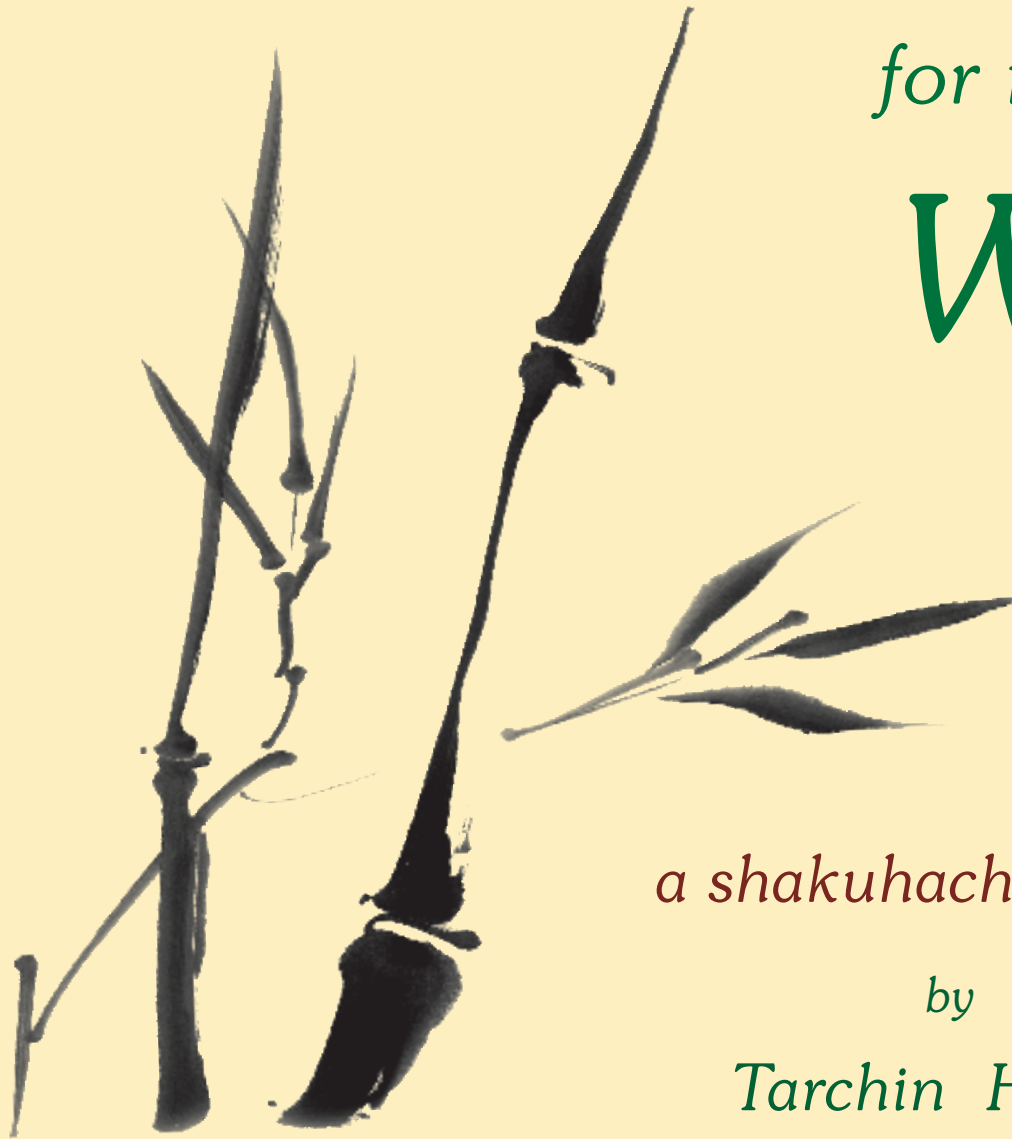


# *Something Beautiful* *for the* *World*



*a shakuhachi sadhana*

*by*

*Tarchin Hearn*

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## *Praise for Tarchin Hearn's Something Beautiful for the World*

Each page is suffused with truth and beauty and the essence of meditation. It will certainly be an inspiration for all beings involved in spiritual search and practice, as well as musicians, artists, craftspeople, psychologists, social workers and many others. I highly recommend it to everyone. **Steven Gellman**, *composer and Professor of Music at the University of Ottawa*

The real beauty of this book is its universal appeal - with its simple yet profound teaching put in such a way, that anyone with the slightest aspiration to bring goodness into their life and the life of others, will appreciate. **Leander Kane**, *teacher of Liberation through the Body*

Speaking from the source, aiming to the source – Tarchin's words and images touch the heart of what has been driving great artists throughout the centuries. But we don't need more great musicians – we need more beings mastering their inner flute. Tarchin hands out an accessible, practical and profound path for everybody with aspiration. Try it out! I know from experience: it works! **Michael Gohl**, *conductor and music director, Switzerland*

There is a long history of craftspeople and artists projecting the compelling and absorbing experience of their craft, as a metaphor for the alchemy of self and social transformation. Tarchin's vision, however, is even broader than this. Not only does he embrace the crafting of the human instrument, which surely is the root concern of every educationalist, but he leads us through a practice, softening and healing the separations of mind and body, art and science, self and other, humankind and environment. As both makers and responders we are urged to engage with authenticity and presence, imbued with the capacity for inner silence. And he asks the purpose of our striving, 'What kind of music are we being?' This brings immediacy to an education in transformative presence; 'being' not just 'becoming'. "Allowing yourself to be touched – and be changed!" **Graham Price**, *Senior Lecturer, Art Education, The University of Waikato*

*Something Beautiful for the World* is richly evocative of how musical expression causes compassionate, creative, enjoyable flow. Because of my background in painting, at places in the text/poetry, I could envision the interplay of musical sounds, silences, and rhythms as brush strokes; forms being spaces, dynamic harmonies, arresting colours and textures. Creating art is a universal birthright, nature flowing through. This book shows that the insights of meditation, and the crafting of art, are able to be in perfect concert. Tarchin's writing is rich and lyrical, and exposes the truth that creating something beautiful is the natural outpouring of a clear mind.

**Barry Sharplin**, *artist and art teacher, U.S.A. formerly NZ*

*Ah! that we may hear this song. Ah! that we may dance with it. And know we are crafting the flute and are the music.* A wonderful offering to our troubled world. I loved the book. The metaphor is so clear and direct and the poetry expresses it perfectly. It is already helping my practice and I am certain it will help everyone who comes in contact with it.

**Dominique de Borrekens**, *artist, sculptor and art teacher*

Tarchin has always brought us creatively to the meditation of the ordinary. Be it eating a bowl of muesli, walking in the moment, or shaping a shakuhachi flute. For in the craft, the art of any work is to become that work. As a sculptor and vessel maker, without such dedication, I cannot effect that critical edge, where primal inclusive language, (form), is shaped from. You become the clay. You become that essential feeling. The vessel or the sculpture, is the external expression of that which is invisible... beyond words, held in the silence ... as Tarchin says, 'of the muse'. **Michael O'Donnel**, *clayworker and vesselmaker*

Tarchin eloquently describes the method of making a flute and learning to play, linking this to the refinement and concentration required to craft a fine human being. If the student asks "How do I attain enlightenment?" the teacher could reply "Go make a flute, then blow it!"

**Barbara O'Sullivan**, *MFA*

*Something Beautiful for the World*

Also by Tarchin Hearn

*Breathing*

*Natural Awakening*

*Growth & Unfolding*

*Walking in Wisdom*

*Meditative First Aid*

*Daily Puja*

*Cycle of Samatha*

*Foundations of Mindfulness*

*Sangha Work*

*Coming To Your Senses*

Something Beautiful  
for the World

a shakuhachi sadhana

Tarchin Hearn



Wangapeka Books

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# Contents

Prologue .....	8
Introduction .....	10
1st Node Primordial Naturalness: The Bamboo Grove .....	16
2nd Node Crafting the Instrument: Two Instruments in One .....	26
First Round - Opening the Four Nodes .....	32
Second Round - Fine Tuning the Bore .....	41
Third Round - Discovering the Music .....	46
3rd Node The Art of Playing .....	55
Blowing a Single Note .....	55
Musing and Stillness .....	60
Authenticity and Presence .....	61
Sound and Silence .....	66
Breathing and Movement .....	72
4th Node Music as Language .....	75
5th Node Music as Offering .....	78
6th Node The Sound of Mystery .....	81
7th Node Return to the Source .....	84
Acknowledgements .....	92
Biographies .....	94

# Prologue

A SHAKUHACHI is a traditional Japanese end-blown bamboo flute. In times past, it was associated with the 'Fuke' Zen sect. Practitioners of that tradition were called 'monks of emptiness'.

A SADHANA is a spiritual practice. It is a meditative exploration that weaves into a seamless whole; visualisation, inner focus, physical movement, breathing, mantra, prayers of devotion, and silent contemplation. The purpose of a sadhana is to help the practitioner recognise, understand and experience the unbroken wholeness of mind and phenomena, and then to live the implications of being this all-inclusive, utterly dynamic weaving of timeless mystery. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, sadhanas often blend poetry and prose in order to convey not only a method and sequence of contemplations, but also to suggest a feel for the spirit of the exploration.

I first began playing shakuhachi in 2000. A little dabbling gradually flowered into a minor obsession which now shows all the signs of becoming a relatively permanent fixture. Although I haven't had the benefit of studying with a traditional shakuhachi teacher, my explorations have been filtered through the lens of a great many years of involvement with Buddhist teaching and practice. Gradually it became clear that my approach to shakuhachi had taken on the nature of a sadhana. With this attitude, the flute fulfils a similar function to a rosary or a shrine. Each is an external support that can help us recognise something ineffable, wondrous and utterly available. A Buddhist shrine and the various objects on and around it represent and point to our true nature. In a similar way, a shakuhachi flute can remind us of our innate flute-ness and the universal music of wisdom and compassion that we all are.



# Introduction

IN JANUARY 2007, on the wind swept eastern slopes of the Kaimai Range near Aongatete in the North Island of New Zealand, a group of us gathered together to explore a week of meditation and flute making. Each morning, I gave teachings on the theme of how making a shakuhachi could be compared to crafting a fine human being. Along with these reflections I suggested various meditative exercises, to be done with and without a flute, to help transform the ideas into direct personal experience. In the very first class, those who didn't already have a shakuhachi were loaned one so that they could begin to experiment with this wonderfully expressive instrument. During the afternoons we gathered at Rolling Cloud Gallery, the studio of friends Irene and Kelvin Tuscia-Falconer. Kelvin is an excellent craftsman and potter and in the last few years has turned his considerable skill and sensitivity to making shakuhachi. In these hot, sometimes rainy afternoon sessions, we drilled and sanded and crafted a number of amazingly good first flutes.

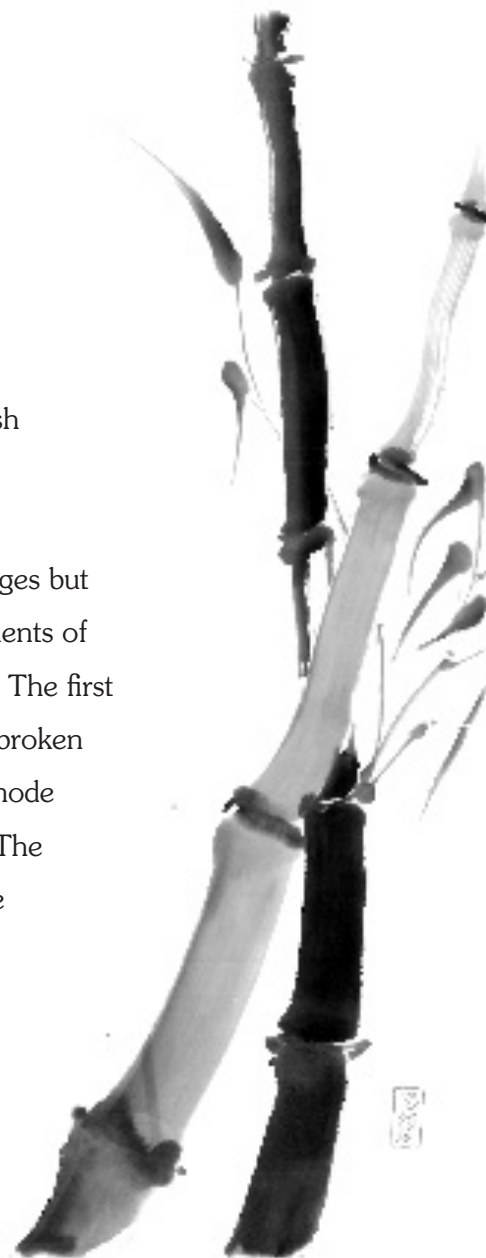
In this book, graced with the beautiful ink brush work of Canadian artist Robert Sinclair, I would like to share with you some of the ideas and contemplations that grew from that week. Although these contemplations are obviously tied in with the process of shakuhachi making, *Something Beautiful for the World*, is not a manual for making bamboo flutes.\* Rather, in these pages, we will be considering parallels between flute making and 'human making'. This is a

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\* If you would like more details on the actual process of making shakuhachi, I recommend obtaining Monty Levenson's *The Japanese Shakuhachi Flute: Notes on Craft and Construction*, or *Blowing Zen: One Breath, One Mind*, by Carl Abbott. Both are available from <[www.shakuhachi.com](http://www.shakuhachi.com)>. If you live in New Zealand you might contact Kelvin for help at <[falconer@enternet.co.nz](mailto:falconer@enternet.co.nz)>.

resonance that says much about how we might live well in today's climate of change and multi-levelled challenge. Having dabbled with many different crafts, I feel certain that the ideas and contemplations in this book could be creatively applied to any discipline of art or craft in which the artist or maker has a sensitivity and passion for understanding how we mesh with the larger living world.

This 'shakuhachi sadhana' is developed in seven stages but I'd like to call them nodes, paralleling the seven node/segments of a length of bamboo used to make a traditional shakuhachi. The first node involves reflecting on the basic state of affairs, this unbroken wholeness of totality, the grove of becoming. The second node involves crafting two flutes, one bamboo and one human. The third node explores ways of playing them. The fourth node leads us to experience all beings as flute/music/musing and explores music as language and language as music. The fifth node looks at music as offering. The sixth node leads us into touching the sound of mystery, and with the seventh node we return to the source.





## a shakuhachi sadhana

*Two qualities:*

*one sharp, discriminating, brilliant, precise,  
the other, open, responsive, luminous, ineffable.*

*Both are needed.*

*Both are precious.*

*Shall we continue further?*

*One makes shape  
the other makes room. One is  
questioning, penetrating, discerning, and creatively  
divisive; the other is accepting, permeable, subtle and inclusive.*

*In a human ...*

*we think, analyse, investigate and intend.*

*We also flow with empathy, love, compassion and cascading generosity.*

*In a flute ...*

*there is a blow edge with precisely shaped lips approaching*

*and ...*

*the absence:*

*the holes, the open bore, the empty space, the*

*internal cavities of the person playing.*

*The crafting of a playable flute is like*

*the making of a well functioning person.*

*For good music,*

*the sharpness of the blow edge needs to be very sharp and*

*the openness of the spaces needs to be very open.*

*We need them both at the same time.*

*It's not one or the other.*

*To be able to muse, to contemplate, to embrace*

*both the immensity and the particularity of being,*

*our capacity to question and discern must be honed to a vibrant edge.*

*Our openness needs to be unimaginably open.*

*We need both these qualities at the same time.*

*It's not one or the other.*

*A place for musing  
upon the many staged and multi-pathed  
journeying of 'now' is a museum.\* The inspiration, the deep  
welling upward that surprises and delights us with insight and revelation  
is the dancing of the muse; in Tibet ... the dakini ... Ah!*

*This is the incandescence,*

*the glorious music of everyone.*

*Not merely building blocks of star dust, arrangements of atoms and*

*elements, but emerging consciousness, responsiveness, aliveness, knowing.*

*Flute making and human making are similar arts.*

*Both driven by the muse. Both dancing and revealing the music  
that we are. Both inviting and drawing forth  
the music that is the other.*

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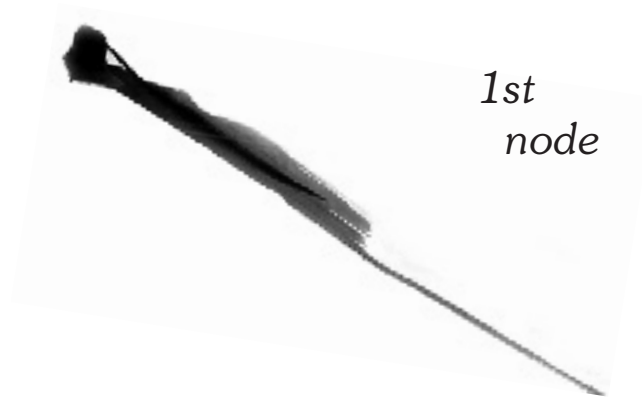
\* It is interesting that in Sanskrit the letter 'a' placed at the beginning of a word negates it. If we apply this device to English, and that's not such a silly thing to do since English and Sanskrit are both members of the Indo-European family of languages, then the words 'a'musing and 'a'musement must be pointing towards distraction, non-thinking, disconnectedness and general mental noise. In Japanese, *mu* means 'the silence between the notes', so 'musing' might be the singing of silence.



Please  
pause and breathe  
for a while.

Let these ideas  
percolate into your bones.





# Primordial Naturalness

## The Bamboo Grove

OUR JOURNEY OF FLUTE MAKING should begin at the beginning, though when we look carefully, it's not so easy to say where or when that is. Each beginning is an eternal now. Each moment of now is a fresh beginning and all beginnings are expressions of the natural world in all its fullness and multitudinous ripeness.

A bamboo grove is a temple of mystery, a gateway into a world that has largely disappeared from the perceptions of people wrapped in the ambiance of automobiles, shopping centres, cities and narrowly focussed human chauvinism. It's possible that you have never been in a bamboo grove but surely you have been in a forest. As you read further, invite your memories of actual forests or groves to breathe life into these words – a gift of inner sensing, a grace of

empathy. Your heart/mind and my inspiration linking. Come with me now. Let's walk together into Kelvin's roadside shrine.

It's hot. The back smacking afternoon sun hastens us across the field towards a coolness, towards a living cave, a vegetative grotto. Inside, light is slanting through the leaves, highlighting the upright columns of bamboo; a parallel universe of brightness and shade reaching skyward, crowned with a lacy canopy of dappled green-greys and shimmering blue sky. The air in here is humid and still, and the drone of cicadas penetrates our skulls dissolving boundaries, drawing us into a place that is primordial and innocently fresh.

*Coming home.*

*Falling home.*

*Letting be into home. Ahhh! – a great exhalation.*

Forget your timetables – your schedules. For this entire afternoon, let go of appointments and the business of oughts and shoulds. Completely give yourself to being here. Let the ground support you. The dry leaf litter will be your cushion. Welcome the visiting insects and feel the rhythms of your breathing, your entire body of experience loosening its strings of limitation and containment as it tunes to something deeply flowing and natural. If you have a meditation discipline, practise it for a while but then, as you become more calm and centred, let go of any effort and simply soften into spacious translucency.

Now,

as you sit here ...

ever so gradually

open the doors of your senses.

Do this in a very passive way as if they just fall open of their own accord. Effortlessly. Sights come to your eyes and sounds come to your ears. You don't have to reach out and grab anything. All you have to do is to relax in trust and openness. The earth is supporting you. The rising culms of bamboo are pressing close around.



Did you know the entire grove  
is one creature? Bamboo  
often grows by suckering.  
The forest of culms  
towering above you and  
around you all share the  
same DNA. They are one  
single organism! Rest in the womb  
of this living being and allow yourself to  
gestate anew.

As you sit here breathing, look around and methodically observe how the new shoots push up, asparagus-like, from the earth. Note the beautiful mandala of rootlets emerging from the nodes just above the ground. They curve gently downward like the ribs of a parasol. Each culm grows solidly into the earth and from the earth, the flying buttress rootlets lending strength to what after all, is really a giant stem of grass! Study the subtle play of colour and light; greens shading into yellows and yellows shading to siennas, umbers and myriad tones of grey. Note the shapes of the stalks, the sequence of nodes and the regular way the leaves branch from the nodes making particular geometries of shadow and form as they reach towards the sky. Beneath you is a carpet of dried and decaying leaves from by-gone years in many tones of brown, russet and green. Today, the ground is very dry and ants, in long columns, are busy carrying seeds and bits of plant matter back to their nest. Over to the left, a perfect orb weaver spider web is stretched across the path; its delicate threads glistening in the narrow shafts of sunlight as it gently billows with the imperceptible whisper of air movement. Let the shapes and colours sculpt and dye your whole being, your bones and flesh resonating with bamboo.

Observing, breathing, and relaxing into a vast open stillness, see if you can hear with every cell of your body. Around the grove the breeze is softly whooshing and whistling through the stems. Listen. The patter of leaves and the rhythmic clacking of culms. The buzz of cicada and countless other insects. The occasional car. The silver-eyes twittering and flapping as they dart through the foliage, feasting on tiny bugs and no-see-ums. The squawking of a gang of parrots on their way to the plum trees. Settle in for an hour or so. Give yourself to being here, stroked and cradled; bathed in textures of rhythm and sound and a quality of pristine stillness that flowers,

beginningless and endless, between the sounds. In this timeless space of nothing more to do than life itself in all its naturalness, the grove will sing itself into your very fabric. You must give it a chance. It's a gift to all of us.

Breathing, gazing, reverberating with sound. Now, open your nostrils. Inhale and savour. You are embedded in an aromatic symphony; the earth, the sweetness of growth and decay, pungent and penetrating. Direct your nose to this indescribable bamboo-ness making chemical music in your olfactory membranes. A pharmacopeia of connection, weaving you deeper and deeper into the larger family of life. This is the smell of your ancestors, the perfume of bodies transforming into other bodies. Put your nose into the ground, into the leaves, into the sap bursting fresh shoots – a story of elemental intimacy turning on your juices and releasing feeling and understanding and ancient long forgotten memories.

With your fingers, reach out and touch the earth. Explore the soil and pebbles, the dried stems and leaves. Slide your hands along the culms and read the braille of satiny smoothness and the stanzas of poetry expressed in these particular bumps and grooves. Note the hardness and brittleness, the varying densities of young and old. Trace the shifting sensations of your clothing moving against your skin and the refreshing coolness of an almost imperceptible breeze. It's as if each cell, throughout the entire surface of your body, has become the sensitive hand or fingers of a skilled surgeon or artist. Feel the fluidity of your breathing and the openness of your pores; your physical organism, permeable and receptive, filtering uncountable languages and

web workings of conversations – the stories of the heart business of living. Allow yourself to be touched – and be changed!

So .....

*here we rest,*

*relaxing in this afternoon,*

*senses doing their sensible thing;*

*observing, listening, smelling and touching.*

*You might even explore with your tongue and lips and add the world of taste.*

Now, with all your faculties vibrant and functioning, open your mind door and blend thinking with sensing and reflect on the journey of everything around you. Allow the grove to teach you.

Consider the stories of shaping, where these creatures came from and where they are going to, what they've been and what they eventually will be. Ponder the beginningless endless matrix of becoming that is a leaf, a stem, a clot of earth and yourself in the midst of it, contemplating. Beetles and fungi and spider webs and bird droppings; each play a role in this seamless organisation – a verdant bamboo grove, a transient organ of a living planet.

With each inhalation you receive gifts of oxygen from photosynthesising leaves. Each exhalation adds to the great cycling of carbon through atmosphere, oceans and earth. The sun, 150 million kilometres away, is an essential partner in this moment of living earth; this

immense symbiotic colonial creature. The air wrapped in and around both you and the grove, is the greatest storehouse of nutriment on the planet. A vast ocean of food. Gaseous nitrogen will be converted to ammonia products by bacteria in the soil. The nitrogen in the ammonia becomes essential parts of proteins assembling at this very moment in the cells of bamboo all around you. Animals, including ourselves, are eating the plants and so the nitrogen from the air circulates through our bodies, through the grove and through the world. Another item on the menu is carbon. Carbon in the form of carbon dioxide is taken into the chloroplasts of green plants. There, in a dance with chlorophyll and photons and molecules of long journeying water, it becomes carbohydrate in many different forms. Our bodies are made from this. We are all members of the dance company, a company of inconceivable talent and evolving natural ability.

Kelvin's grove grows on the back of a tectonic plate. Maori mythology has the North Island fished from the depths of the sea by the great hero Maui. Modern stories speak of plate tectonics and continental drift and the land of New Zealand emerging from the Pacific depths. More recently, a gravel bed was laid down by the railway company, an east coast line connecting Waihi and Tauranga. It served sheep farmers and colonial expansion. Now abandoned, this bamboo grove is growing from the rail-bed's bony remains. Perhaps the first bamboo arrived from South-East Asia brought by homesick Chinese labourers. Perhaps the seeds hitched a ride in, or on, birds or in shipping containers. The story of this grove involves the whole world. It involves you. It involves your capacity for knowing and story making. Let your thoughts and feelings and imagination, touch and be touched by the mystery of this bamboo grove.



*We are dancing together and dancing through each other.*

*Living, changing, roiling masses of interconnected densities;*

*Sculptings of substance and energy; symphonies of species,  
and niches of desire, and passions for homemaking.*

*This beginningless endless ungraspable fact of bamboo*

*is where the journey of our flute takes place.*

*It is also the story of our lives.*

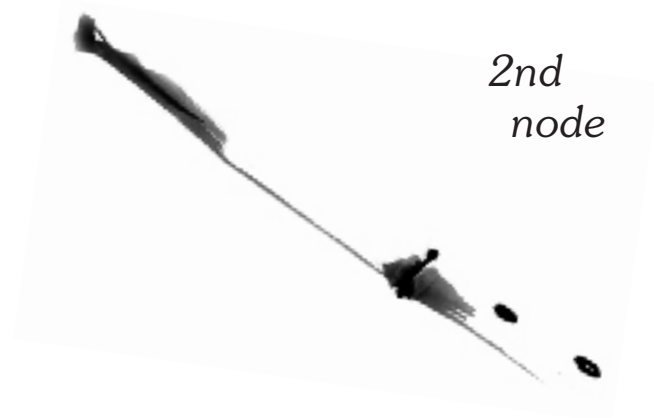


From a certain perspective, we too are a grove. We are composed of our own types of culms, and our roots in the earth of becoming channel substance, shape and meaning. We are embedded in a matrix of parents, ancestors, societies, belief systems, hopes, fears, ecosystems and food chains. In this womb of becoming we are continuously shaped and cradled and nourished even as we simultaneously shape, cradle and nourish.

To engage these contemplations in an actual bamboo grove or forest will greatly enhance your experience but if they are not available, sit in the metaphorical grove of wherever you are and breathe and feel/know your rootedness in the living world. It took 15 billion years to make this bamboo grove, to make this moment of you reading and contemplating and languaging with me through the words of this page. What is occurring now is the essence of music, the body of musing, the building of this museum of grove and museum of our lives. It is the embodiment of active enquiry, of nature contemplating its own mystery. It is the nature of bamboo. It is the nature of neural nets growing themselves into universes of connection and understanding. This unbroken wholeness of totality is the fundamental ground, an ever-fresh expression of primordial naturalness. Let be into this. It's what you are. It's what we are. It is our true nature.



Astronomer and science writer, Carl Sagan, once said that to make a cherry pie absolutely from scratch, you would first of all have to make a universe. Well to make a shakuhachi from scratch the same thing applies. To make the uniqueness of any living being, to make you or me, the same thing applies.



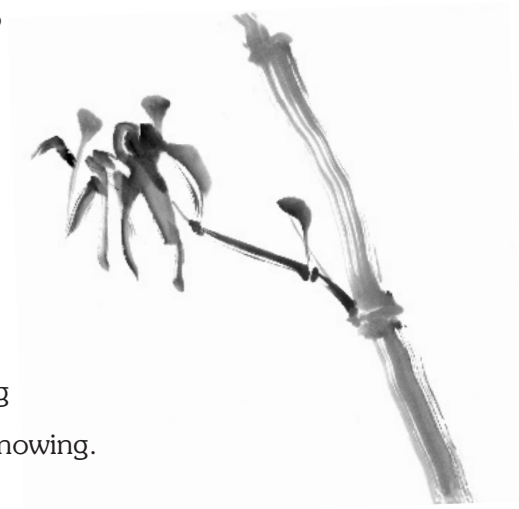
# Crafting the Instrument

## Two Instruments in One

IT IS SPECULATED THAT THE INSPIRATION for making a shakuhachi flute may have arisen as someone listened to wind sounding across a snapped off end of living bamboo. The idea quite appeals to me. I can imagine the broken culms and gusts of wind, the mysterious moans and deep, tactile, almost sub-audio tones. A grove singing within itself. For some nature purists this is perhaps all the flute they need, but to make a shakuhachi as we have come to know them today requires the bamboo first be chopped out from the living matrix and then carefully crafted into a musical instrument that we can hold and play. In a way, this process parallels the experience of each individual human being. In the journey of becoming ourselves, as in the journey of becoming a flute, the first event is birth, a separation from mother matrix, and a gradual dawning of perception of self and other. Then the raw material has to be worked. A human needs to

interact with the world in order to become an adult of at least average abilities. A person, needs to encounter warm hearts and skilful hands in order to grow into a really fine instrument.

In this book we will consider two types of human instruments. Our body-minds are biological instruments of great sensitivity, with huge potential for intimate knowing and subtle responsiveness. Beautifully calibrated to light and sound and chemistry and pressure, we interact with a vast ecology of becoming. Uncountable weavings of experience are continuously distilled into workable images that comprise the world of our ongoing conscious existence. In this sense, we are living instruments for bringing forth a world of unique knowing and experience. At the same time we are shaping and being shaped by myriad other uniquely embodied instruments of knowing.



Along side the idea of a ‘scientific’ instrument, we could also imagine our body-minds as musical instruments; instruments for musing, for revealing the music, the rhythms and harmonies of time and space that is both the world we know, and ourselves dancing within it. Whether scientific or artistic, these instruments don’t just happen by luck or blind circumstance. We have to consciously participate in our crafting and our learning.

*Everyone has the potential to be a  
very wondrous instrument.  
Not everyone has the opportunity, inclination  
or dedication  
to master this craft.*

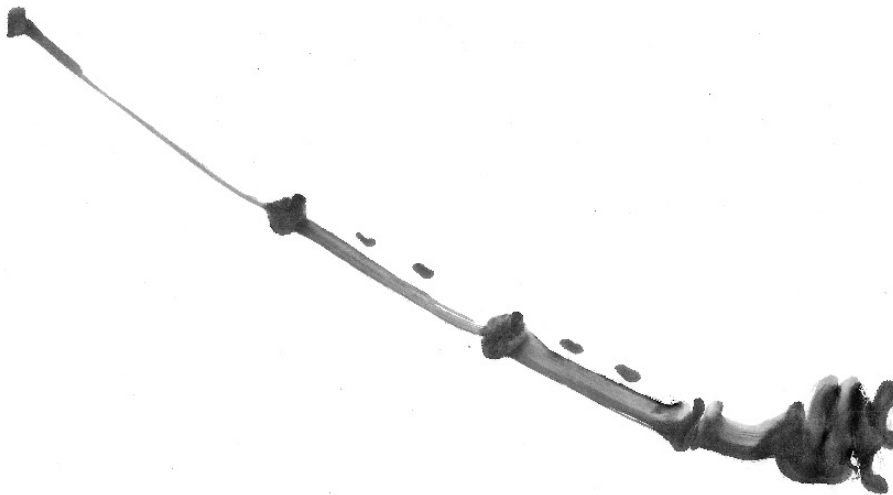
The first step in crafting a flute is to select and then harvest a suitable culm. This takes considerable skill and in Japan today there are people who specialise in gathering the bamboo and then selling it on to flute makers. After digging up a suitable piece, the next step is to clean and trim the roots and set it out to dry. Depending on the type of bamboo you are working with, the drying or curing process will be longer or shorter. The black bamboo from Kelvin's grove is relatively thin walled compared to *madaki* bamboo that is traditionally used in Japan. *Madaki*, *Phyllostachys bambusoides*, is very dense and thick walled and needs to be dried for at least three years. Our black bamboo was ready for crafting in three months.

Good flute making and good human making have many similarities. For example, although most people have no memory of their birth and the cutting of the umbilical cord, the cut is a moment of distinction, a fairly clear point of separation. This is the ending of mother/foetus and the beginning of semi-autonomous 'me'. This is the ending of grove and the beginning of flute. These thresholds are obviously not sharp lines, rather they are complex transition zones, that for some people, span their entire life. One might speculate as to whether we ever become completely independent from our mothers.

At this point, many intriguing questions might arise. Can we leave the bamboo in the grove while simultaneously cutting it out and making a flute? In Buddhist philosophy this is called the two-in-one truth. From one point of view, everything is precisely what it is in all its uniqueness; this individual person or this particular flute. At the same time though, everything is an expression of the interrelatedness of everything else; the grove, the matrix, the unbroken holomovement, the boundless ecology of becoming. It is our consciousness, our focus, our attentiveness that makes it one, or the other, or both. Can we cultivate the capacity to hear the world in the flute? Can we hear the flute in the world? Can we see our mother, the mother earth, in ourselves? Can we see ourselves in our mother? Can we engage with the vast living globe of the world without ignoring the individual flutes? Can we play our flute without losing the world?

When harvesting bamboo for a traditional shakuhachi, the culm is cut a little below the surface of the ground so that some of the root stock is preserved. A similar situation arises when crafting an exquisitely beautiful human/flute. To cultivate and realise the full richness of your own being, it is necessary to explore the myriad beginnings that lie below the surface. You need to get down into the dark loam of the 'unconscious' where your roots spread widely; anchored in many dimensions of strength and nutriment. Having said this, from a practical point of view, it is easier to learn the craft of flute making by beginning with a piece of bamboo that is cut above the ground rather than with a curved root end. A straight piece with only three or four nodes is much simpler to work with. So too, many people need to begin their journey of self-discovery in a roughly similar way.

We first explore the weaving of the events that took place since birth. Once a pattern of understanding begins to arise and we get a sense of our personal journey, we might then feel moved to widen the exploration to take into account factors from the womb, and society, and history, and the evolving ecological matrix in which we exist. Though it's relatively easy to understand our lives by tracing the pathways of conscious events that have occurred since birth, to craft a great flute and to craft a human of vast depth and breadth, we need to dig below the surface. A richness of being is inseparable from a profound understanding of roots.





According to traditional Japanese aesthetics, the finest shakuhachi, should be made from a length of bamboo that has seven nodes.\* Three or four of these nodes would have once sprouted roots at, or below, the surface of the ground. After cutting and drying the culm, the next step is to open up the nodal membranes that separate one section from another. We used a fat nail-punch and hammer to do this. Once the membranes were opened we worked with increasingly fine grades of sandpaper, wrapped around a suitable width of dowel, to further open and smooth the internal bore of the flute.

With shakuhachi, it is obvious that if the nodes are not opened, it will be impossible to blow through the bamboo to produce a sound; so too with a human instrument. When we are dense and unresponsive, when we are tight and not flowing, even if we are able to make a minimal expression of life-music, the quality will often be strained or blocked in some way. There is little subtlety of knowing or easeful flow. With this in mind, the first step of consciously crafting ourselves into a beautifully functioning instrument is to open up our 'nodes'. A nail-punch and hammer is probably a bit crude so our tools for this job are breath and awareness.

Paralleling the process of learning to make a bamboo flute, we will simplify our explorations and consider our human flute to have four nodes rather than seven. These four nodes correspond to the areas of our head, throat, chest and abdomen. Just as we use ever finer grades of sand paper to craft the bamboo bore, so too, we will use three 'rounds' of increasingly subtle contemplative tools to open up and then fine-tune the shakuhachi bore of our being.

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\* For some people, these nodes might once have been related to the seven main chakras identified in many yogic traditions: the crown of the head, forehead, throat, heart, navel, below the navel and base of the spine.

## First Round – Opening the Four Nodes

*Establishing easeful flow in head, throat, chest and abdomen.*

THE FIRST ROUND OF OPENING the four nodes, involves establishing an easeful sense of flow in head, throat, chest and abdomen. We begin this exploration by giving careful attention to posture. When discussing posture in the context of meditation, I often have the impression that, for some people, the very thought of meditation posture brings up images of control and correctness and sometimes even stiffness and discomfort. Just mention good posture and the focus often slides sideways to a consideration of bad postures. Maybe we need a new word. I looked up ‘posture’ in the thesaurus and found alternatives such as: mein, attitude, stance, asana, demeanour, cast, pattern, deportment and bearing. Roving further a field, I found: significant form, character, architecture, style, configuration, frame and cut of one’s jib. I like the last one. However you understand it, you begin this exploration by relaxing into a posture that supports a deepening sense of easefulness coupled with a quality of alert attentiveness.

*For good music,*

*the sharpness of the blow edge needs to be very sharp and*

*the openness of the spaces needs to be very open.*

*We need them both at the same time.*

*It’s not one or the other.*

The ‘openness of the spaces’, is the easefulness. The ‘sharpness of the blow edge’, is the attentiveness. This posture is both physical and mental. It’s a way of meeting the world. It’s

the cut of one's jib! When these two qualities are radiantly present, it doesn't really matter how you arrange your body. You could sit in a chair or in a traditional meditation posture, or you might find these explorations unfold better for you standing, or walking, or even lying down. The essential key is the easefulness and alert attentiveness.

Once you have settled into a way of being that is both easeful and awake, the next step is to strengthen your desire to consciously and intentionally craft yourself into a beautiful instrument, one that can know and reverberate the ever fresh symphony of living. Reflect on ways the music of your being, ultimately links with the life music of others, and feel a strong determination to succeed in this work, not only for the benefit of yourself, but for the uplifting and well being of everyone. This determination is like a great river of unfolding that has flowed from generation to generation. Now it's your turn to enter the crafting. This is much more than a hobby. It is serious music making for the healing of a world. Allow the nectar of strong aspiration to soak into the very marrow of your existence, gradually exciting your cells to action. It is important not to hurry. Wholesome aspiration has great power when it matures from a mere wish or dream and becomes a thoroughly grounded sense of confident determination.

Having established good posture and clear aspiration, settle into a refined discerning awareness of your breathing. This is a very physical experience. Feel the many rhythmic muscular movements that together make up the activity of inhaling and exhaling. Your exploration can be greatly enriched by breathing simultaneously through your mouth and nose.

For many people, the novelty of mouth/nose breathing will invite sharper attentiveness which can lead them deep into the sensations of their body of experience.\*

*Breathing in through mouth and nose, reinhabiting my body.  
Breathing out through mouth and nose,  
studying the myriad shifts and changes,  
the rippling cascades of physical tightening and loosening  
– these footprints of a living breathing organism.*

The great Tibetan teacher, Padmasambhava once said: “Though the essence of awareness is hard to grasp, the expression of wakefulness is accomplished through gentleness.” Paraphrasing this statement, we might say. “The art of crafting a wondrous human instrument, though complex and sometimes hard to understand, is ultimately accomplished through gentleness.” Think of this first round as a type of study, an exploration of breathing and spaciousness, an opening into newness and wonder. Having said this, it’s not a matter of being gaga in wonder. Crafting our fluteness needs to be precisely disciplined yet at the same time flowing and effortless. With experience, you will find yourself deepening into this work with a degree of, what one writer beautifully named, ‘skilful nonchalance and ceaseless concern’.<sup>†</sup>

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\* Body of Experience: Just as a body of knowledge refers to a gathering or summation of relevant facts and understandings, one’s body of experience refers to a summation of the wide range of knowings and occurrences that make up one’s present flow of experience. This would include sensing ‘outer’ objects, the internal physiological and chemical state of the body, and mental factors such as feelings, emotions, thoughts, memories, attitudes and so forth. The weaving together of all of these make up this current body of experience.

<sup>†</sup> Lex Hixon: *Mother of the Buddhas: Meditation on the Prajnaparamita Sutra*, Quest Books, Theosophical Publishing House 1993, p. 201



*Breathing in and breathing out.*

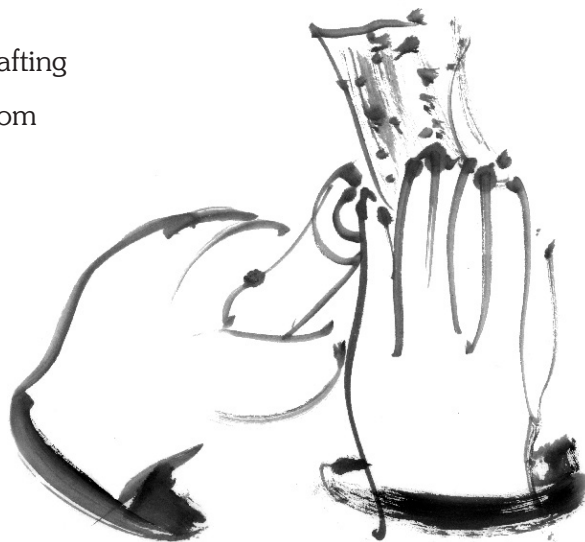
*An easeful, investigating, weighing, examining,  
dissecting, delimiting, mapping, contemplating,  
surveying, sounding, evaluating, appraising, appreciating ...*

*This extraordinarily alive responsiveness.*

*Ah ... simplicity itself!*

Mastery of human flute making requires a blend of deep letting go and letting be, coupled with an active nudging of curiosity and interest. Judgmental criticism or any other self-depreciating assessments are inadequate tools to craft a performance level instrument. We need to cultivate the skills of marvelling and engaging; of making friends with, or making peace with, or learning to work with, or being exquisitely attentive to, whatever we meet on the constantly fresh pathways of our lives.

In many ways, the discipline needed in crafting a good human being is not essentially different from what is needed for crafting a shakuhachi. When working on a bamboo flute, if I am opening up the bore and I become distracted by a bird, or a conversation, it's best if I stop sanding. If I continue sanding without really paying attention to what I am doing, I may remove too much bamboo and ruin the flute. In crafting any good instrument a continuum of focussed concentration and sensitive responsiveness is absolutely essential.



As you settle into an appreciative awareness of breathing, if your attentiveness drifts away into fantasy or mental conversations then recognise this has happened and gently come back

to studying the movements of your breathing body. You may need to do this again and again. Be persistent. In time, you will develop a continuum of relaxed focussed exploration. This is a fundamental skill of meditation and one well worth taking the time to cultivate. While studying the process of your breathing, investigate how your breath seems to shape or influence the condition of your body and mind and how your body/mind simultaneously shapes the breath. You will find the rhythms of breathing are constantly revealing the cascading shifts and changes; the ripples of time, space and knowing, that together form this ephemeral body of you.

Once you become more skilled in the basics of meditatively exploring, working with, learning from, and being this living breath/body, then focus more pointedly on the ‘four nodes’ of head, throat, chest and abdomen. Beginning with the particular dance of breath and sensation that is occurring in the area of your head, see if you can discover a sense of spaciousness, flow and harmonious functioning.\*

*Rhythms of breathing  
ebbing and flowing  
this mystery of head.*

With each exhalation, make a barely audible ‘Ah’ sound and allow the physical vibration of breath and tone to gentle your head into openness. Soft and translucent in the eyes, in the forehead, in the jaw, the cheeks, the lips, the ears, the back of the head, the top of the head, the

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\* For more instruction on working with these four areas, see *Natural Awakening*, Wangapeka Books, 1995, p. 95-99

nose, tongue, palate, skull and brain. Opening the bore, the central channel of this human flute, the spaciousness, the capacity for resonance and responsiveness. This stage of flute making requires great gentleness and steady persistence. All the myriad aspects and characteristics of your instrument will be affected by the perfect openness of the bore. It's worth doing this well.

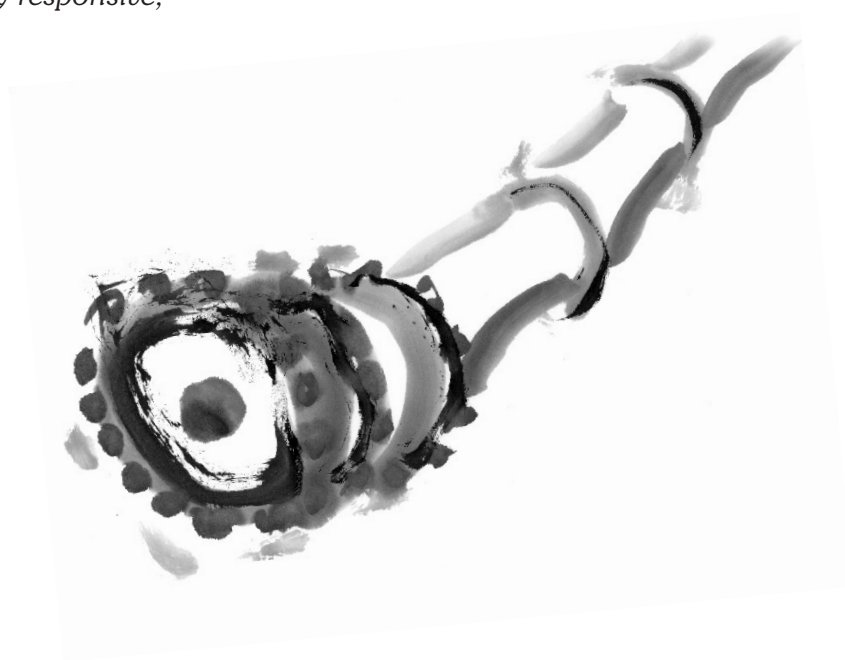
Feeling your way into the head and face, you may discover areas of tension, denseness and sometimes even discomfort. If this happens, carefully notice the very subtle, almost elusive texture of your breathing. Then, permeate the tension with this inner, delicate quality and gently, caringly invite the area to soften. Completely let go into the flow of your breathing, particularly on the exhalation. The 'Ah' sound will help. Breathing this way again and again; softening, permeating and gentling, you will gradually find a new way of being with these not so pleasant sensations.

If you still find it hard to stay with a particular experience, you could try the following. With each inhalation, mentally name the difficulty or sensation. With each exhalation mentally say, "I'm here for you." Do this again and again. "Tension ... I'm here for you." Gradually density will soften, revealing itself as a spacious webworking of constantly changing causes and conditions. Opacity lightens into translucency; many layerings of texture and sensation; more spacious, more transparent. Track how one sensation is linked to another; how feelings and trace memories, interweave with physical phenomena. A sign that you are doing this well is that the entire exploration will become more engaging and more interesting. What begins as a technique or method ends up as a form of worship, an entering into grace and reverence and vast gratitude beyond explaining.



After investigating your head area for about five to ten minutes, bring the same type of care filled exploration to the area of your neck and throat. Then move to your chest. Then to the abdomen. In each of these areas, use the suggestions made for the head. Awaken your anatomical sense and appreciate the rich layers of living structure and process that altogether make up the body of this amazing instrument. Finish a session as you began by feeling your entire being, including your arms and legs; one beautifully integrated living organism, breathing in and breathing out.

*Soft, open, wondrously receptive,  
utterly responsive,  
Ah!*



Working with the bamboo flute, after opening up the bore, we then craft the blow edge. A simple way of doing this is to fasten some sandpaper to a fixed flat surface. Then, having decided where you want the edge, firmly grasp the bamboo and, anchoring it with your body so that you can keep the angle of the bamboo stable against the table, move back and forth over the sandpaper. The blow edge splits the air coming from your lips and sets up a vibration inside the bore. This vibrating column of air creates the sound. In a professionally made flute, an insert of water buffalo horn or ebony or inert plastic is set in the bamboo to give the edge greater durability. This inset blow edge is called an *utaguchi*. With a blow edge in place we can begin to sound a note. The next phase of construction uses our evaluation of the quality of the sound to guide us in refining both the bore and the edge.

*Edge affecting bore,*

*Bore affecting edge,*

*It's like this when working oneself.*

In crafting yourself as a human flute, the sharpness of the blow edge could be compared to the sharpness of your attention. For clear notes of experience, you need a quality of exquisitely attentive discernment. Crafting this 'blow edge' involves a methodical refining of your discernment and attention to detail. Now we have our two most precious characteristics. One is a capacity for spacious openness – the bore. The other is a talent for sharp, attentive, discernment – the edge. This first round is complete when these two qualities are familiar and fairly stable in the areas of head, throat, chest and abdomen and more generally, in the various activities of your life.

## Second Round – Fine Tuning the Bore

*Integrating the four nodes into one continuous flow.*

WHEN CRAFTING A BAMBOO SHAKUHACHI, once the nodes have been opened and the blow edge has been roughly established, we continue to work them with increasingly fine grades of sandpaper. Alternating back and forth between blowing and delicate sanding, we gently and meticulously, feel our way towards an intangible and difficult to name, sense of rightness.

The work of fine tuning a human flute follows a similar course. With supportive posture and clear aspiration, retrace the ‘first round’ of opening and breathing with the head, throat, heart and belly, and then all four together. As you settle into a flow of spacious, lucidity, expand your contemplation to include the entire body of experience.



*One beautifully integrated living system:  
a fluidity of head and throat and chest and abdomen,  
a co-operative weaving of organs and muscles  
and skeleton and rivers of blood,  
a synergy of cells and metabolic processes.*

As if you were a living flute, sit quite upright. Your spine, or central channel is the core of your fluteness. Feel the richness of your breathing, reverberating in the auditorium of your knowing

flesh. Go for texture, for an interior, subtle, almost tactile quality of experience. This stage of the work requires an exquisite degree of attentiveness.



Deepening into a profound stillness and an extraordinary quality of open responsiveness, your body-mind begins to reveal itself as a symphony of shaping. Savour the music of being, the tightenings and loosening, the weaving of pitch and rhythm, the multidimensional dancing

that altogether is what you are. Every sensation evokes a cascade of other sensations. A shift or change in one part of your body causes ripples of shifting and changing in other parts. Physical movements give rise to feelings and memories. These in turn stimulate more physical responses accompanied by flowings of thought and shimmers of new comprehension. The explorations in this second round are similar to but more subtle than the first round. Like sonar or a kind of ultra-sound scan, each breath reverberates throughout your being, revealing landscapes of understanding along with places of density and holding, and sometimes even numb bits or deadenings of non-participation and inhibited responsiveness. As you soften into the music of this living breath body see if you can discover new ways of opening even further.

*Gently and delicately teasing out  
layer after layer of ever more subtle experience.  
Transluscensitising opacity.  
Softening and releasing,  
life crafting itself into beauty and understanding.  
A filigree interbecoming.  
A perfect blending of vast spaciousness and fine discernment.*

You don't want to hurry this round. Enter it again and again and let your own direct, intimate experience teach you something I can only crudely hint at in these pages.

After fabricating the bore and the blow edge, we measure and drill the five holes that allow us to play a pentatonic scale. The final work involves fine tuning for consistent volume and balance. Now we have the essential flute. It is made of form (the wood of the bamboo) and emptiness (the bore and the holes). The dynamic relating of wood and air filled spaces and the breathing body of a musician, give rise to music. It may be stretching it to make a further analogy to a human flute but let's try. The five holes could correspond to the five senses. The bore, with its two open ends could correspond to the sixth sense, the mind door. The dynamic relating of our physical body (the form), and the spacious openness of knowing (the bore), along with the stimulation triggered by the natural world (the breath), give rise to the music of being.

In learning the art of making shakuhachi there is no substitute for simply rolling up your sleeves and making them. As in any craft, we develop skill through doing and 'doing mistakes' is both unavoidable and an important part of the learning. If we approach the task with strong expectations of how the finished flute should sound, inevitably, there will be many failures and much frustration. If we embark on this journey with patience and heartfelt interest and a willingness to explore and experiment, then whatever eventuates will deepen our understanding and ability. The same principles apply when cultivating ourselves as an instrument – a wondrous human flute.



## Third Round – Discovering the Music

*Very fine tuning.*

MANY PEOPLE SEEM TO DRIFT THROUGH LIFE in a mist of concepts; floating on the currents of inner dialogue, fantasy, dreams, rememberings, plannings and expectations. When they do discover a sense of rootedness through a deepening familiarity with the second round, they sometimes feel as if they had reinhabited their bodies. How extraordinary, the music of a well functioning organism! Why did we ever leave home?

Thoroughly cultivated, the second round will lead you to appreciate two vital qualities. One quality embodies openness, love, acceptance, presence, fullness, spaciousness, non-clinging and letting be. The other quality reveals awareness, discernment, question, investigation, discrimination, attention to detail, curiosity, and interest.

*Two qualities*

*one sharp, discriminating, brilliant, precise*

*the other, open, responsive, luminous, ineffable.*

*Both are needed.*

*Both are precious.*

*One makes shape*

*the other makes room.*

*One is questioning, penetrating, discerning, and creatively divisive;*

*the other is accepting, permeable, subtle, and inclusive.*



In this third round we deepen the exploration in ways that sometimes blossom in flowerings of profound insight. Here we become the flute, blown by the world, giving rise to the unique music of our continual flow of experience. Following the pattern of the previous two rounds, take up a supportive posture and contact your aspiration. Retrace the first round and let it slide into the second and rest there until everything feels spacious and flowing.

Now, as you breathe in and breathe out, open your eyes and enter the mystery of seeing. It's as if, in the experience of seeing, light and form are delicate breezes blowing through your flute body, invoking the music of current visual experience. To do this well, you need to be extraordinarily gentle and soft throughout. Examine how each moment of seeing is reverberating in the open bore of your body/being; a spacious openness of knowing. Dancing form and colour joins with breath, invoking melodies of names and memory and shimmering physical sensation; the music of an entire visual world arising in your knowing. Photons and form, whisper and caress, setting in motion a neural symphony of association and visceral knowing; your entire body of experience responding to the breath of sight. This continual response, in turn, is shaping the universe of visual experience that your total organism is creatively bringing forth. Allow yourself to be pulled into the music; the visual world shaping your being and simultaneously, the being that you are, shaping the way you see.

Blend breathing with listening and carefully investigate how sound plays the instrument of your body/being. Bird calls dancing in the cells of living breathing presence. The whisper of wind and falling water. The stroke of voice and passing motor. The ring of phone and the barking

of dogs. The humming of a fridge and the thump of your own heart. Immerse yourself in this symphony of sounding that resounds within and around you. Sound excites densities and spaces; rhythms of music in this great choir-like body of experience. These rhythms invoke textures of feeling and understanding, which is the sound of your being, shaping the way you respond to the world.



Explore how smells play music in the world of your knowing. Smells exciting memory along with cascades of sensation and emotion. Smell can be extraordinarily evocative. A note of

perfume brings forth vivid feelings and understandings of times long past. Study the weavings of scent, this deep chemical symphony of smell.

*Outer smells*

*Inner smells*

*Whiff of health or sickness*

*Odour of depression or the aroma of possibility*

*Stench of lust or aversion*

*Tang of life or death.*

Become extraordinarily still and focus with every cell of your body as your entire being engages in savouring and sampling messages of presence; a multidimensional chemical communication network. Your body, an orchestra of olfactory knowing, being played by the molecular breath of the world.

Taste is a great musician, plucking your strings and bringing forth the uniquely intimate music of you singing in, and with, a vast living world. Each time you eat or drink, open to the music of tasting. Your body receiving and transforming the bodies of beings into your own living substance. The music of acid and alkaline, of sugar and salt, of bitter and bland, dancing the strings of your body-mind, blowing the sound of nowness through the fullness of being.

Breathe with the magic of touch; temperature and pressure and pain and soft stroking. Textures of contact moving your body to choruses of response. So pervasive. So intimate.

Whatever you experience, the moment by moment summation of knowings that you are; this experience is the music. Your body-mind is the instrument. The world is the musician.

Explore each of the five senses individually and then when you are very poised and open, try exploring them in combinations and then all together. You need to be very still and effortlessly focussed to master this music. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, all together bringing forth this present harmony, the music of being vibrantly alive. This is extraordinarily refined research that can lead us to investigate the actual process of perception and experience. The quality needed here is utter simplicity. Being still and open and intimately attentive leads to further openness. Opening the bore, the spacious quality of being. Refining the capacity to reverberate with and respond to others; others shaping me, me shaping others. Where do I begin and where do I end off? Where does the music begin and where does it end off? Who is the player? Where is the music? Who is the audience?

*All five senses are serenely singing.*

*Like the strings of a sitar,*

*when one is plucked, the others respond in sympathy.*

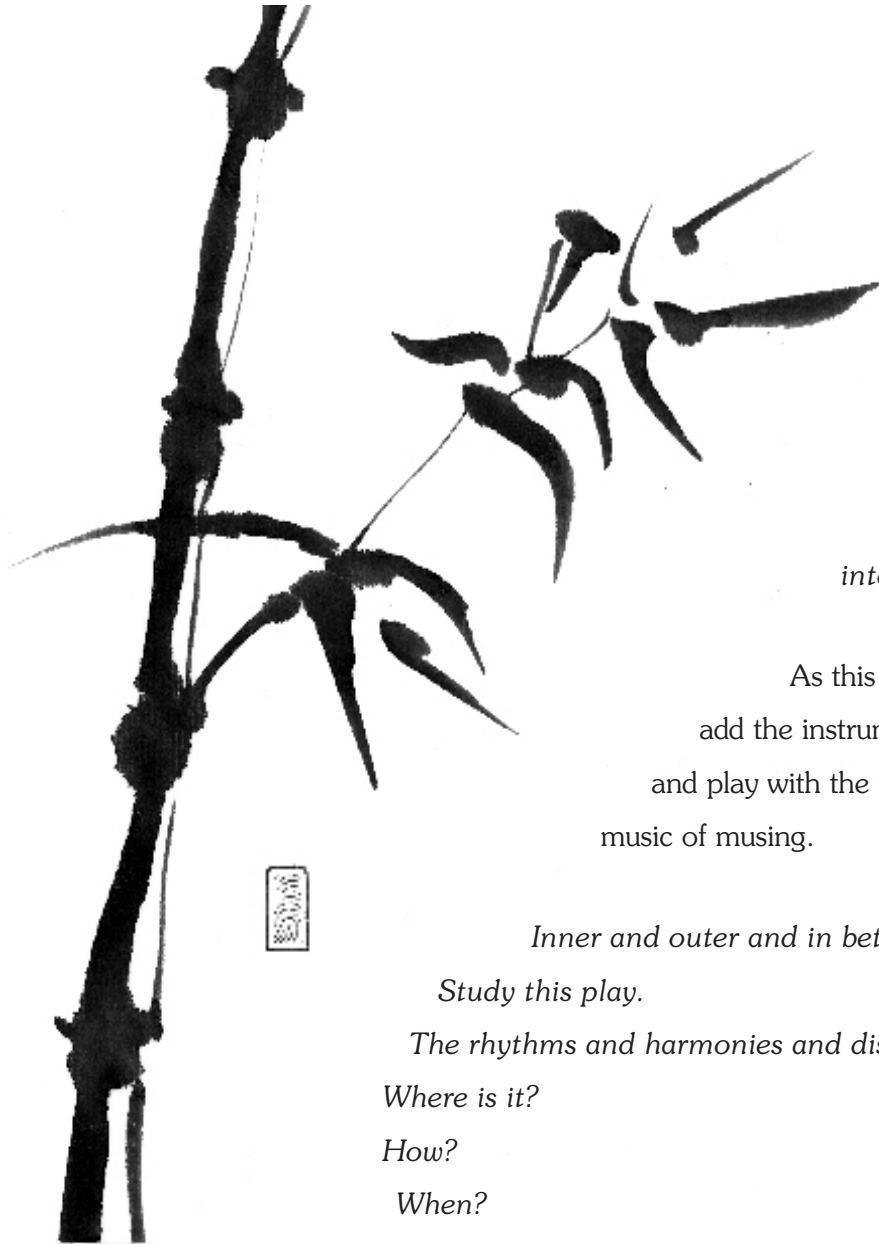
*Each chord of knowing evokes and invites arpeggios of further knowing.*

*Harmonies of experience inviting further cascades of experience.*

*A universe crafting itself.*

*Vision sounding smells*

*evoking matrices of touch and taste.*



*Deepen into this  
again and again,  
day after day.  
A lifetime of familiarity.  
A maturing of skill.  
Each instrument  
conducting an orchestra  
of instruments,  
conducting the spacing and  
timing of knowing  
into being.*

As this experience becomes more stable,  
add the instrument of thinking and conceptualising  
and play with the full orchestra. Everything is the  
music of musing.

*Inner and outer and in between.*

*Study this play.*

*The rhythms and harmonies and dissonant surprises,  
Where is it?  
How?  
When?*

*Opening into a vast space of knowing.*

*The very spaciousness itself*

*is the bore of this human/flute/instrument of understanding,  
a humane flute of musing music.*

*A craftperson at work*

*refining the space.*

*Ever so subtle,*

*so soft and generous ...*

You may still find knots or holdings or densities that seem to detract from the openness.

*Explore, soften, observe, release.*

*This is crafting the single bore.*

*This is refining the instrument of all instruments.*

*The core of the flute.*

*The open clarity of mind.*

In 18th century Japan, the shakuhachi playing monks of the Zen Fuke sect were called monks of emptiness.\* One might paraphrase this as ‘monks of non-clinging’ or ‘monks of openness’ in the sense of being open; ready and able to embrace whatever is arising. In Tibetan,

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\* Monks of the Fuke sect would go on the alms round playing their shakuhachi. They wore a basket hat to hide their identity, presumably to counter any tendency to seek ego recognition for their skilful playing.

the word for monk is *gelong*. An inner meaning of *gelong* is 'one who is free to ask questions'; one whose life manifests a flow of spontaneous enquiry; an embodying of manifest curiosity. Are you *gelong*? Are you called to a life of openness and enquiry?

*Emptiness is letting go,  
non-clinging.  
Openness is ready to engage,  
availability.  
Both together are expressions of spaciousness,  
an all embracing flow.  
Flow is a state of grace,  
forgiveness,  
acceptance,  
love,  
home.*



Although I have spoken of three rounds, with experience, each will blend seamlessly into the next. With exquisite attentiveness, inhalation and exhalation becomes a river of silent sensation. The pregnant sounding of stillness. A sense of extraordinary presence and possibility. Can you feel it? This flow of life blows, strokes and caresses, vibrating your body of experience which sings forth the sound of your particular flute/instrument in the form of sensations and understandings.

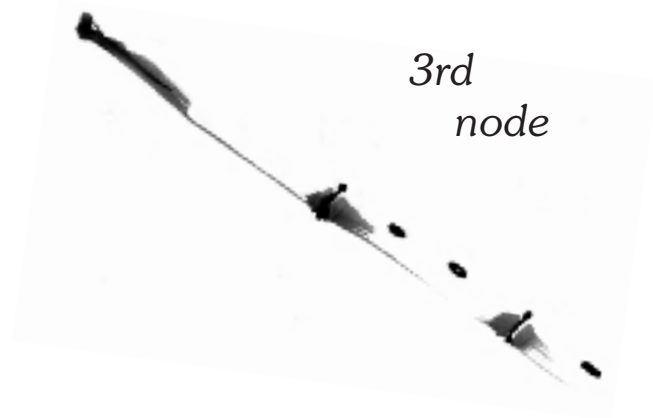
T. S. Eliot wrote in the *Four Quartets*, “You are the music while the music lasts”.\* Can you become the flute playing itself? Sense objects (the breath) stimulate the body of experience (the flute) and the response of your being/knowing is the ever fresh music. Explore the range of sounds, pitches, rhythms, textures, harmonies, and colouration. Your music is then the stimulus entering another’s senses which brings forth their music. A beginningless, endless, fabric of interbecoming; the music of life, the musing of a living world.

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\* T.S.Eliot *The Dry Salvages, Four Quartets*, Faber and Faber Limited, 1974

“... or music heard so deeply  
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music  
While the music lasts. These are only hints and guesses,  
Hints followed by guesses; and the rest  
Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.  
The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is  
Incarnation ...”





# The Art of Playing

## Blowing a Single Note

SHORTLY AFTER I BEGAN EXPLORING with shakuhachi, I was visiting a friend in Switzerland who is a professional musician. Michael used to play clarinet and now conducts choirs and orchestras. Although he had no experience with shakuhachi, this was the first time he had even seen one, I thought he might be able to give some hints at how I could teach myself to play. After a moment of reflection, he suggested that I not bother trying to play tunes but rather focus my attention on playing a single note. For some reason this advice appealed to me and it led me into a long term exploration. Little did I know at the time, but his suggestion was straight from the Fuke school of shakuhachi.

If you have a flute, set it on a table beside you and try the following exercise. Standing upright with your hands resting at your sides, sink a little in your knees and let your awareness blossom within the sensations of your breathing body. As you settle into these rhythms, scan your physiology and soften throughout. Explore the multitude of contractings and relaxings that are supporting this upright posture.

After a while, bring your attention to a place about four finger widths below your navel. In the Japanese traditions this centre is called the *hara*. You might think of it as a place of creative energy – a womb of becoming. See if you can develop a sense of breathing from, with and in the *hara*. This place below the navel is where the power comes for sounding your flute; billions of years of creative life energy. At other times, explore breathing from the heart. Here is a centre of strength, confidence and communion. Finally, solid in *hara* and heart, explore the sensations around your mouth and throat. For flute playing, this is the place for steering and guiding the stream of air as it splits across the blow edge.

*Here you are.*

*Standing,*

*loose in the ankles and feet,*

*soft in the hara,*

*open in the heart,*

*unstrained in the lips and cheeks,*

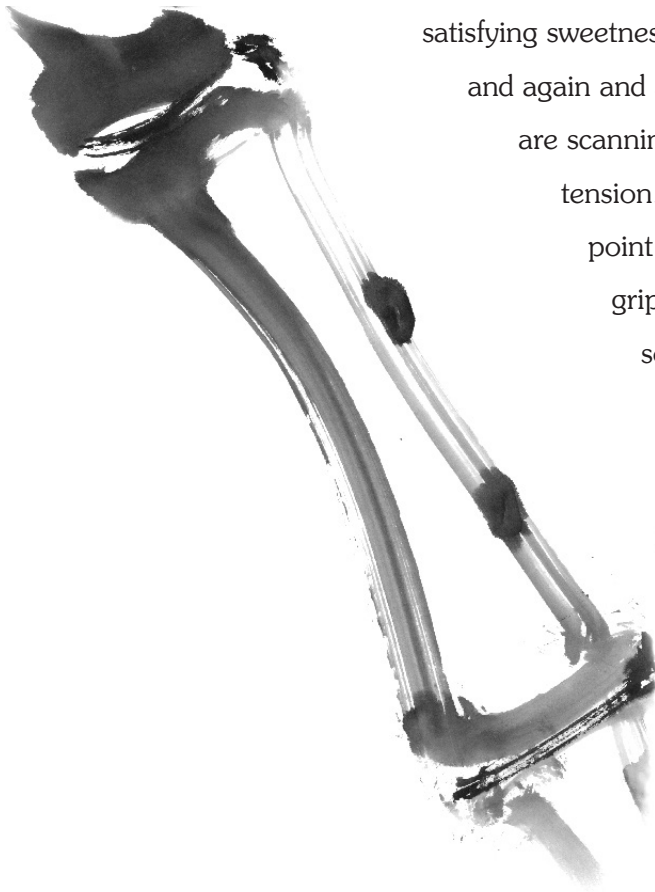
*allowing your breathing to move with its own natural rhythm.*

Now, with graceful attentiveness, pick up your flute. Feeling its weight and texture, note how your muscles respond and your respiration shifts as you bring it mindfully to your lips. Rather than 'blowing' a note, begin to explore the possibilities of simply breathing the sound into being. You might find it useful to experiment with different notes until you find one that vibrates with a satisfying sweetness. Once you have it, breathe with it again and again and again. All the time you are doing this, you are scanning your body and softening any unnecessary tension. Let your hands and fingers relax to the point where the flute almost slides out of your grip and your finger pads are buzzing with the sound.

Let go.

Let go.

Let be.



It is worth giving as much attention to the inhalation as you do to the exhalation. Your entire body of being; breathing in ... rapturous. This is delicate and exacting work that requires a wondrous precision of appreciation. Remember the two mysteries; the sharp edge and the openness.

*Fingers breathing.*

*Toes breathing.*

*Legs and arms and torso inviting in the air of a living world.*

*All your cells and sinews surrendering to this every day intimacy.*

*Drowning in oxygen.*

*Engulfed in the mystery of inhaling.*

Then, as effortlessly as water flowing to the sea, exhale. Let your breath cascade out and merge with the sounding of body and flute. Abandon yourself to the flowing of sensation. Notice how even the most subtle shifts in your body-mind are accompanied by shifts in colouration and texture of tone. How long can you sustain the sound without straining? Five seconds? Ten seconds? Twenty? Thirty? Try blowing from your hara, from your heart, from your throat, from your head, and from your whole body. Is the sound different when you blow from different centres? How is it different? Where is it rich? Where is it thin and wavering? This is the single note, and it can reveal everything.

Sometimes I meditate with the bamboo flute. Sometimes I put my flute down and completely relax and become a human-shakuhachi that is breathed by the world. Colour and form

and sound and smell, playing the flute of my body-mind, bringing forth this symphonic universe of my current experience. And such music! Such sound! This sounding of suchness! This musing of presence! There are so many 'breaths', so many rhythmic exchanges that are inseparable parts of being and becoming. In addition to the song of breathing, air moving in and out from my lungs, there are longer 'breaths'. There are the alternating breaths of day and night, of summer and winter, of light and shadow. To really explore these tidal rhythms of life, is to embark on an immense journey of learning and transformation. Open to the sound of spring, of autumn, of birth and death; as these experiences breeze through your flute/being. Feel your sounding with the rain, the wind, the sun and the earth. Entering the perfect note of 'just this'. Body and mind extraordinarily present and unified, exploring the rich interior harmonics, the vast universes of experience that make up a single note of now.



# Musing and Stillness

MUSIC AND MUSING both emerge from stillness. One exercise I gave during the week was for people to go down to the stream and play with the river. In the rushing business of daily living there is a nourishing intimacy that many people rarely get to know. You can be ravished by breathing! Stand or sit by the stream and soften into the flow of breathing.

*Slipping into the streaming of breathing,  
open your senses and give  
yourself to the river,  
rivering inside  
rivering outside  
rivering all over.*

Stay with this for a while. Between the sensations, between the breaths, or inside the sensations and inside the molecules of river breathing, is a place of absolute stillness. Can you find it? Can you completely surrender into it, surrender into the stillness – without abandoning any thing or any flowing?

Now, with extraordinary sensitivity, begin to blow your flute in harmony with the mood of the stream. Play the ripples and gurgling. Play the glassy smoothness and the ropey plasticity. Play the bubbles and the sparkle of light on surface. Play a duet with the stream. Let it sing into you as you flute in response.

Face up river and play the water flowing towards you. Turn the other way and play the water flowing away. Life is flow. Experience flowing into you. Experience flowing away. Loss and gain, pleasure and pain, birth and death, excitement of new possibility and grief of letting go. Let the river teach you. Be still and feel it blowing your flute/being. Breathe from the hara and dance in accompaniment. Breathe the music of pensiveness. Breathe the music of exuberance and exhilaration. Breathe the moods of flow and let the sound fill your space and carry you to the sea.

## Authenticity and Presence

NO ACCOMPLISHED MUSICIAN reached a level of competence without, somewhere along the line, playing scales and exercises. Yet who on earth would aspire to be a great scale player! We play scales and work on exercises in order to develop strength and dexterity and ear/hand/emotion co-ordination so that we might eventually be able to 'make' music. An experienced musician can bring forth beautiful music and their scale-playing helped them to do so. A great musician, however, goes far beyond being concerned about getting the notes right. A great musician, in addition to playing music, realises that their very substance and beingness is music manifesting. Their particular instrument is the tool they use for amplifying the symphony that they already are. The creative flowing of their life has become the music and their vocation involves drawing forth the music that is the life of others.

Meditation exercises are a bit like playing scales. They can help to develop focus, and stability of attention and flexible presence of mind along with qualities such as tranquillity, empathy, compassion, acceptance and a valuing of 'just this-ness' or 'as it is-ness'. As these qualities become more established, meditation gives way to contemplation. We can muse on chosen topics with clarity and competence. Occasionally though, the experience leaps into a larger dimension which, continuing the analogy, we might think of as great contemplation. The 'meditator' is revealed to be but one facet of a measureless symphony of authenticity and presence. Just as a great musician realises they are music manifesting, and their authenticity and presence draws forth the authenticity and presence of whoever they meet, so too a seasoned contemplative realises that they and all beings are the universal musing; the creative responsiveness of nature manifesting. In everything that they do, the music of their musing draws forth the innate musing music of others.



I was once graced with a wonderful day of musical education. It was in Montreal at the concert hall called Place des Arts. The occasion was Olivier Messiaen's seventieth birthday and orchestras around the world were honouring him by playing his work. A Canadian friend and composer, Steven Gellman who had studied with Messiaen in France, invited me to attend



a rehearsal and concert. I remember sitting in this huge auditorium with Steven, Olivier Messiaen, the conductor of the Montreal Symphony and perhaps one or two other people. On stage was the entire Montreal Symphony along with a smaller orchestra of modern music that was helping to perform this piece. They were rehearsing a part that required a number of huge tam tams and other percussion instruments that I had never seen before. After playing a few stanzas they stopped. I thought it was marvellous. Then this elderly solid looking man with a beret stood up and, shaking his head from side to side, said, “no, no, no”! Then he rocked back and forth singing; “yum-ti-dum dee yum-ti-dum”; waving his arms and dancing the feeling of the music. The orchestra played it again and I could hear how much better it sounded. I thought, ah, now they’ve got it! Again, Messiaen stood up saying, “no, no, no”, and waving his arms he filled the place with feeling. They played it again, this time as if their very hearts had become their instruments. I found myself thinking that they couldn’t possibly play it any better. Again Messiaen stopped them saying, “no, no, no”, and waving his arms and swaying with his whole body he danced with the symphony. They played it again and I could hear it was magnificent. Messiaen smiled. They had got it. And everyone in the orchestra was grinning madly. They knew they had touched something wondrous. This was a real master class! Messiaen was not merely a master of music. He had a certain mastery of living and it was profoundly moving to be there. That afternoon, in Place des Arts, a beautiful, unique manifesting of authenticity and presence called Olivier Messiaen drew forth qualities of being that I suspect some of the musicians didn’t even know they had. It was a moment of blessing.

When you are blowing shakuhachi are you blowing with authenticity and presence or are you trying to show off or perform? How do you play when you are alone and how do

you play when you are with others? Is there a difference? If so, what is the difference? It is so easy to be hi-jacked by speculation and fantasy about how we sound to others. We try to embellish, to make it a bit fancier. Have you noticed this? We lose the simplicity and honesty, the uncontrived naturalness that everyone finds so attractive about shakuhachi and instead, find ourselves tightening and controlling and trying to impress. This is performance anxiety, not music as liberation. Instead of the shakuhachi being an instrument for amplifying the authentic natural presence that we are, it becomes a mere musical instrument that is being puffed by the 'eight worldly winds'.

These worldly winds can often blow us right off our feet. We're 'blown away', but not in a particularly good sense. Wrapped around our fluting is a layer of concern about praise and blame, loss and gain, pleasure and pain, fame and loss of reputation. In Buddhist teaching these are called the eight worldly winds. We could add a few more like fear of not getting it right, of not being good enough, of being dismissed or criticised or even ignored. We've all been there. Next time you are playing your shakuhachi or your human-flute, be very clear about who is playing. Is it the eight worldly winds puffing on a tube, or is it a seamless harmony of player, instrument and audience; of knower, knowing and known? Who is the music? What is the musing? What would it be like if all of me, the totality of being that makes me up, played for all of you? What would it be like if all of you was attending to all of me; if the authenticity and presence that is my being sang with the authenticity and presence of your being so that naturalness recognised naturalness, so that something extraordinarily beautiful in its uncontrivedness and simplicity, reverberated between us in a chorus of profound mutual appreciation? It's in moments like these that we might realise that even scale playing and exercises can be the beautiful music of ever fresh arising.



# Sound and Silence

*Music is a ballet of form and emptiness,  
an acappella of sound and silence,  
a dance of movement and stillness,  
a weaving of notes and spaces between the notes.*

THE NOTES OF OUR LIVES are not so hard to identify. People, places, events and happenings, likes and dislikes, familiar emotions and reactions. The notes of a musical piece are equally easy to recognise A, G, B-flat, C-sharp and so forth. However, without gaps between the notes there would be little music. So what is the gap? What is the silence? What is the stillness? Is it an absence? Is it a nothingness? Could we have the silence or the stillness at the same time as we have the sound? Unlike the notes, the silence or the stillness is not so easy to identify. Many people feel nervous when there is a gap in a conversation. They have a compulsion to fill every space. Urban life seems to be going this way. Everywhere there is muzak; canned music in shopping malls, background music in restaurants, music on the voicemail service when you get put on hold. It's as if people have become increasingly anxious about silence and will go to great lengths, including spending lots of money, to avoid it. And yet music with continuous notes and no gaps would just be noise.

A lot of my life has been spent in rural settings. In these environments it is never silent. There are birds and wind and hedgehog snufflings. There are also conversations and occasional traffic sounds and yet there seems to be a silence or a quality of stillness between the sounds.

These spaces give us pause for reflection, many micro moments of rest and refreshment. They can be profoundly intriguing. What exactly is stillness? We can only find out by listening intently. One such listening led to the following poem.

*I wish  
I could describe for you  
the space  
between the notes  
of the Bellbird's song.*

*The soft round explosion,  
the radiating glow,  
like the texture of the last moments of a long easeful, colourful, out breath,  
sound revealing the shapes of mountains and valleys  
and pine trees in the mist.  
The Silvereyes filling in the gaps.*

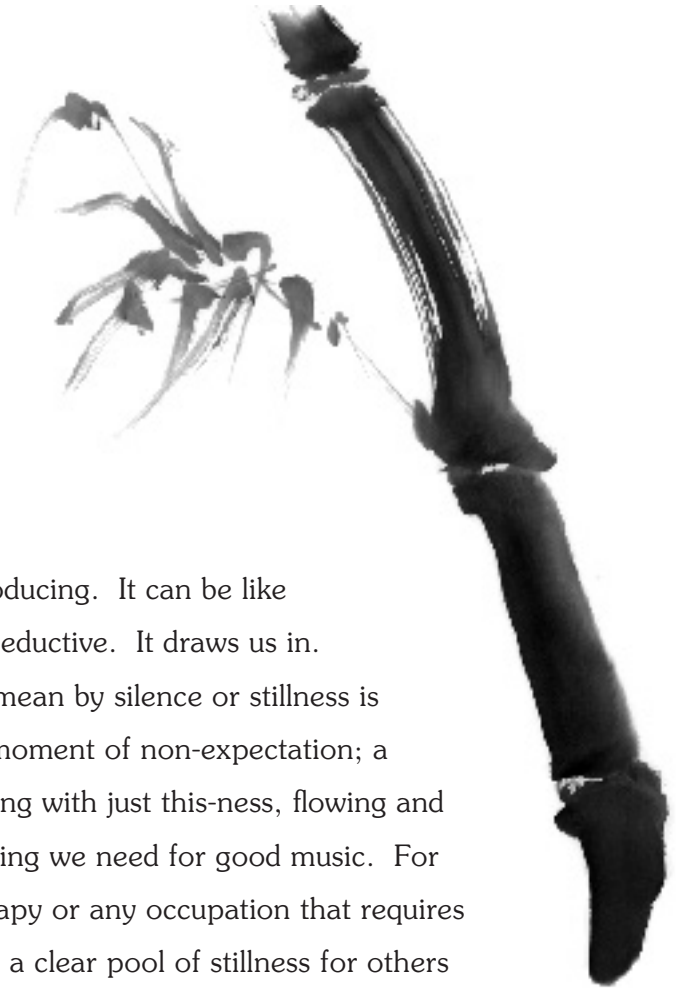
*I wish I could describe for you  
the feeling  
of wishing.  
A huge openness,  
a gentle quivering fullness,*

*a leaning into nowhere,  
a sense of something extraordinary,  
a reaching to connect,  
a mystery that already is.*

*The single notes  
sculpt the space,  
or  
is it space inviting forth the notes?*

*Trillions and trillions of synaptic flowers,  
a meadow of knowing,  
a forest of caring,  
the vastness of mind  
birthing the poignant moment  
between the notes.*

*Olive green feathers,  
light in the eye,  
describing for you  
this space,  
of wonderment.*



Silence doesn't have to be anxiety producing. It can be like a deep clear pool; limpid, lustrous and even seductive. It draws us in. Strips us. All is revealed. Perhaps what we mean by silence or stillness is really a moment of no-conflict or perhaps a moment of non-expectation; a manifesting of total acceptance, of utterly being with just this-ness, flowing and alive. Gaps and stillness are not only something we need for good music. For those who work in counselling or psychotherapy or any occupation that requires empathy and deep listening, can you become a clear pool of stillness for others so that their deepest and most subtle yearnings can be 'heard'? Can you become a human flute and let the winds of your client's lives whisper through you, making audible the layerings of music that they are? For anyone who works with people in situations that call for a huge degree of intuitive understanding, this quality of inner silence, this capacity for profound listening, is one of their most valuable tools.

There is something mysterious about a moment of easeful silence. Mary Oliver in her poem, *When Death Comes*,\* wrote the following lines:

*And therefore I look upon everything  
as a brotherhood and a sisterhood,  
and I look upon time as no more than an idea,  
and I consider eternity as another possibility,  
and I think of each life as a flower, as common  
as a field daisy, and as singular,*

*and each name a comfortable music in the mouth,  
tending, as all music does, toward silence.*

“Tending as all music does, toward silence.” Tending as all musing does toward silence. Can I learn to move, to play, to flute, to engage, to explore in openness from a place of primordial stillness and silence?

Messiaen’s piece emerged from this silence. He intentionally used many moments of stillness to invite deep wells of contemplation. The symphony we heard was called ‘In Expectation of a Resurrection After Death’, *Et Exspecto Resurrectionem Mortuorum*. One of the parts we heard being rehearsed in the afternoon began with a very long pause. Then the giant tam tams began to shimmer into life. There were moments when you weren’t sure whether you were

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\* Mary Oliver: *New and Selected Poems, Volume One*, Beacon Press 1992



hearing anything or not. Gradually the volume increased until the whole auditorium was engulfed with sheer intensity. I remember having a sense of dissolving in rings of golden light. It was as if the sound grew from the tam tam, filled the hall and then rushed out the back like a receding freight train fading into utter stillness. This happened three times in succession. In the concert that evening, many people were very disturbed by this modern innovative music. It wasn't what they were used to. They coughed and fidgeted. Some of the audience actually stood and walked out from the middle rows before it was half way through! When the part with the tam tams happened the first time, there was lots of coughing, as if the notes were the music and the pauses were just places to cough. The second time, in the gap, you could hear a pin drop! Everyone was affected. "Tending as all music does towards silence." When the symphony ended, there was a hush. Then, as if a dam had burst, applause erupted into a standing ovation and above the clapping and bravos, someone yelled, "Throw the bastards out and play it again!" It was an extraordinary scene.

What kind of relationship do you have with stillness? With silence? With the gap framing the word? With the sound moulding the gap? I was so thankful to have sat in on the rehearsal.



# Breathing and Movement

MUSIC HAS ALWAYS INVOKED movement just as movement can bring forth internal music. It seems to be utterly natural to human beings, regardless of their cultural background. Perhaps it's in our genes, an integral facet of what we are. We dance with the music but we are also danced by the universe of our current experience; a harmonizing and synergy of body, breath, mind and circumstance. I can remember as a boy in Toronto, running from house to house delivering newspapers in the early dawn. I would often find myself mentally singing with my breath as I jumped over hedges and flower beds and ran across railway tracks, weaving from door to door. It was a wordless singing that braided together bits of different symphonies and choral pieces into the perfect accompaniment for the very physical running, bag of newspapers thumping in time on my hip. Sometimes it felt as if I was flying. Eventually the singing and the running became so connected that if I did one the other would quickly follow.

It is quite normal for musicians to move in harmony with their playing. The shakuhachi, however, demands movement in order to



get the full range of sounds from the flute. If you watch a good player performing, their lower body is often very relaxed and still, while the head seems to be dancing with the mood and emotion of the piece. Up and down movements sharpen or flatten the pitch while sideways movements add a vibrato or tremolo. Considering flute playing as meditation, we could extend these movements in many interesting directions.

The following explorations first arose for me out of necessity. I prefer to stand while I play but if I stand still for too long, I find my lumbar area tightening in the direction of an old familiar sciatica. I was practising in a small hut at Wangapeka and there wasn't much room to walk so I found myself intentionally exploring the range of movements that I could make while, at the same time, sustaining a single note or the improvised phrase I was working with. Slowly raising and lowering one shoulder, then the other, then both, then alternately. Swaying and twisting and stooping and stretching upward and bending sideways, and all the time softening through the body and flowing with a richness of tone and evenness of pitch. I didn't try to play a recognisable tune. Rather, I would stick to one note or a simple phrase, playing it over and over again while exploring the feeling/emotion of the moment coupled with movement and the blowing of flute. Breath, body, bamboo, flow, and pure sound, all merging seamlessly. Try it!

You can do this with a flute but you can also do this with your human flute. Be extraordinarily mindful of both inhalation and exhalation and then begin to explore raising and then placing one foot. Deep in the texture of breath and sound, move deliberately, with great strength and precision, like an Indonesian or Thai dancer. Lifting. Placing. Sensation rippling from foot to ankle to belly. Try the other foot. Lifting, placing, turning on the heel. Weighing

into the earth. Keep it simple. One note. One simple sequence of movement. Stay utterly focussed.

*Blending sound and movement,*

*Let it wash you;*

*cleansing,*

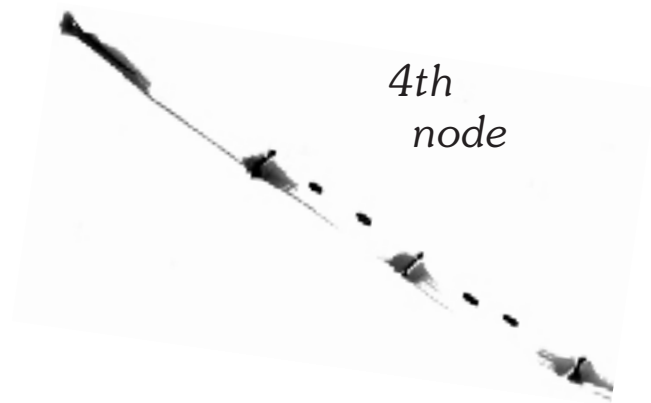
*loosening,*

*connecting,*

*freeing.*

Slowly, as notes link in simple phrases, explore the range of volume; smooth gradations, unexpected shifts. At the same time, let your physical movements become more involved. This is not performance. It's more like worshipful study. Breathing and sounding the magic of embodiment. Stepping forward and back and bending and turning and all the time carrying this pure sound. Guided by the breath, led by the breath, wrapped in the tissues of becoming, honouring this three and a half billion years of ceaseless dancing.

See if you can sound and move from a centre of pristine stillness. Solid as a rock, your axis married to the living earth, an inner knowing begins to guide this journey; a wise choreographer of time and space, whispering hints through the intimacies of nerve cells and muscle fibres; gently unravelling tension and holding and habits of stiffness spanning a lifetime. Investigate moving from hara, heart, throat, head and whole body. Lose yourself in this spontaneous t'ai chi of body, breath and knowing.



## Music as Language

ALL MEETING AND RESPONDING is a revealing of language. It might not be so far fetched to say that the physiological event of meeting and responding, is language, embodied. The whole universe is a seamless fabric of communication. Living bodies are areas of particularly dense conversations; concentrations of dialogues, parliaments of co-operation. Ourselves, and the world we live in, are braidings of an infinity of voices and instruments. Organisms talking with organisms. Organs singing in chorus. Cells consulting cells. Molecules accommodating to each other. Atoms promenading and pirouetting in crystal lattice song. But this description is a bit too orderly. Organisms are also dancing with molecules and atoms are sounding with ecosystems. Everything is connected in rhythms and pitch and alternations of rush and pause. Communication is coupling. The internal biological structures of our bodies are coupling. At this moment of elastic time, my brain cells and typing fingers are coupled with your nervous system through the

media of print, while simultaneously in your mind, this moment of experiencing is deeply linked with mine. As biologists Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana have written in their thoughtful book, *The Tree of Knowledge*, “We are languaging together.”\* Don’t think of language as a noun, as something you have or know. Don’t think of it as an abstract symbol system in which this wail or groan or sequence of melodious grunting represents that object or activity. Think of it as something you do. Even better, it’s something we do. We language together. This is the dance of knowing, of experience. It is a dance that links and joins us all and the linking and joining is what we are.

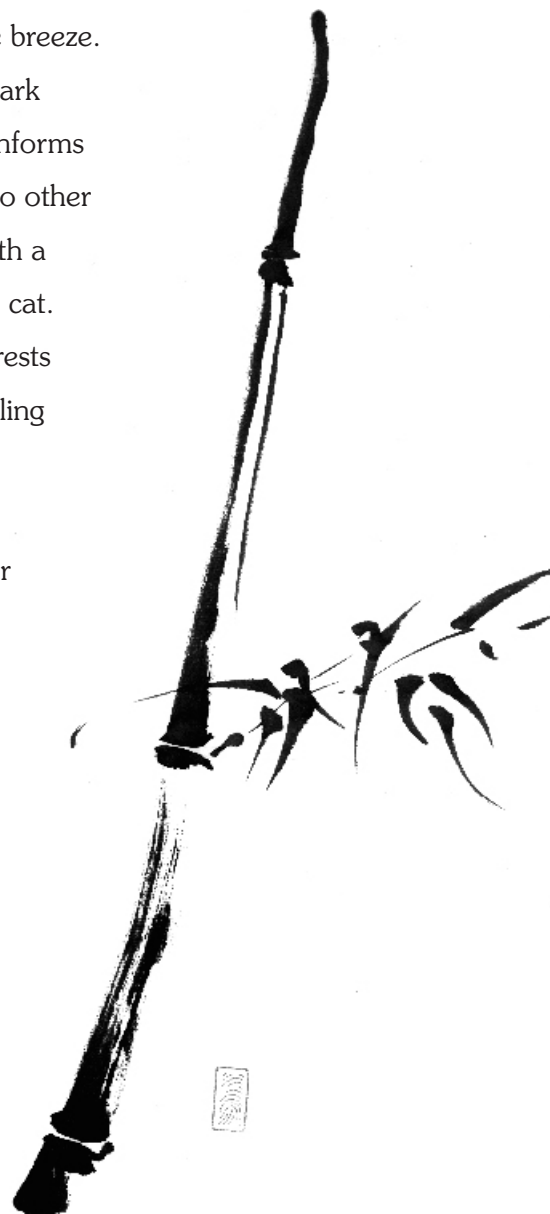
We are sensitised for connection. It is the essence of our aliveness. Our eyes pick up photons. Our ears respond to densities of gas and liquid. Cell receptors link with transmitter substances. DNA coils and uncoils in response to enzymatic messenger proteins. Much of these communings are repetitive, the endless syncopating thrumming of bio-rhythms. The entire fabric of life is a colossal symphony of languaging.

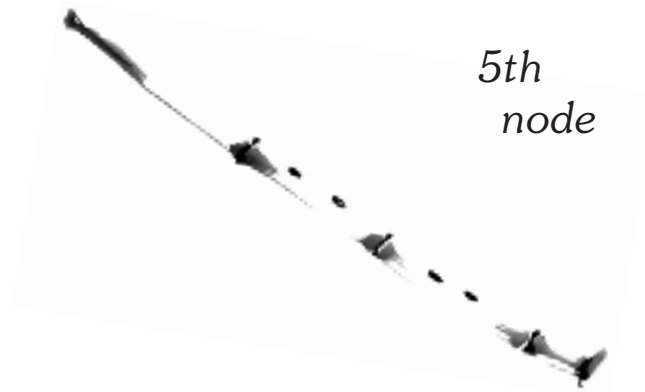
Take your flute into a field. Stand before a flower and breathe with it for a while. It is releasing oxygen which is bonding with your haemoglobin. Odour molecules wafting from it’s leaves are coupling with your brain. The shadow you cast slows its photosynthesis. Your perspiration humidifies the air and changes the plant’s rate of respiration. Let go into this conversation and feel the singing. Now raise the flute to your lips and make the music audible. Play and dance the song of flower/you. Play the leaf and the light on the leaf. Play the texture of

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\* H. Maturana and F. Varela: *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding*, Shambala, 1998

the petals and the way the flower head moves in the breeze. Play the rising sap and the filigree rootlets and the dark mysteries of soil; a matrix of living language which informs both you and me and flower and flute. Extend this to other beings. Play with the quality of light, with a tree, with a raptor soaring above the ridge, with the neighbour's cat. Play with storm clouds, and ploughed fields, with forests and still ponds. Explore the different qualities of feeling and sound that each fresh meeting evokes, cellular intimacies singing their meetings into form. This is music as worship, language as sacrament. The choir is made up of all beings and dimensions of being. The concert hall is the ineffable cathedral of wherever you are.





## Music as Offering

DEEP LISTENING becomes profound musing and profound musing becomes deep listening. This quality of attention; alert, responsive, empathic and available, is the most intimate and personal gift we can offer to the world. The musing music of presence never happens in a vacuum. As we saw in the fourth node, all music is a languaging, a weaving, an intershaping of many. The very act of music making becomes an expression, an exuberance, a demonstration of who we are in this particular life conversation. With focus and great love it blossoms into something more. It becomes a hymn of offering, a prayer for the uplifting of all beings.

Let the music flow. Radiate your beauty, your authenticity, and your presence. Let all that is best in you fill the world and draw forth the best in those you meet and music with. For those who are driven by oughts and shoulds, may we offer the music of deep calm and loving presence.



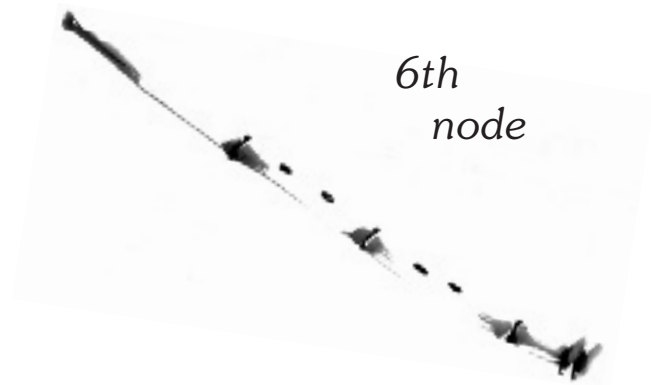
For those who are dulled into submission, the weight of their world crushing their shoulders, may we offer the music of joy and lightness. For everyone, may we offer the music of deep responsiveness and listening. It is not a question of whether to offer or not. Our entire life, the music that we are, is already reverberating in all directions. The question is, what kind of music are we being? To recognise that our very presence is affecting others is the soil of ethics and the first step towards caring for the worlds of ourselves and others. Can we learn to sound forth in ways that respect and value life rather than in ways that destroy it? Can our singing together be an act of heart generosity rather than a solo of greed and need? Can our fluting with one and other open our senses to the wonders of worlds? Can our musing together be a demonstration of life enhancing communion? Can our symphony-ing feed all that is 'wholy' in each other? This is music as offering and we offer it without attachment.

Shakuhachi has a sound that is extraordinarily simple and unpretentious. It seems to move people from a wide range of ages and backgrounds. I have played outdoors in public places and experienced children, teenagers, young adults and elderly people, both male and female, stop and breathe and smile and offer some comment of thanks before continuing on their way. Once Kelvin and I were playing in an enclosed car park in Tauranga. We went there to explore the hollow acoustics. As we were playing, I noticed a woman sidling along in a tentative way as if she had forgotten something. Then I realised that she was actually stalling so that she could listen to us play. When she finally arrived in front of us, I saw that she had some coins in her hands and she asked us where our hat was. As Kelvin continued to play, I explained that we were not busking and hence, no hat. For a moment she looked a bit confused and then, brightening up she

asked, “Is this your spiritual discipline?” I nodded and she smiled and stayed a little longer. It was a simple but lovely moment for all of us.

As I write this, I recall visiting some elderly people with varying degrees of dementia. Conversation was very frustrating and exhausting for everyone as it drifted round and round in circles, constantly veering off in tangles of misunderstanding and poor hearing. One day I took in my flute and instead of struggling with conversation, I played some very simple tunes. The smiles and obvious relaxings revealed the depth of our languaging. Another experience was with a friend who was having a period of extreme anxiety. I invited her to sit and then directed the deep tones of a long flute to her head, her throat, her heart and her abdomen. From a place of feet on the ground calm, I blew long single tones, allowing them to fade to nothingness. Afterward, she described how the tensions just melted and fell away.

When we flute, we are speaking an elemental language. It’s the language of biology, of life unfolding, of generations feeding and nourishing each other. It’s a languaging that connects with other species, breath to breath, heart to heart. While fluting, I’ve experienced some wonderful meetings with dogs, birds and horses. This communing is a beautiful dance of offering, offering the inestimable treasure of authenticity and presence. Offering a directness, utterly stripped of pretence. The whole of one biological being, the community of all its cells, structurally coupling with the whole of another biological being. Giving ourselves so that the other might live, and through their living we are enhanced. This music of offering is a music of deep healing and it is something beautiful for the world.



# The Sound of Mystery

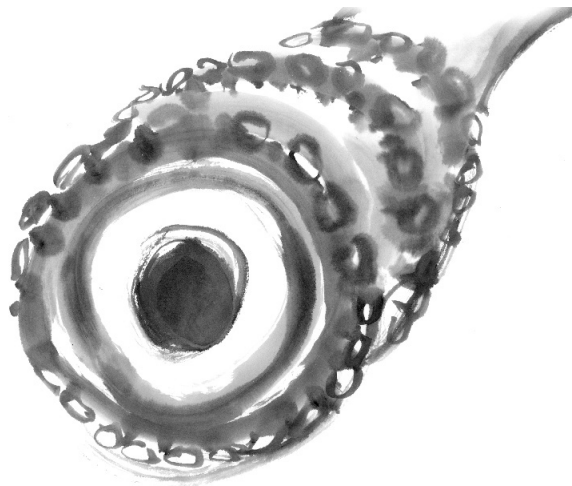
EVERY MOMENT OF DOING is comprised of myriad moments of multidimensional knowing. Every doing/knowing is a moment of offering. A universe of being, flowering freshly. Sounding and listening. Emoting and responding. Each sounding of becoming stimulates new becomings in others. From micro through to macro, from inter-musing atoms, to chamber music molecules, to organism orchestras, to ecosystem symphonies. We are music emerging from music and the music that we play is the nourishment of other musicians. To live this, is to enter 'the musing', the action, an unceasing play of compassion. To live this, is to recognise the musical embodiment that is each being that we meet. What is their creative genius? Where lie their roots? Who is this person, this caterpillar/butterfly of mystery, this vast unique fluting of being that penetrates us to the core and sings our form in fresh directions? How can we nourish their music? How can we sustain this orchestra in which we are all participating?

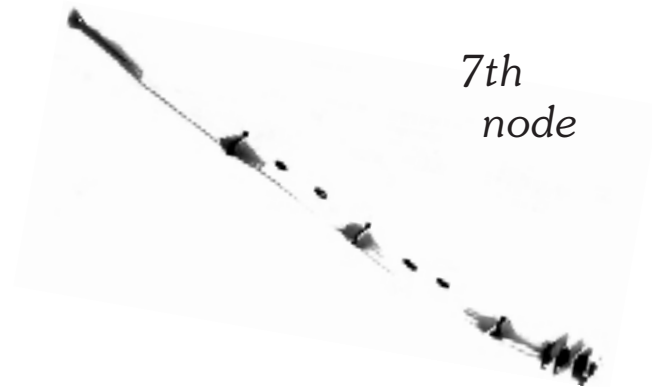
In much of the human world today, instead of appreciating the music of the mystery of life – the music of reverence for life – we immerse ourselves in music that is pushy, angry, hungering or seductive. We use music for advertising and creating a sense of deep lack and compulsive need. We reinforce unconscious prejudice and bias with military music, patriotic music and nationalistic music. After marinating in these rhythms and energies for thousands of hours, juiced by i-pods, radios and piped-in sound in public places, our metabolism and cellular functioning attunes to these rhythms and textures. Our lives have become a battle of bands. One band, the popular sound of the time, is a tinsely little fly-by-night operation that tries to make up for lack of maturity with raw decibels and ego appeal. The other is the fifteen billion year unfinished cosmic symphony of shaping that we always have been. The Indian mystic/poet Kabir once wrote, “The unstruck drum of eternity sounds within me but my deaf ears hear it not.” For individual sanity and the health of the world we need to open our ears and listen to the song of shaping – the unstruck drum of eternity – and allow this musing music to guide us home.

There are so many possibilities. What about becoming and radiating the music of loving-kindness, the music of innocent curiosity, of joy, of playfulness, of wonderment, of awe, of worship, of forgiveness, of acceptance? Think of your lover, or friend or co-worker or neighbour. Can you see the unique musical instrument that they are? The universe is flowing through them, stroking their strings, blowing across their sound edges. Together, the universe and your friend, are making a unique music of knowing. Violin, cello, shakuhachi, trumpet, snare drum, hand bell; who is this mystery playing beside you, a fellow musician in this endless orchestra of life? It took billions of years to make him or her; a master-piece of distinctive tone and intrinsic worth. Listen to them. Can you find a way of playing that complements and enhances their best qualities?

Being the unique music that we are, can we harmonize with their unique music and together birth something fresh with unexpected possibility?

Exploring this way is to enter a world of experience that is so rich and vast and multidimensional that it is impossible to pin down or define in any absolute way. The philosopher and teacher, Krishnamurti often said that truth is a pathless land. This is your life. It's pathless in that no-one has ever walked this way before. There are tracks behind you but in front is always new territory, in this sense a vast space of not knowing. This pathless land, this impossible universe, this, in all its glory is, in the end ... a Mystery. Can we live with poise and dignity and be this pathless not-knowing while at the same time manifesting a spacious presence of loving-kindness coupled with sharp observation and vivid discernment? We may ask of this mystery, where is this pathless land of life-unfolding going? Even though no-one knows the answer to this question, still we can craft our instruments and enter the dance, this streaming of becoming. Together, we sing worlds into being.



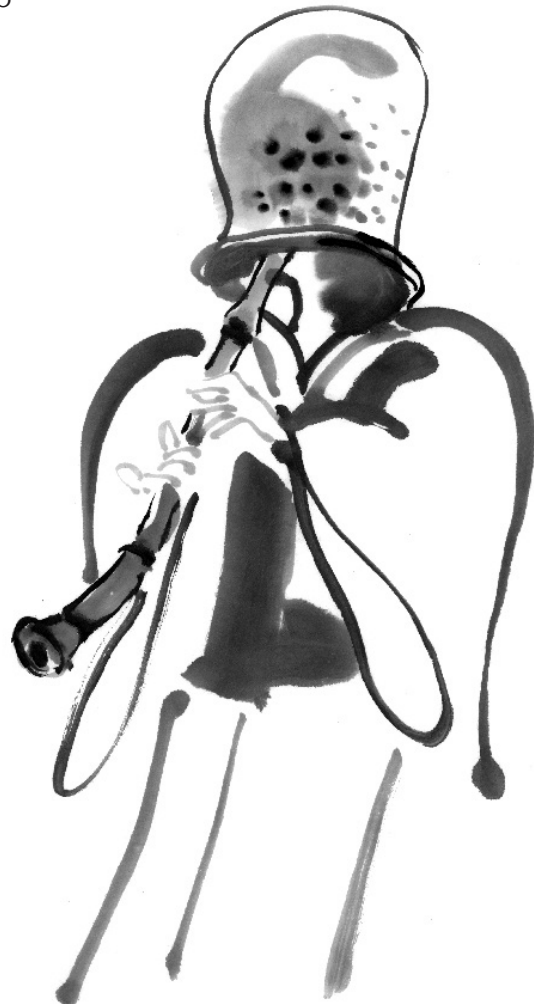


## Return to the Source

THE MONKS OF THE FUKU SECT were called *komoso* or sometimes *komuso*. *Ko*, can be translated as ‘emptiness’; not empty as in a vacuum or an absence but empty in the sense of spacious, open and translucent. *Ko*, points to a quality of non-obstruction, a spaciousness that can embrace and accommodate any arising, the way the open sky can embrace and host any type of cloud. The syllable *mo*, means illusion. An illusion, like a reflection or a rainbow, is due to a co-arising of many causes and conditions. If any one of these interweaving factors shifts or ceases, the illusion or rainbow will change or even disappear. Every identified thing, a tree, a person, a thought, a memory, a mountain slope, a grove of bamboo, a treasured flute, is composed of many inter-twining parts and processes. It has no independent existence apart from all the bits and pieces that make it up. This interdependency or interbeingness gives rise to its illusion-like body; a transient appearance in a transient world. *Mu*, refers to the silence between

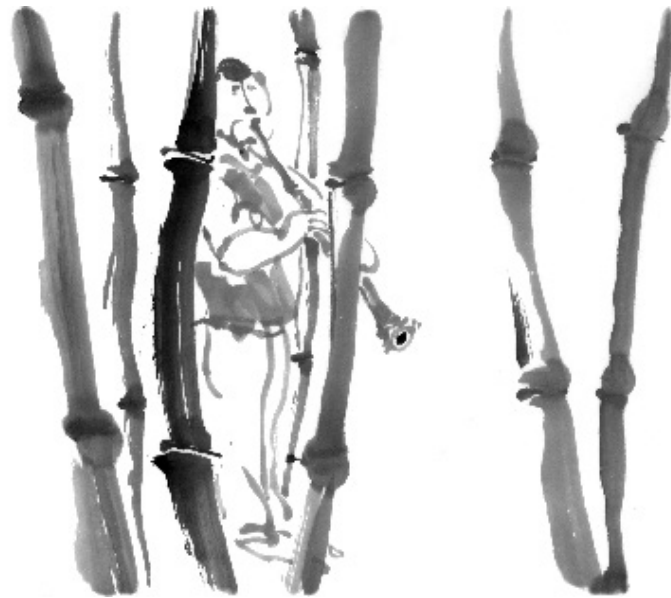
the notes. So, refers to a monk, 'one who is free to ask question', one who has dedicated their entire life to enquiring into, investigating and examining this dance of manifestation and knowing, and then living according to the implications of what is found or understood.

As you can see, apart from translating komoso or komuso as 'an 18th century shakuhachi playing monk', to give these words their full due is not so simple. We might come up with; 'a person devoting their life to investigating the open, illusory-like nature of knowing and being, and the spaces between musing individuals, and how they connect and language together, and how they collectively weave into being the fabric of a well functioning world'. Any academic arguing over which word is correct, komoso or komuso, is really missing the opportunity to enter a profound flow of fruitful contemplation. Both words carry nuances of meaning that enrich the other. *Mo*, is the illusion-like appearance and *mu*, is the silence, and this entire living world, including myself typing these words and you reading them, is the great mystery of being



that is arising in the *ko*, the spacious open knowing of this moment. So is one who is living and exploring this wondrous arising. We are all *ko mu/mo* so. It's just that not everyone realises it.

A major practise, for monks in the Fuke order, involved playing traditional pieces called *honkyoku* which led the musing musician deeper and deeper into the mystery of being. At the same time, this contemplative music was a unique and personal expression of the komuso's current inner state. Classical honkyoku are often very simple in terms of the notes but they are extraordinarily rich in the moods that they express. They are often punctuated with large silences, great gaping invitations to return to the ever fresh source, this ground of becoming, this beyond words mystery that we are.







Throughout these pages we have oscillated back and forth between bamboo flute and human flute. Each has been a metaphor for the other. Making the flute, bamboo or human, and playing it, are extraordinarily intertwined like a continuous loop. How we play becomes the

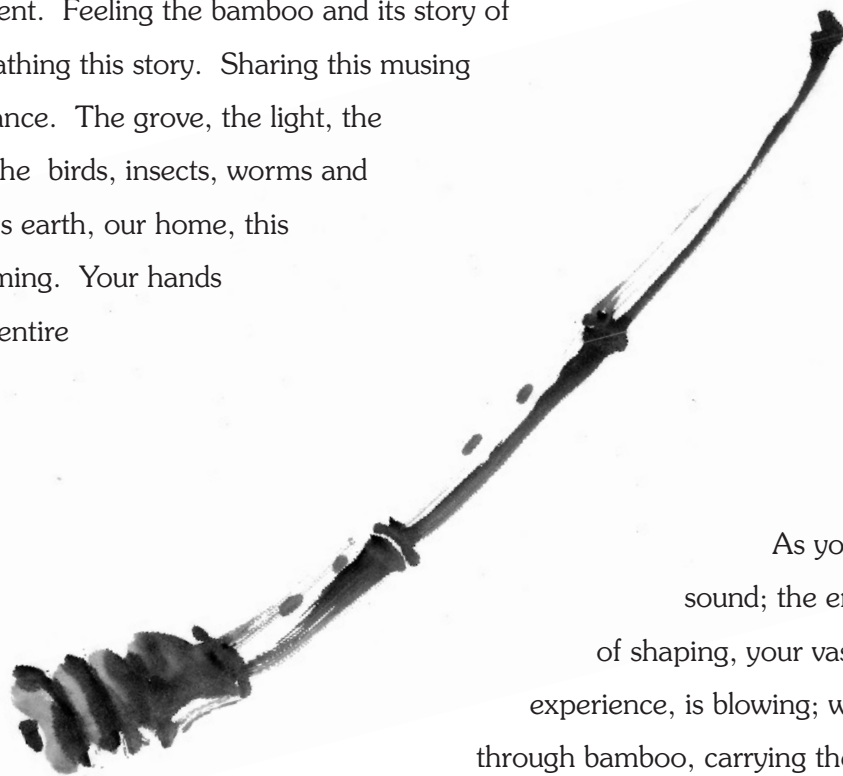
very action of crafting the instrument. Crafting the instrument is the making of music. Beautiful instruments and beautiful music go together. As Monty Levenson once remarked to me, “the most important tool that a flute maker has, is to play a lot”. In that conversation, he was referring to making and playing bamboo shakuhachi. However, I’m sure he would have understood that it applies equally to crafting human flutes. Playing the music of openness, love, engagement and wonderment, shapes a wondrous human flute that is beautifully open, loving and having the capacity to richly engage.

We are all craftspeople working in the studios of our lives. Our tools are compassion and awareness. Our mediums are living bodies and responsive minds. We are supported by the world and our craft supports the world. Let’s do it well.

*Standing;  
feet firmly planted in the ground of now,  
the timeless source of being.*

*Breathing;  
the tides of becoming  
ebbing and  
flowing  
through infinite channels of manifestation.*

Gently, with exquisite sensitivity, pick up your flute and bring it to your lips. Softening through your entire body, senses vibrant and engaged. Simple, straight forward and thoroughly present. Feeling the bamboo and its story of becoming. Breathing this story. Sharing this musing music of abundance. The grove, the light, the rain, the soil. The birds, insects, worms and geography. This earth, our home, this ground of becoming. Your hands are holding the entire world.



As you begin to sound; the entire story of shaping, your vast body of experience, is blowing; wind breezing through bamboo, carrying the voices of everyone. Your mother and father and grandparents; ancestors going back time out of mind. DNA lineages weaving the unfolding of life, four billion years in the making. Your fluting is an expression of societies and economies and education and philosophies.

It reverberates with Fuke monks in ancient Japan and bell birds in New Zealand. It contains me the writer and Robert flowing his ink brush beauty. Your playing sings with Kelvin and his grove, with Monty, and a world of uncountable beings dedicating their lives to growing something meaningful and beauty filled.

Your music honours the hopes and fears and beliefs and musings and life journeyings of an ocean of beings. Play them into the world. Breathe them through the fabric of your life and the lives of those you meet.

*Living this seamless wholeness,  
thus-ness,  
just as it is  
with nowhere else to be,  
we jam and jazz and sing together, this  
ever creative, ever fresh, always present musing music.*

*Offerings from the heart,  
offerings to the heart;  
something beautiful for the world.*

After you finish playing, rest in the stillness for as long as is natural. Then, like a rainbow appearing in the sky, you emerge, just as you are, a spontaneous expression of mystery unfolding, singing out your life, for the health and happiness of all beings in this world.

*Everything is Blessing*  
*Sarva Mangalam*



# Acknowledgements

It takes an infinitude of players to make the orchestra of life. It has taken the co-mingling of myriad musics and musings to make *Something Beautiful for the World*. The sun pumping  $215 \times 10^{13}$  calories of energy per second through a green photosynthetic world. Four billion years of unfolding biotic community, countless musicians; bacteria, eukaryotes, fungi, plants and animals fluting together the planetary ensemble of today. To each of these beings, I bow and play a daily song of thanks.

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*May all the generous contributions to this project,  
flower in the music of beauty unfolding,  
a gift for this precious world  
and all the beings who make it up.*

Completed in Triple Gem Hut, Wangapeka Study and Retreat Centre, May, 2008

*Tarchin Hearn* resides with Mary Jenkins in New Zealand. Since 1977

he has taught in many countries and has helped establish a number of centres for retreat and healing. Writer, artist, poet, traveller and inspiring teacher, Tarchin's approach is thoroughly non-sectarian and universal in nature. Rooted in Buddhist principles, his work frequently links personal healing with a deep ecological perspective in ways that have inspired a wide range of people, from a variety of diverse backgrounds and traditions.



*Robert Sinclair* MA, MFA

taught at the University of Alberta from 1965 to 1996, as well as at the Banff School of Fine Arts. His work has been featured in sixty-five solo exhibitions and more than forty-two group shows at public and commercial galleries in

Canada, America and abroad. A skilled craftsman

and wonderful teacher, Robert emphasizes exploring your own creative intelligence and intuition in order to build trust in yourself, both as an artist and as a complete human being. <[www.sinclairart.com](http://www.sinclairart.com)>



# Personal Notes



