

## Memoire 1

### On Arriving in Australia.

On arriving in Australia in 1976, I met in quick succession three musicians who played an invaluable part in helping me orientate myself to this southern continent. They were in order of appearance - David Ahern, Bill Motzing, and Martin Wesley-Smith.

At the end of my first week in Sydney, I sauntered down to the pub at the end of the street for a drink and to take in the local vibe. At the bar, flaying at credulity with his arms, was David Ahern, shouting at the top of his heavily alcohol fuelled voice to anyone who would listen (no one) about the serial compositional techniques of Karlheinz Stockhausen. This struck me as unlikely in any pub anywhere, let alone my first foray into Australian culture. Unnerving but glorious. David lived in Rosser Street, a block over from me at Smith Street, Balmain. And over the next weeks I visited him, when he was more or less sober, to enjoy long conversations about his work, combining as it did orchestral modernism and improvisation. Within a few months I was already organising concerts and tried to coax him out of his semi retirement to perform. It was clear however, despite hanging onto a job teaching 'sound studies' at the local art school, he was already on a downward slide. As he put it on that first night, 'Stockhausen was a workaholic, but I became an alcoholic'. Others informed me that he had been the official *Enfant terrible* of Australian contemporary music, well supported by those in power even, but somehow the cultural environment in which he lived had triggered (if not caused) him to come apart. This level of self destruction was a trope I encountered with many musician colleagues in my first years in Australia (particularly those coming out of free jazz). It was a warning of what can drown the original and talented in such a narrow band of options as the Sydney music scene.

My last memory of David comes from a lecture by a visiting composer at the recently established Australian Music Centre at The Rocks. David entered quietly and very unsteadily. Then after a few minutes, he was at the back shouting 'You're fucked! No really, you're really fucked!' Regarding some of the content of the lecture, his truth telling wasn't wrong, but was nevertheless led away by an embarrassed usher.

People advised me to check out the Con(servatorium) as a conduit to scoring professional music work as a session player, club band member, or a host of the many miscellaneous gigs on offer. I met American composer and trombone player Bill Motzing, who persuaded me to join his jazz arranging course (although he could see that I had limited interest in a career in jazz). Bill had the most engaging knowledge bank of musical propositions that I had encountered to that time. His life experience as a musician was vast. He was just as at home showing me advanced uses of the EMS VCS 3 synthesiser, to articulating issues of sound design (which had brought him to Australia in the first place with the band 'Blood, Sweat, and Tears'), to teaching me how to write music for films (I never did it), to teaching me the ins and outs of The Schillinger System of Musical Composition. It was the later skill that took over my imagination, and although I never pursued the standard composer career, Schillinger's method of counterpoint (in which just about any mode, scale, or sonic escapade can be lined up with the *Cantus Firmus*, providing it has independent motion) has informed my entire opus over the decades. Bill handed me a bunch of bread and butter session work at that time which helped me set up a 'professional music' career of sorts in Sydney. It was a propelling start. On one session he asked me to play my exotic Dillruba, on another a country version of '76 Trombones', on another they just wanted to make a silent video of my left hand playing violin for a TV soap ad. I turned down performing electric violin in a water tank on George Street (promo for Jaws 2) for reasons of survival, but accepted the gig on a yacht for a 'divorce party'. The ex-husband liked the sound of a violin, not that you could hear it as the drunken rabble sailed around Sydney Harbour for hours - drowning from the inside.

On initial investigation, I discovered the Con had an electronic music studio. (My last job in London had been as a recording engineer for The Royal Academy of Music which despite the impressive job title was completely unimpressive in reality- advertised as it had been along with toilet and car park attendants in the small ads section of a local paper- anyway it had given me access at least to the Electronic Music Studio there). I knocked on the door and Martin Wesley-Smith complete with a fistful of jangling keys and a side ways smile let me in. He immediately gave me open access to the Con electronic music studio which I used for all kinds of recording activities and experiments. A more generous musician, there was not. Martin also gave me my

first 'environmental' gig with artist George Gittoes at Bundeena. My memory of the gig high up on the cliffs above the beach is a little blurred as we were hit with a massive sub tropical storm about 10 minutes before start of the show ( featuring a cast of dozens of local swimmers, dancers, performance art aficionados, and me providing the music on my home made amplified string Instrument). We had another bash at it on the following night, however no-one had considered that the tide would have changed. And so it was that the hidden tables set up on the sea bed to give the illusion and mystery that the dancers were dancing on the surface of the sea was sunk - the tables sticking out as incongruous props half a meter above the gentle unconcerned waves. A woman came up to me after the gig and said how she had liked the 'sound effects'. 'That's not sound effects' said Martin standing nearby, 'that's music!'

Martin was head of composition at the Con but he operated as 'other'. One of his many skills was an ability as an improvising musician on the CMI - an instrument he made his own. (The Fairlight CMI was the World's first sampling musical instrument). Back then improvising didn't rate very high on the composer hierarchy of skills, but in the years we worked together on our project in the early 1980s, I can say he was a master of the musical moment. We worked as a duo with violin (me) and its simulacrum (Martin playing my sampled violin sounds in glorious 8 bit clunky on the CMI). This was serious innovation at the time, and there was nothing around like it - call it real time electronic music composition if you like. Up to that point most electronic music existed on tape. After some local gigs in Sydney, the project was invited to Festival D'Automne, Paris in 1983.

We eventually made an album TANGO for Hot records (Hot 1009) in 1984 which at the time was a major alternative rock label featuring bands like The Laughing Clowns and based in prime real estate on Victoria Street, Darlinghurst (now housing a struggling restaurant).

Martin passed away in 2019 and he is missed by the many musicians who came into his orbit.