

Shades of There

Intuitive knowledge leaping into speech,
Seized, vibrant, kindling with the inspired word,
Hearing the subtle voice that clothes the heavens,
Carrying the splendour that has lit the suns,
They sang Infinity's names and deathless powers
In metres that reflect the moving worlds,
Sight's sound-waves breaking from the soul's great deeps.

Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, Book IV, Canto IV

In giving titles to the improvisations encoded herein painterly allusions are not out of place. The environment in which these recordings were made is not only physically picturesque but also spiritually evocative; a place bursting with energy and, seemingly, its own will-to-power. Sean Barry's 'Lazy Curl' is a haven that, to an open heart, provides sustenance both of natural, and of human making. It is a mix, an intersection, where time might go in several directions concurrently or perhaps, as a conscious manifestation, cease altogether. And the potency behind this environmental force is, undoubtedly, creative. We were granted privy to this special place just near Milton, NSW, Australia, where, among other commitments, Sean Barry, together with Louise Morgan and Tyson Contor, lend their support to indigenous culture. And, as if preordained, our music is, we feel, imbued with their generosity. Whether it be the wide cast of *Tracings*, *Fresco*, and *Shades*, or the more concise forms of *Violet*, and *Cameo*, these "Works" may well be considered as sound paintings and sculptures depicting 'The Curl' and its environs.

Our project, *Converging Paths*, began life in November, 2005 when we presented a duo concert in Kanazawa, Japan, to inaugurate Facing East, a performance initiative established by Phil for the purpose of exploring creative possibilities found at the intersection of improvised and notated musics. This initiative is ongoing and Hamish returned to Kanazawa the following year for another concert, one that involved several other musicians. However, developing our collaborative work through improvisory means quickly became our primary concern, thus giving rise to *Converging Paths*.

Given the geographical distance that separates us - Sydney, Kanazawa - we tend to work on a project basis, setting aside timeframes devoted to intensive work together and documenting this in one form or another. 'The Curl Project' is exemplary of this working process. Sean Barry facilitated the project and Shane Fahey came on board to make the sound recordings. Both are artists, Sean in the area of visual art and Shane in the area of sound. The positive impact made by these people on the shape our project has taken can't be overstated. Indeed, this is a clear case of collaboration between open-minded creative souls. Envisaging the CD cover as a means of visual expression directed towards opening our collaborative frame wider, Teo Treloar was invited in. As a three-CD series has been generated by The Curl Project, Teo's images appears on each of the CDs. In the sound domain, while the first two CDs draw focus on directly recorded, improvised acoustic material the third incorporates electronic media, thereby involving Shane not only as a recordist, but also in the sense of composition and sound-art.

During the two and a half days of recording, Shane's presence and his many suggestions regarding proximity - people, instruments, microphones - opened up our ambient field, at times having Hamish play in the outside environment while

Phil remained indoors. Thus, being visually, and for the most part aurally, out of touch, our intuition was given full scope. The *Cameo* pieces herein are examples. As it turned out, Phil was to play marimba exclusively during the course of recording while Hamish plays a variety of percussion instruments, both made and found. These include drums, cymbals, an array of small instruments and, at times, kitchenutensils, the shells of pistachio nuts, the walls of the wooden building we worked in, and so on. Exploration throughout was limited only to a personal sense of integrity and, perhaps above all else, the desire to pool our creative resources.

These resources are brought together through time we shared: walks in the bush, cooking a meal, driving to town for a coffee, and hours of playing. All of this, and more, became constituents in our creative pool ... communication ... beginning with people ... moving via the sound ... people-sound/musical instruments' environment. Quite often long and deep discussion would be devoted to reason, rationale, motivation, feelings, and ideas, but never to how we thought 'a piece' should go or even be. Nor to particular linguistic formulations. 'Pieces', as such, have not been conceptualized. All the work recorded here is improvised. The shapes and forms that converge and emerge do so through the act of 'being' ... *there*, doing. This *is* the musical expression of The Curl Project.

Both this CD, *Shades of There*, and the one to follow, *Time to Be - in memoriam Jackie Orszaczky*, have been recorded 'live' direct to DAT. Editing consists only in arranging track order. The recordings are faithful in all respects to their real-time performance. And William Bowden, with his exceptional ear for recorded sound, has ensured through his mastering expertise that you, the recipient of these 'sound paintings', are privy, as we were, to 'The Curl' and its environs.

Acknowledgments

In the course of The Curl Project coming to fruition we have, happily, incurred several debts of gratitude. Without the abundant love and support of our respective wives and families, Miki-chan, Lisa, Holly, & Oscar, Wynton & Teo, it's difficult to know where we might be, and doing what(?). Their love and understanding make it all possible. This project would never have made a start without the perception and gracious generosity of Sean Barry. An idle discussion over a friendly meal culminated in six hours of music in the can ... indeed, food for thought! The project having set sail encountered some rough waters. Marimbas seem to be pretty reluctant to emerge from the woodwork when you need them. Transporting Phil's from Japan was, of course, totally out of the question. Claire Edwardes was more than accomodating. She was, in a word, cheerful. *and then Violet* is dedicated to Claire as both a thank you and a congratulations. Claire gave birth to her first child in May, a baby girl she has named Violet. Leaving Sydney for Milton with drums, a million cymbals, percussion bits-'n-pieces, bags of stix, brushes, mallets, (and U name it), *and*, a five-octave marimba ... Hame's Barina doesn't quite make it. Thanks a million Tina. The van was perfect! Inevitably things get forgotten. Short a few stands and a drum seat, Wade presented us with his generosity. It would be impossible to imagine this music as the recorded document it is without Shane Fahey's engaging quirkiness. Sometimes the very best way to see is to shut your eyes. Shane's vision opened our ears. Mastering can make or break a recording. The Curl Project, as played and recorded, is now yours to hear through the astute ear of William Bowden. Even with the bumpy road in, on a normal day life at The Curl would be, we imagine, fairly smooth. But then the likes of us arrive and spend almost two weeks making the strangest of sounds, disturbing the

dogs, the hens, the roosters, the horses, the ducks, the birds, the trees, and last but not least, the people. If patience is a virtue then Lou and Tyson must be among the most virtuous known to human kind.

It helps heaps to have friends, especially those who show a willingness to exchange and to share ... enthusiasm!! Miles of gratitude to John Shand, Steve Elphick, Greg Johns, Bob Douglas, Michael Askil, Mark Simmonds, those two staunch Miltonians, Wade and Bob, Hisae KIDO, Junko KAMISHIMA, Chris Hinkley, Hisako KIDO, Norihiro MORI, Bruce Cale, Barry Woods, and Peter Boothman. Our heart-felt thanks to you all.

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CONVERGING PATHS

Shades of There

Interaction is as important as melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, dynamics, emotion or imagination in making any music. Even solo performers interact with instrument, room, audience and the piece. Such engagement helps beckon in the listener.

Duetting as *Converging Paths*, Phil Treloar and Hamish Stuart generate a feast of interaction across all facets of their intimate music-making, as the paths of the former's marimba and the latter's drum-kit and percussion converge. Each can be intensely reactive to the other, or they can rove along largely parallel courses that meet at an imaginary horizon.

Treloar generates the warmest marimba sound I've heard, each note arriving plump and round, with a finely tapered decay, and his enchanting improvisations bubble up as naturally as spring water. Stuart, meanwhile, long considered among the grooviest drummers in the land, here displays a splendour of textural invention to rival the great free drummers, and the fluency of his improvising ensures the two instruments are equal voices throughout. Outstanding.

(John Shand, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December, 2008)
