

Thoughts on the Beijing Panel, from John Drummond
22 August 2007 – with an Appendix, 2 October 2007

Tradition

The term ‘tradition’ has two meanings. On the one hand it can be taken to represent an inherited cultural past, and it is in this sense that we speak of ‘safeguarding intangible cultural heritage’. We wish to see the cultural past preserved in order that it can continue to have an impact on future generations. On the other hand, ‘tradition’ can also be taken to represent a continuum of practices from the past to the present and on into the future. From this perspective a tradition is a living, growing thing, continually changing and evolving. It is in this sense that we speak of ‘sustainable futures for musical traditions’. The two perspectives are rather different. Actions taken to ‘safeguard a heritage’ (for instance the building of museums and other repositories) may well be quite different from action taken to ensure that a tradition continues to develop and grow in the future (through for instance the provision of performance opportunities for creative people working in the tradition). Indeed, creative people may well do things to an inheritance that seem to some to challenge or even demolish that inheritance.

I am therefore a little uneasy with the idea that our discussion on ‘sustainable futures’ will be linked to ‘safeguarding heritage.’ In my view, it should go well beyond it, and if we are to include in our plan actions for safeguarding heritage we should not ignore the equally important actions for sustaining futures. This may, of course, spark a (rather typical and boring) debate between those who look back and those who look forward, and I would hope that we can be ‘both-and’ rather than ‘either-or.’ But I do believe our focus should be on the future, not on the past, as, I would suggest, our Panel Title indicates. At the very least, we need to make it clear that ensuring the future of a tradition is not just about safeguarding its past.

Sustaining a future for musical traditions

This can be approached from the outside or the inside.

From the outside

- Generic, world-wide, contextual action, undertaken by world bodies such as IMC, UNESCO or whoever, to provide an environment in which diverse musical traditions can flourish
 - o We already have enough Conventions, Declarations, Statements and the like. We don’t need any more. More useful now would be to get buy-in and commitment to what the Conventions say. That takes power and influence – probably more than IMC has!
 - o One positive outcome from the WMF might be to obtain an undertaking from the dominant musical cultural organizations that they will nurture other musical cultures. (‘Sponsor a music. . .’ like sponsoring a child in the Third World.) I suspect the chances are extremely slim, but wouldn’t that be a break-through? Of course, it might just be lip-service, and not much would actually happen, but there’s always hope.

From the inside . . .

- Individual action taken by particular cultures (especially threatened ones) to ensure they have a sustainable future.

- Possible actions here by IMC and its members include a guide-book ('How to sustain your musical culture' or 'How to use Global Music to your advantage'), or mentoring ('We did it, let's help you'), motivational speaking (very good for lifting up the downtrodden, ask Lenin), and (see above) finding a foster-parent.

So what I have to share is based on that big picture. My three challenges/success factor are these:

- **what are we** (as organisational members of IMC, national members of IMC, and, in most cases, leaders in the dominant musical cultures of Western Art Music or global commercial music) **going to do to help sustain the future of diverse musical traditions, either by helping to preserve their heritage or by helping to nurture creative work in these traditions (and preferably both)?**
 - My examples from Aotearoa New Zealand would be the holding of competitive festivals in Maori and Pacific musics as well as in Western music; support for Maori and Pacific Island musicians working in the music industry; the inclusion of Maori performance groups as well as Western performance in schools as part of the official curriculum; the inclusion of Maori musical protocols in official government ceremonies (even if it takes longer); the official recognition of indigenous musicians as equal in status to Western musicians in the awarding of honours and status; the inclusion of the Maori language and Maori music in bourgeois mainstream radio stations (not without resistance); the earmarking of government arts funding for work in Maori and other community musics
- **how can we encourage those in the dominant musical culture to be brave enough to let go, and accept the value of minority musics, and how can we encourage those in minority musical cultures to stand up for what they have and do?**
 - My examples from Aotearoa New Zealand would be the inclusion of the haka in the international All Blacks rugby matches; the kapa haka movement which gave Maori a new pride in their own culture; the recovery of Maori musical instruments by a European music practitioner behaving in a Maori way; the inclusion of works in Western concerts that bring together Maori and European traditions, based on mutual respect; and even allowing a Europe-born New Zealander to be here talking about Maori music, illustrating commitment and trust from both communities (it had to be built and earned, and is not acknowledged by all)
- a culture is based on people, not artefacts or products (Maori: he tangata, he tangata, he tangata). **What are we doing to enable individuals to experience and learn, through participation, more than one musical culture?** In Aotearoa New Zealand we need to do more – we haven't addressed this yet to the right level
 - require fluency in more than one musical culture, including one that is a minority music in your country of residence (The Lou Harrison Solution)

- ensure the opportunity is always there to educate creative people in local and other musical traditions, so that they can preserve them by renewing them; this means making those musics available in educational settings (not necessarily official institutional settings, which may be unsympathetic or culturally unable to adapt to them); include creative work in diverse musics in national assessment measures (however difficult).

Appendix: Sustainable futures in the world of IT

The development of www2 offers a significant opportunity to marginalised cultures. The internet has changed its function from a medium allowing easy access to information (www1) to a medium allowing the easy providing of information (www2). It is very easy for anyone to put audiovisual clips on YouTube, and already to be found there are examples of performed traditional music and dance from most East Asian countries. The Philippine clip has been viewed by over 8,000 people in the past seven months. These examples seem mostly to have been filed by enthusiasts rather than by culture bearers, but there is no reason why YouTube shouldn't be used extensively as a way to communicate local traditions to wider audiences, and to interest them in a particular local culture.

MySpace is widely used by up-and-coming rock groups to spread the word about their musical products. Audio-visual materials, blogs, discussion groups, are all available on this site. This also offers an opportunity for culture bearers to present their musics and other cultural practices to the world. In January 2007 MySpace was listed as the sixth most visited internet site in the world. 200 million people subscribe to it.

A large number of social networking sites have emerged in www2. Individuals create their own webpages on these sites, including their musical preferences, and can often form groups. These sites offer another opportunity for the display of local cultures. Some of the most widely used are: Bebo (34 million users), Broadcaster.com (26 million), hi5 (50 million), imeem (16 million), Last.fm (20 million), and Netlog (24 million).

Second Life is a website which enables an individual to create a second identity in a cyber world. Here one can create one's own living space, as well as interacting with others on the overall website. There is clearly an opportunity here to create a living space with particular cultural characteristics, a reproduction of a traditional cultural environment, for instance, and to introduce others to one's own virtual reality. Second Life has around 10 million users at present.

These sites all suggest effective new ways to sustain cultures that otherwise seem threatened by the march of globalisation. Indeed, they might be seen as the products of globalising technology, and to use them in the cause of sustaining threatened cultures is an opportunity too good to be missed.