

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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### *Music has a central role in addressing problems of the human condition*

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

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

war, their use punishable by death.

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

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

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

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

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

