

EMBODIED LIVES

*Reflections on the Influence of
Suprpto Suryodarmo and Amerta Movement*



Edited by: Katya Bloom, Margit Galanter and Sandra Reeve

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OPEN ACCESS

Chapter 16

The Musical Portal

Tim Jones

Edited by:

Katya Bloom, Margit Galanter and Sandra Reeve

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A Balinese Saying

Ilmu Padi (a lesson from the rice plant)

semakin tua semakin berisi, dan semakin merunduk
(the older, the fuller, and the more it bows)



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16. THE MUSICAL PORTAL

Tim Jones (UK)

I first met Prapto in 1992. It was his first visit to England. As I walked into the room, Prapto, seated on the floor, said directly to me, “*You are wonderful*”. I replied with the well-known English swerve manoeuvre, “You’re not so bad yourself, Prapto”.

Welcome to England!

~ ~ ~

My work as a performer, and voice and singing teacher has the umbrella title ‘The Nature of Sound’.

This title brings together two ideas. The first idea incorporates an appreciation of the totality of, and fine discrimination among, nature’s sounds – ones we like, ones we perhaps don’t: birdsong, the wind in the trees, the natural sounds of human expression (sighing, laughing, singing, heartbeat and nervous system hum), the sounds of traffic.

The second idea approaches the nature of sound as a feeling for sound’s own nature.

There is of course a physiology of sound – a sound’s frequency, or pitch; its amplitude, or loudness; its timbre, or internal overtone structure; and its morphology, the shape or dynamics of its attack, duration and cessation.

But that doesn’t tell the whole story. Perhaps there is also sound’s own nature, its soul. From this perspective we can see or hear sound as yet another facet of a totality of being. This may seem an unusual thought.

I take it that my ‘own’ soul is not an independent entity residing somehow separately inside my body. I take it as the totality of my being, known and unknown, the totality of my expression, conscious and unconscious, and the totality of my attempts to live a life of growing awareness.

But if my own soul is not this independent entity inside me, perhaps neither is my soul, as I have expressed it, an entity that dwells in its own magnificent independence: not independent of the world and the people in my environment and my locality, not independent either, in my movement, speech and song, but more existing in relatedness.

The discrete events in the tapestry of sound outside my window – gardening activity, birdsong, leaf rustle – all relate through stories of season, climate and behaviour, and also in the stories I bring to the identifying and naming of them (the sounds). But they also cohere as an expression of the nature of sound (i.e. not just the sounds of nature). This takes a slight shift in one’s relation to the sense of hearing. I remember Prapto calling out to those who might feel words directed to them:

“you do not yet know your hearing has language...”

This recognises that hearing itself *is* a ‘language of being’, a language whose syntax can be, and initially is, memory, pattern and habit, our relations to objects we hear.

Again that is not the whole story, but perhaps an initial nudge towards letting ourselves be present in and to our own stories. Another kind of hearing can occur in a shift that does not happen by trying to unstick patterns or get rid of habits, but in a space of recognition and kindness, an inclusive widened hearing space. Imagine a room full of people. The atmosphere is still and quiet. We are asked to sense our hearing. I do so, and slowly sense not just my own hearing, but also the hearing sense of all the other people in the room. This is not a listening *to* anything, not to silence, not to our breathing or to any other present sound. It is collective sensing hearing. And then I am aware of hearing hearing itself, which I would term the ‘being of hearing’, hearing as consciousness present to itself, expressing itself as hearing. This is akin to Rilke’s injunction to “learn to forget how you sang... real singing is a different kind of breath, a nothing breath... a ripple in the God”. Or expressed in the term ‘*Nada Brmha*’ — Sanskrit words meaning ‘the world as sound’. Hearing becomes part of the *speaking being*, as Prapto terms it.

It was an early thought of mine in teaching singing to recognise that to sing you have to know you are heard. Heard at least by yourself (although perhaps that is the most difficult step), or by your

friend, or your God, or by the wind, birds – it doesn't really matter, the issue at hand is connectedness or relatedness.

Prapto has a movement 'formula' (or perhaps suggestion is a better word). It goes:

dependence – independence – inter-dependence = inter-independence

Although this can be read as a progression leading to a goal (it can also be that), it is also important to allow that there is no judgement of any state, just recognition of which condition is in action, hence opening a space of movement and change in relation to self, other and to the environment of meeting.

~ ~ ~

In the project *Songworlds*, devised and developed over a period of 12 years by myself and my colleague Michael Dick, and part of the core curriculum of the acting school in Cologne where we both worked, student actors were invited to bring a song from any time in their lives – a lullaby, a children's song, an aria or pop song, any song. They were also asked to bring and be prepared to tell the memory or story of their connection to their song.

A vital part of the process we initiated with them is a Song Circle.

Progressing in a circle from whomsoever starts (basically whoever takes the plunge!), each person, without preamble, sings their song, tells their story and then sings again. The invitation is to inquire into 'now-ness' through their singing and telling, employing what we call vertical memory (as opposed to simply a horizontal, linear re-telling of events). Singing and telling become a way of hearing and sensing where the resonances are for you in your song and in your telling, as you go. Which part of your story is moving in you now? The resonant field of memory evoked for us by our choice of song can act as a doorway to a deeper experience of our own biography and narratives, a doorway allowing permeability, vulnerability and humanity.

The circle is always (and I mean, in my experience of perhaps 50 circles, *always*) a powerful experience of presence for participants: presence both to the self and to others. The circle has the ability to create for participants the dual role, important for trainee actors, of making them both 'actors' and 'audience'. As audience, their own response is clearly just that: watching, listening, enjoying, being

moved. And yet each person is also an actor in this, i.e. their turn comes, and their responses to others' stories and the resonances or differences they find from their own offering contribute to the collective offering as well as to their own, individual telling.

Responses after such experiences (I've been part of circles from 2 hours to 5 hours long) often include feelings of shared experience, and of an inter-connected difference of culture, gender, race, experience or story. We commonly hear something like, "I know more about my classmates than I learnt in the whole of the last year".

This is a chance for each participant to be present to their own experience, their experience of themselves and their experience of others, whilst those others are simultaneously engaged in the same process. It is also a chance to learn to negotiate their own tolerance levels within this process – "*to receive the presence of your own story, and how much to let circulate*", as Prapto once said.

In all this I am reminded of a former Archbishop of Canterbury's thoughts on 'conversation'. Rowan Williams writes extensively about the current debate between 'liberals' and 'communitarians'. On the one hand there is the view that individuals are endowed with intrinsic rights and liberties to be negotiated and protected in the public sphere; on the other hand there is the idea that people "find their dignity, even their sense of 'rights' through identification with values of the community". Williams's interest is in how a meaningful conversation might be effected between these views.

Williams, exploring the concept of 'conversation', quotes the political philosopher Charles Taylor: "A conversation is... a common action in this strong irreducible sense; it is *our* action."

His description goes on to include the 'uh-huhs' and 'mmms' of neighbours chatting over the fence. In this instance subject matter or content isn't the primary purpose. Williams continues by taking up the thought of conversation as a breakthrough into a recognition of common goods, "things we can *only* value and share together". To conclude the quotation: "conversation... in which the positive and participatory enjoyment of some other agent (person) is intrinsic to my own awareness of wellbeing and satisfaction."

This brings me back, full-circle as it were, to the shared space of the Song Circle, or its improvised performance version, *Songworlds*. Here, every circle has its own integrity, its own unveiling of the present for participants.

One group was asked to choose songs with the theme of beauty. Their choices indicated a sense that beauty always lies elsewhere, in another person, another place, another time. Through the month of the project they became aware of beauty as something almost like a scent, an atmosphere ‘given off’ as they became more and more close, intimate with their own stories and experience.

Another class, culturally very diverse (German, Serbian, Azerbaijani...) worked with themes from *Romeo and Juliet*. Their theme song, ‘There’s a place for us’ (from Bernstein and Sondheim’s re-working of the Romeo and Juliet story, *West Side Story*) was reflective of their sense of family fragmentation and cultural displacement. In the final improvised performance, as one of the performers began to sing, the song was taken up by the audience (fellow students at the school) who were also often from displaced and fragmented lives. The audience sang with and to the players in an incredibly moving moment.

In the sharing of songs and the unveiling of our stories and attachments to them, we enter a common ground that reveals both our individual distinctiveness and our mutuality.

I originally chose the quotation from Charles Taylor about the conversation over the garden fence as a link in my own preparation to co-host a workshop project with Prapto with the happy title *Music Garden Chatting*, re-christened *Mu-Ga-Cha*. These were meetings in my garden, in the local village hall, and up on Bulbarrow, a hill fort in Dorset. Williams’s take on conversation and the sharing of common humanity made for me a direct link to Prapto’s ideas of *Garden* and *Chatting*.

In *Mu-Ga-Cha* the ideas of a common ground of mutuality and distinctiveness were given the added dimension of the idea of garden, the relatedness of being human within the relatedness of human and nature – conversation with the environment, chatting over tea in the garden, musical chats, breakthroughs into the recognition of common goods, things we can only value and share together. The garden becomes the meeting place of human, nature and spirit.

In *Mu-Ga-Cha*, with these themes for moving and sounding within the garden, many ‘movers’ and ‘sounders’ would recognise the ‘mmms’ and ‘uh-huhs’, gentle signals of presence and engagement in the collective space. The *Garden*, both the collective and shared, my own garden, both the real one and the real one of my soul, is where

I tend my own needs, watering, planting (and in my case eternally mowing), mediated within the needs of the collective, the people with whom I move and sing. *Chatting* is where my own wellbeing is invested also in the wellbeing of other/s. *Music* is where these same intentions and 'listening's' are inherent in the evolving conversation of melody, harmony and rhythm within and around us.

Let's Go Outside!

We are in my garden, in Dorset, in England. It is a hot June day. I am recording a day in the life of *Mu-Ga-Cha*. Prapto and I are there, as are my wife and two friends, one a musician.

Prapto sits by the gently swaying acer tree, at intervals chanting. The musician sits just behind him, to Prapto's left, playing a beautiful repeated pattern on the *siter*, a plucked zither-like instrument from Solo in Java. In Solo, the *siter* is a street instrument, a reminder for Prapto of home.....

There is bird song and then
 the Doppler effect of an aeroplane lazing at great height
 across the sky
 it takes its time
 Sometimes the telephone engineers' conversation drifts down
 from their 'perch' up the telephone pole overlooking our garden
 And our neighbour wanders down his garden,
 turns on the water for his lawn sprinkler
 he positions it so that the water
 hits
 the weather-vane-like construction of his bird-scarer
 a rhythmic patter of water on tin
 The siter figure continues
 Prapto chants
 a delivery van arrives
 departs
 a bee drones past hangs in the air
 and the siter figure continues
 Hangs
 in the air
 It is beautiful the sounds of nature the nature of sound.
 music
 garden
 chatting
 "thank you" I hear Prapto say.
 No no no, thank YOU!

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As a singer, storyteller and teacher, **Tim Jones** combines a performing life with a teaching life. He runs a public workshop programme, 'The Nature of Sound', and taught at Arturo Schauspielschule in Cologne, where he co-created the syllabus *Songworlds*, now offered by Tim and Michael Dick as part of their individual public workshop programmes and as a co-led course.

His love of Carnatic music has led to concerts and recordings in the UK, Europe and India. Tim has also collaborated on many performances with gamelan orchestras.

An Amerta Movement practitioner since 1989, Tim studied Carnatic music with Sivasankara Panikkar (1984-2007), has worked as a qualified Craniosacral practitioner since 1994 and is a member of the Ridhwan School.

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