

# ♣Report on the House of Symphonies, 1995-96♣

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## PRELUDE

We are going to talk this year, as honestly as possible, about life at the edge of a volcano.

Our work in sound and perception takes place for the most part on our mesa in New Mexico. The wilderness provides space for exploring what a human being can be, and stretching the envelope of what is perceptually possible, without the white noise of shopping centers and the constant chattering of electronic data fields.

Over the years we have invited many people to the House of Symphonies, in order to share the unusual experiences which the symphonies had to offer.

Last spring we decided to take a break from this pattern. Questions had arisen like wild elephants, trampling all over our basically simplistic, "just do it" approach to our work. Also the experiential quality of our work had exploded with phenomenon which seemed related to synesthesia and classic kundalini experiences and which were sometimes more than a little overwhelming. Actually our biggest question last year revolved around, "Oh my God, what have we done?"

Questions regarding the relationship of sound to perception, the riddles of our own fundamental nature, as well as its perplexing interconnectedness with the all and everything, made it imperative that we step back and re-examine the data, re-experience the experiences, and to go, ourselves, on a very personal journey to discover answers. We had proven with experience what we were not yet ready to accept with our minds. We had to catch up with ourselves. We were experiencing things for which we had no words.

Therefore, beginning in early summer 1995, instead of our usual large, milling crowds, only myself, my wife, and a long time friend and apprentice went adventuring, with the occasional involvement and advice of an artist friend. It was our intention to inquire intensively into some specific questions implied by our previous work, but instead we found wide-open areas of inquiry and experience which had not even been on the list.

## METHODOLOGY

It is necessary that we mention methodology. On the mesa and in our workshops we use sound as a via, primarily in the form of crystal bowls with long pitch duration and also human voices. Sound activates the capacity for visions and extended perception. In effect, what we purpose is an access to a nearly culturally unbiased shamanism, or access to alternate realities, through the universal vias of sound and music – a shamanism without cultural foundations, but also without cultural baggage.

These experiences are accessible through sound and through a reasonably accurate paradigm of the self and its relationship to the world. We have found experiences of visions and psychic perception were common in our groups, but each individual experience required respect and acknowledgment. It is too easy to miss or ignore these experiences. As a culture we do not have the thousands of years of carefully constructed cultural safety nets to handle these experiences which are the birthright of many traditional peoples. Therefore, there is a difficulty in the interpretation of experiences, and a need for balance and a place to put these experiences in the context of our lives in present culture.

Anthropology and the study of such ancient disciplines as yoga have never been so important in providing historical data, common symbol patterns and descriptions of personal experiences across cultures. These provide essential experiential trail markers and language where our extroverted culture leaves us hanging without references.

Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that there are indeed Western cultural references, but that these are largely negative, philosophies shaped by the separatism of American pragmatism, and folk dictums such as "It's *only* your imagination." We will not elaborate upon the negative and profoundly tunnel-visioned evaluations of main stream American clinical psychology, although phrases like "delusional" and "hallucinatory" aimed at shamanistic cultures and experiences come to mind, the pathologizing of psychic experiences.

The key problem here, about which we spoke about last year, is the internal Western cultural division of the self from experiences and perceptions. The philosophy of "Cognito ergo sum" which translates in human terms into living an *idea* of life, instead of being there. It is not a matter of which is right or wrong, but that we have lost our natural biological trust in ourselves and are taught to rely only on logic without feeling. These attitudes limit the support and possibility of alternative experiences for the collective mind.

The mind is not "wrong" or "useless", it merely needs to be reconnected to the rest of its being. The mind is a recorder of our experiences, not the sole experiencer. A mind connected means that it is possible to be aware of what we experience, to acknowledge our own perceptions.

But back to the mesa.

## THE PARADIGM

In addition to using sound as a via, we also found it necessary to create a working concept, a paradigm, a map for a whole or complete human being. From the inception of this house we had decided to avoid *a priori* preconceptions and theologies, *vamos aver*, to go ourselves to see, and so we needed to build our models from our own direct experiences. But we also needed to give these experiences wide definition. After all, we needed to include a house built from vision, unreadable musical scores on the wall, lights in our heads, lights making 90° turns in the sky, lights around trees and rocks as well as people, intense and spooky dreams, a whole spectrum of things that go bump in the night, and a few more things we do not talk about much.

From these experiences, comfortable or otherwise, we turned ourselves inside out, not worrying about the provability of the phenomena so much as how we happened to perceive it. We found that people move in basically three geometries or modes of perception which we called bodies. Later we added a fourth mode or body, giving our paradigm four sides, a tetrahedron. The paradigm we had created to describe what we are is thus three-dimensional, not flat, like a piece of paper.

These four modes, in their most apparent aspects, would be first, the physical body, with its eyes, ears, nose etc., as well as its somatic knowingness, the ancient DNA knowledge that reaches back in a direct line to the first cell on earth.

Then there is the emotional or auric body, with its feelings and ultimately its elasticity, its ability to reach out and feel and see, not just others' emotions, but the universe's all and everything. We believe that much "third eye" phenomena is in the auric mode. Seeing, hearing, feeling or smelling the lights and colors of emotions is an unacknowledged form of synesthesia as experienced from the auric body.

Third, the dream body is that mode from which we see visions and understand underlying patterns, unrestrained by time. From the dream place we see the reflected patterns and possibilities of our physical lives, but also the reflected perceptions of all four bodies interacting and influencing each other. The dream



body is the truth teller, the navigator, the knower, but so sensitive to the input from other bodies that it is easily damaged.

In the fall of 95, we added a fourth mode, or geometry of perception which we had talked about, but not explored. We called this body "mystery", by which we meant a concept similar to the Indios' *Nagual*, or the Lakota' *Wakon Tonka*. However both of these terms refer to that which is great mystery, beyond ourselves, while we have confined our definition only to its subjective aspect, that in ourselves which touches mystery, which reaches out to that which is other than ourselves. It is here, perhaps, that we may dance with gods and find our umbilical cord to the greater universe.

The completion of the tetrahedron meant, if our interpretations of our experiences were correct, that we exist perceptually, and physically, in four different universes, *simultaneously*. It was an amazing thought. And all this time we have been stressing and straining just to squeeze our being respectably into just one small cognitive part of one universe. The present culture is in massive need of soul retrieval. We really had lost 90% of our universe.

Buried within these brave new (and ancient) worlds of ourselves, like a Chinese puzzle box, is the Tibetan concept of the monad (from theosophy), the monad which is the indestructible self, which is both infinite in time, yet singular to each and every one of us. "Who is the eye that sees the eye that sees?" Going into the monad through sound we found that its essence seemed to be sound, with each person's song as unique as a fingerprint, but made of sounds like the grinding of boulders under the sea, the wind on a mountaintop, or the steady plopping of water in a deep underground cave.

As people recover their own unique sounds, and regain some of their ability to perceive, with some understanding, more fully in all of their bodies, and to wield these together as a single entity, we have noticed frequent experiences of illumination as well as an activated sense of self presence.

Now we were ready to travel.

## THE JOURNEY

When I was a child growing up in the highlands of central Mexico, I often heard a unique sound emanating from the Indios whom I would pass in the village.



I did not hear this sound again until 1995, when we played the symphony seeking our monadic sounds. Each of my companions now vibrated, just as the Indians I remember in Mexico. The sound is indefinable, not exactly heard with the auditory system, more felt, like an invisible tapestry.

The most common experience within our symphonies has always been the personal visions of those playing. Each symphony has its own specific score, providing context and directions for those who are playing. Visions therefore are generally related to the nature of the particular symphony.

Within the symphony experience, one phenomena repeated itself constantly, synesthetic perception, or perception in alternate or multiple sense modes, such as seeing sound or smelling visions. Instead of seeing visions, some people, in the course of a symphony, would go into other sense modalities such as sound, smell or touch. Several ran out of the house to find the waterfall they were hearing. One searched for some time to find the ocean breakers he heard crashing on our desert land.

As we entered the summer of 95 with our small but intensified group, experiences which seemed to be related to kundalini began appearing with increasing frequency. Warmth going up the spine and sudden lights in our heads were the most pleasant, nausea and sleep disorders were not.

It was this sensitiveness that was to be our signpost for the next year's journey. We were on the threshold of experiences which had hitherto been both inaccessible and unknown to us, but which had appeared in earlier symphonies. These unknown experiences or energies became our unexpected quest.. We called them "rivers" for they were definitely flowlike.

Though each of these rivers contained aspects familiar to all, such as love, compassion and mystery, these definitions were but poor descriptive shadows of any of the "rivers" experuenced in our new symphonies. Worse, when we attempted to describe a specific river with an old, worn out word like "compassion", we found ourselves falling back into the old emotional meanings and losing the exquisite, newfound sensation of the original river experience.

One of our group was a gem expert, and began defining each river by a specific stone or mineral such as emerald, garnet, topaz or lapis, etc. By November we had identified twelve unique rivers, each assigned a corresponding stone.

However, I felt that something was amiss. It remained difficult to access the energy of the rivers without actually playing the appropriate symphony. It was clear that their energies were not rooted deeply enough to be integral to our beings. They faded too quickly.

For example, I know I possess the emotions of rage, or love, or euphoria within me even though they are not active at this moment. I wanted to be able to say the same about the rivers.

Then there was another concern. Though each time we invoked a specific river, our knowledge grew, we seemed to be going in a wrong direction in our aim to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the properties of these rivers. Our understanding remained fragmented.

My wife and I immediately began to work on this problem. A series of hit or miss efforts ensued with inconclusive results. Suddenly we broke through in a direction I had never before conceived. The effects were astounding.

It is one thing to go into the "ether" region and retrieve twelve energies which had been beyond our collective sphere of experience, and quite another thing to penetrate into depth fields where one's whole stance concerning one's reality is altered. The secret we found was learning to "go through mirrors". I will illustrate this for you a little later.

In the course of our activities we defined the following four principles as fundamental to our work:

## **PRINCIPLES:**

### ***This Is Easy***

One of the most shocking discoveries we have made is that what we do really isn't hard. It requires concentration, discipline and a clear comprehension of the structure of the music we are playing, but it is not some inexplicable, inaccessible mystical process. It is already there, in our cells, our feelings, our dreams and our mysteries. It *does* require that we put all this together, but it *does not* require that a two-headed bat be sacrificed on the new moon to invoke the dreaded Erraticus. You could do this if it made you more comfortable, of course, but we only wish to stress it is not necessary.

### ***Music***

Throughout our work we have stressed the use of sound and music in our methodology. However it is necessary to make several distinctions regarding music as it is used within our symphonies.

As we spoke about last year, Western music has largely been driven by its need for the resolution of dissonance and the achievement of an end, a cadence. It is thus a goal-oriented music, but also is a music held external to the performer by the rigidity of its notation.

Music, as used in our house, does not specify a particular external ending, but is not improvisational either. However, the player is *part* of the score. The combinations of tapping and extended pitches from the bowls, the incredibly varied sounds of the human voice, allow the players to feel their feelings, perceive their perceptions while riding the waves of the sounds produced. These feelings and sensations are as much a part of the personal symphony as the outside sounds created.

The music requires, in fact, a new and different technical proficiency, where the precision and intensity of the player's perceptions determine the power and beauty of the music.

### *The Gaia Principle*

The question of aloneness has haunted some of our species over millennium. "Are we distinct beings, separate units disconnected from ourselves and our environment, swimming each alone in our own particular universe?" Or are we in some way part of our universe? A cell in an immense, intricate, delicate creature, brother and sister to the winds, the rains, the rocks and the bears? Is there perhaps some sacred dance or song we might perform so that we might witness our relationship?

Here, as we consider the interconnectedness of the universe, we will take a small sideline and introduce the work of the philosopher, Martin Buber.

Martin Buber drew a critical distinction between two different types of relationships with the universe, the "I - It" relationship, where the "I" objectively observes or judges an object, even if that object is a person, and the "I - Thou" dialogue, where the "Thou" is a person, and the exchange is fully alive, interactive and unpredictable. In the "I - It" process, the past experience of the observer comes into play, as developed attitudes, social influences, and so on become judgments about the object. Buber observed that there is always a part of ourselves separate from the object observed. However in the "I - Thou" dialogue there are no barriers. The "I" interacts completely with the "Thou" and the "Thou" responds in the full freedom of otherness. Buber, with his work, achieved the distinction between inclusive and exclusive relationships, although Buber felt that humans could ultimately maintain a constant "I - Thou" dialogue only with God. It is unlikely that Buber ever considered such a relationship with all of nature.



The Lakota beliefs parallel Martin Buber's "I - Thou" dialogue, but for them the relationship involves all of creation. Everything is personal, and all that is, is living. *Mitakuye Oyasin*. To all my relations.

Like the Lakota, we find ourselves within the Symphonies in need of a wider dialogue. We need an "I - Thou" relationship with the rocks and ravens. All of nature comes and goes within the music. When symphonies go well, the wind rises and gusts about the house. Ravens change their songs and coyotes imitate our music. The world we find is alive and responsive. The symphonies are perhaps our way to attempt to dance a response, to witness our relationship.

Once one of our players was having difficulty in feeling her dream body, but she did keep seeing a black jaguar totem. Finally in a burst of sound from her bowl she saw her jaguar make a flying leap across a chasm. Simultaneously, there was the sound of impact and the long, thick double-paned window next to her shattered from the outside pane, not the inner pane. The inner pane would have shattered if our sound vibrations had been causal. We give this story as a caution against treating visions as *merely* symbols or metaphors. Our relationship with the all and everything is not just in our heads.

On another occasion we were playing a time symphony for the first time, attempting to make subjective time perceptible. As the symphony concluded, we were interrupted by a weasel carrying a rat (dead) and scratching madly at one of our long windows. After he had gained the entire group's attention, he left his rat offering on the ground and sauntered back into the piñon forest.

### *Alice Through The Looking Glass*

The basis of much alternative and shamanic experience is the journey. There is a phenomena within the journey process which we call "going through the mirror". As one absorbs fully a given vision or experience, the details begin to dissolve or completely disintegrate. When you truly go into a perception, you can go through it and find yourself in another, deeper perception.

I will attempt to describe the in the symphony process, as the players themselves experience it. Let us say we are playing the Emerald River symphony, roughly described as abundance or growth.

In the playing of a symphony, we do not "imagine" energies, objects etc. In other words we do not self-generate images in the mind. In the playing, persons, objects and patterns will appear of their own volition, and at times with awesome intensity.

After playing a brief introduction to the symphony, the Emerald symphony begins, invoking the energy of that particular river. The first vision that appears is fields upon fields of early spring grass. We move through the vision, perceiving the nature of the fields, not how the fields feel to us, but how it feels to itself. The vision of the fields disintegrates and we record a powerful awareness of rebirth.

As we play on, a second vision appears. At the bottom of a great sea bed are two thrones side by side where are seated two great beings, Lord and Lady of all the seas, infinite in power and presence. (Of course, this makes sense: abundance/ growth/ water. You stand before the vitality of all waters.)

Assuming you can hold on to your self-separateness, you pass through the beings, and in doing so, sense their qualities. The vision again disappears, and you are in non-formed energies, aware of the power and sacred vitality that flows in the liquid of all life force.

We are now going very deep within the symphony. A new image appears. We are a hundred miles above the planet earth. It is extraordinarily beautiful. As we descend, we see the world very differently. The trees, the bushes and plants seem to be one giant entity, locked together by their wide spreading roots. Weed stalks and tree trunks are but prickles on the unified skin under which the water of life moves. Animals and people are just mobile carriers of water. Again the vision disintegrates.

Now there is an invisible, intense feeling of the intention for life. For the briefest moment we understand the underlying energies. All waters of life have been, and will flow again through all the forms of life indiscriminately, all the life forms through which these waters have passed have become perceivable. This is enough lest our synapses disintegrate. The symphony is over. We have absorbed the emerald river. And most importantly, this energy will remain vital within us.

## NOT SUPERMENSCH

One question which automatically arises is, "What have all these symphonies and experiences done to us as people? Have they changed us?"

The effect of these musical travels upon our psyches has not been the acquisition of the supermensch state. Quite the opposite, we feel extremely vulnerable and sensitive to our environment, but also we live in a very different universe in terms of the assumptions we make about how reality works.

Our sensitivities have really changed as if our windshields have been washed by a cleaner, brighter sunlight. Objects look a little clearer. Synesthetic experiences, such as tending to hear auras as well as see

them or playing a symphony while simultaneously seeing, hearing, feeling and touching it, occur occasionally. More basic psychic experiences, like telepathy, are simply part of life. We are also, in general, more sensitive to environmental energies. On the other hand, this has made it somewhat more difficult to go into cities where there is too much input, too many feelings, too much noise, too much electricity.

Our assumptions about the world start from the foundation of our experience that everything is alive and responsive. You can establish an "I - Thou" relationship with a car or the ants in the anthill outside the door. We believe human beings may be harder. This responsiveness creates the possibility of new occurrences, and that improbable outcomes can become probable, new combinations can occur. We do not have to play an inescapable part in someone else's eschatological drama.

When anything can be perceived from several angles, including time, that thing becomes knowable and less frightening. Life is much less scary seen in this perspective.

## CONCLUSION

The volcano edge on which we have lived is our own explosive capabilities to extend ourselves into alternate realities.

On our mesa, with sound and paradigm we have explored visions and come up with more than we expected.

Of our varied discoveries, we believe one of the most significant was one which we called "Through the Looking Glass" in which we found that the quality of the perception ("I - Thou" or "I - It") changes that which is perceived.

In our Emerald river example, when the river was approached in an "I - Thou" manner, where the player each level of meaning without preconceptions of the river, the membranes between the levels became more permeable, and the player was able to penetrate more deeply.

When old definitions of the river were used, the life force of the river left and no experience of any kind was possible.