year with performances of *Moon Man's Variations* – for harpsichord and cor Anglais and *Variations on 'Directions Changing'* – for ensemble and improvising quartet. And a two-week residency with his quartet, Feeling to Thought – Treloar, dms.; Steve Elphick, acoustic bass; Mark Simmonds, ten. sax.; David Ades, alto sax – at the Tasmanian Conservatorium of Music facilitated a hands-on opportunity to explore *Collective Autonomy* with music students through the rehearsal and performance of his thirty-five minute composition, *Primal Communication: version two* – for string orchestra and improvising quartet. The performance was broadcast nationally on ABC-FM. One of the students, in appraising the residency, was cited as summarizing the view held by many who participated:

The group has prompted me to reconsider the whole idea of music and the musician. ... Especially impressive was their self-acceptance without egotism. Their philosophies of communication and creativity in a performance environment shed a great deal of light on earlier composers, especially pre-Romantic. This is what music making is all about! Being part of the Primal Communication concert was the most exciting musical experience I've ever been part of; I'm honored. The fact that they seemed to have enjoyed the residency just as much is an extra delight.

(reported in *PRESS PRESS*: Winter 1988)

And in more recent times, on occasions Treloar has been invited by the Japan Poets' Association to perform improvised music together with poetry readings. A major event inspired by the poetry of Matsuo Basho, October 2005 is indicative of the creative interaction he shares with the Japanese tradition. *Facing East*, a performance initiative inaugurated by Phil in 2005 and based in Kanazawa, presents occasional concerts. These have premiered several new "Works" written by Treloar and for which Australian, together with Japanese artists, have been invited to participate. Stemming from this initiative, *Converging Paths*, a collaboration with the Australian percussionist, Hamish Stuart, has, to date, generated a three-CD series.

“I can’t imagine a recording which could capture more extemporization and random acts of giving from the human spirit. ...interactions which at times boarder on telepathic. ... Neither courageous nor self-indulgent but honestly and faithfully expressed, clearly influenced by the over-arching maze of sound found in bushland near Milton, NSW.”

(Peter Wockner, *Limelight*, April Edition, 2009. See also *Jazz & Beyond*)

Treloar’s life-long project, *Collective Autonomy*, continues to engage him with research that concerns relationships between composed and improvised musics.
