

Daryl Pratt interviewed by James Nightingale

Friday 5th November 2004

JN: Daryl, could you describe your current musical practice.

DP: Most of my time is spent at the Conservatorium (Sydney Conservatorium of Music) with students. This is a recent focus, part of a gradual change. I'm also writing more music now. In the 80s and 90s I was quite active as a percussionist in a variety of ensembles, especially when I first moved to Sydney in 1991. There seemed to be more going on then, but we may get to that later in the interview. Outside of the Con my main project is the percussion duo, Match, with Alison Eddington I am still occasionally contracted for freelance work with chamber groups (recently Halcyon and Aark, for example). Most of my creative energy, however, is at the Conservatorium developing projects with students.

JN: What resources do you currently utilize to put things together? Like institutions, obviously the Conservatorium is one which we've already touched on, but what other things are you drawing on to do your work? People, access to instruments, technology, etc.

DP: The percussion duo project with Alison, in comparison to other percussion groups is actually quite streamlined. Our two main instruments are percussion keyboards and we do most of our rehearsals in our home studio. I guess that as one gets older, there is less interest in carting around truckloads of gear. I rely on electronic communication, such as email, a lot more than would have been the case in the past. Publicity happens this way. The New Music Network, for example, have an email listing of what's on. The general perception is that there is less and less going on with continually fewer performance opportunities, but when you look at that list (as long as your arm each month!) it's encouraging that there seems to be so much happening. Email and internet communications are important, not only nationally but internationally.

JN: What sort of funding, management, agencies, festivals?

DP: Management is all internal, we do it ourselves. Which is why we probably don't do very much. It's always been the case, in this country, that for new music, you have to do it yourself. There are opportunities but you can't rely on other people to do it for you. If you don't develop your own projects and follow them up things quickly dry up. It's an ongoing effort to keep things ticking over, maintain lines of communication, funding application submissions, etc. This is demanding business if you've got a full time job.

JN: How do you think that the resources for your projects could be improved? Can you suggest a couple of things that would enable your work to reach a wider audience?

DP: Administrative assistance with regard to publicity, contacting festivals, and arranging overseas touring would really be very helpful. This is one thing that the music we make precludes because there is generally not enough generated income to employ an administrator. Even for a fairly successful group like Synergy administrative management is an ongoing issue. I probably

shouldn't speak for their administrator Greg John's but I'd imagine that he puts in more hours than he's paid for.

JN: And that would be the same with you though, if you added up the number of hours you put in to preparing for performances...

DP: That's right. You do it because you love it. It would certainly make it easier if there was some avenue of assistance with the non-artistic side of things: organising gigs, making contacts, investigating what festivals are out there, where the opportunities are...

JN: Do you think that musicians these days are trained well enough to be able to do those sorts of things?

DP: Probably not trained, no.

JN: What thoughts might you have on the state of new music today, its relation to the past and future trends?

DP: When you contacted me a few weeks ago to do the interview, I thought that I'm not really well equipped to answer that question, as I'm a little bit out of the loop due to the narrowing of activities. On the surface it would appear that there is much less going on. Looking at the email newsletter from the New Music Network, however, it is clear that there are a wide variety of events on all over the place.. Maybe I'm wrong, but it seems that there's as much or more activity now, but that it's scattered and not focussed with well-known groups. When I came to Sydney there was Seymour Group, Sydney Alpha, and other groups that everyone knew about. I think there is still a lot going on, but people probably play a lot less frequently. It's difficult to have one group that does a lot, so you find yourself doing lots of little things. That's how it looks like to me.

JN: yeah, there are a lot of people who are doing little things in lots of different groups.

DP: Yes, that's how I see the scene, now and it's not entirely negative. It would be nice if the scene was strong enough for ensembles to maintain a bit of momentum. This is a difference in this country-compared with others due to our location, population size and distances between cities. The gigs are too few and far between to get a run on things.

JN: Do you see your work at the Conservatorium as something that enables your creative work? Obviously, the focus has to be the teaching work, but do you see it as something that could enable your artistic work?

DP: In principal, yes, and most directors would encourage their staff to perform and engage in creative work. Everyone aspires to this, but the reality is that we're now required to do more administrative work, take on more students, work longer hours. It's difficult to maintain an active performance profile. I should say that I've never been discouraged from doing what I do, and it has worked out reasonably well. I take time off when I need to, when creative projects come up or

there are performance opportunities. In the current work environment, however, I don't think that I could be as active now as I was in the past.

JN: Well that should just about do it Daryl, unless you have anything else to add?

DP: Yes, just a few words in defence of Conservatoria. Earlier this year the- Swiss percussionist/composer, Fritz Hauser performed at the Sydney Con. He questioned me about the value and ethics of teaching in an environment that can't support ever increasing numbers of graduates. It's an important question. I responded that my primary responsibility is to provide students with a foundation, in the broadest sense of the word, to enable them to pursue opportunities in the community when they leave the Con. And the evidence suggests that most Sydney Con percussion graduates maintain some form of involvement in music. We also serve another invaluable service. Fritz who also visited the VCA and The Queensland Con and the percussionist Steve Schick who visited The Sydney Conservatorium and WA University a few weeks ago would probably not have been able to come to Australia without support from the tertiary sector. He wouldn't be in Australia doing what he's doing and sharing it with students and the community if there weren't conservatoria to fund and support these activities.

JN: Thank you Daryl.

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