

SOUNDASATIONS

Sound and Dance Conversations



The Story of
An Evolving Community
Improvisation Ritual
compiled by
Rosemary Julea Faire

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"If you can talk, you can sing..."

African saying

***"If you can move, you can groove -
You can do most anything!"***

Ommlets addition to African saying

Dedication

This potted history is dedicated
to all those who have participated
in the evolving magical phenomenon
of MADGIGs / Soundasations.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the friends who contributed to this project
with their personal perspectives and photos
so that we could all share them.

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*Fill me with your magic breath
I will let it moisten my dry places.
I will taste and savour
Where and who you have been,
Who I am becoming.
I devour you.
And through me you have a Voice,
Can return to yourself
Through the waves that I send forth.
Some notes are rough:
Blow harder - gently...*

Preface

*"Life is what happens to you
while you're busy making other plans"*

John Lennon

I feel like the one who looks for the dropped keys under the lamp post not because that's where they were dropped, but because that's where there's light. I too have been looking for my "career", for meaningful work as a music and movement therapist, for the last eight years, in the places where I think it should lie. But all the while a process has been unfolding almost behind my back. A process that didn't earn dollars and was not under my control. I did it "for fun" so it was not part of my "career".

It has gradually dawned on me that the creativity of human spirits engaged in the process of freeing themselves cannot be confined within a narrow definition of "therapy". When our culture (with its labels of performer/artist vs audience, therapist vs client, clergy vs layman) failed to provide us with what we needed, we invented our own vehicle for growth, self expression and spiritual renewal.

I want to share with you the story of this evolving phenomenon which we now call Soundasations.



the founding mothers
of MADGIGs

✿ A Potted History ✿

The beginnings...

You will never know the whole story for the simple reason that mine is only one perspective of many. This is the way I (think I) remember it started...

Once upon a time...

... there was a performance of music and dance at the Performance Space in Sydney. Among the audience were five women who met up outside (friends of friends were introduced) during the interval. Their names were Ellin, Cate, Heather, Leeorah and Rosey. They were enjoying the performance but at the same time frustrated that they had to sit in the audience and watch, when what they really wanted to do was unleash their creativity too.

"Why don't we form a group in which we can improvise with music and dance ourselves...?"

YES!!

Around that time, Ellin also had a big birthday party with lots of spontaneous music and dance; these two events led to our deciding to meet regularly to nourish this creativity - and the process had begun.



MAD GIGs 1

We would meet at first in Ellin's lounge room, (and at Heather's and at Leeorah's?). At some stage I remember suggesting the name "MAD GIGs", an acronym for Music and Dance Group Improvisation Gatherings*.

Craving more space to move we hired an upstairs dance studio in Rozelle (Brent Street School of the Arts). The emphasis in those days was on the dance. We would put on taped music and then interact spontaneously through our dancing. Small percussion instruments and drums also interacted with the dance. It was very liberating to have so much space, so much freedom to dance, and so accepting a group to explore with.

**Funnily enough, this name preceded the group itself: it had come to me one day in the park behind Birkenhead Point, as I mused on what I wanted in my life now that I was back in Australia. I had lived in the U.S. for thirty months and had, during that time, been lucky to participate in three groups that used improvised music and movement: Paolo Knill's Intermodal Expressive Therapy trainings; an exploratory performance group at Ohio State University led by Jesse Fernandez; and Group Motion in Philadelphia created by Manfred Fishbeck. These groups gave me a taste of open-ended group creativity and I wanted more. But I hadn't known how to go about it...*

At that time an offshoot of MAD GIGs was also born. I wanted to explore in more depth the feedback loops that I'd experienced in Group Motion in Philadelphia. I called these loops Kinetoning and Soundancing. I will describe these in more detail in a separate chapter.

This first burst of MAD GIGs met fairly regularly for a while, but then our gatherings dwindled... what happened?

I remember joking later that what happened was that the women who were the driving forces behind MAD GIGs got into relationships!! After a time all the relationships fizzled and... MAD GIGs was reborn!

Leeorah and I decided to revive the gatherings, holding them at her house...

Brent street

school of arts

AGENCY!

NEXT:

DANCE PLAY

SUN 13 OCT

ROZELLE

4-6pm

DONATIONS PLEASE

(\$2 minimum)



Queries - ROSEY

MAD GIGs 2

The character of MAD GIGs began to change, with more emphasis on the creative improvisation through sound. We would hold the gatherings at night in Leeorah's lounge room, light candles, bring instruments (and Leeorah had a piano). My recollections of the music and dancing bring multicultural images: sometimes the drums, percussion and candles at night resembled a Shamanic ritual; sometimes African beats embodied themselves in earthy dancing; Didgeridoo and click sticks; middle-Eastern belly dancing; flutes and guitar, piano and voices. And mellow endings with back massages and foot massages and me occasionally reading one of my "stories from out of the blue".*

Then... Leeorah got a new carpet. Understandably, she didn't want candle wax stains on it, so MAD GIGs had to find a space of its own...

The Move to our own Space

Leeorah found us an upstairs room in Crows Nest healing centre, and we put together our first fliers...



But as friends brought other friends, after only three months we began to need a bigger space. Leeorah once again found us a new room at Mosman Community Centre.

Sitting outside this Centre after looking at the space and deciding this was it, we explored new names (Leeorah didn't like the MAD anymore, and it wasn't as MAD as in the first wild days.) The phrase Sound and Dance Conversations became **Soundasations...**

*"Stories from Out of the Blue: spontaneous self-healing fairytales for grownups" by RJF

Hello! Guess what! It's on again! One of our "Music and Dance Happenings",
otherwise known as **Music**

And

Dance

Group

Improvisation

Gatherings (MAD GIGs)

is going to be on **Saturday July 10 from 6-8 pm**
at the **Sun Centre, 130 Willoughby Road, Crows Nest**
at a cost of **\$3**

Bring

- * any percussory (or other type) instruments you want
- * loose clothing that you'll be ready to move in if our jamming moves you!
- * any friends who are curious

One thing for sure, we never know where MAD GIGs will take us - it depends entirely on who's there and what mood we generate - but it's always new, often fun, and sometimes ecstatic!

We are planning to hold these gatherings on the second Saturday night of each month from now on. Any alternate suggestions are welcome...

Need more info? Call Rosey on 816 4884 or Leeorah on 901 4845

See you!

P.S. On the back is a notice about another event that may excite
your sound/ movement making spirit...

Soundasations

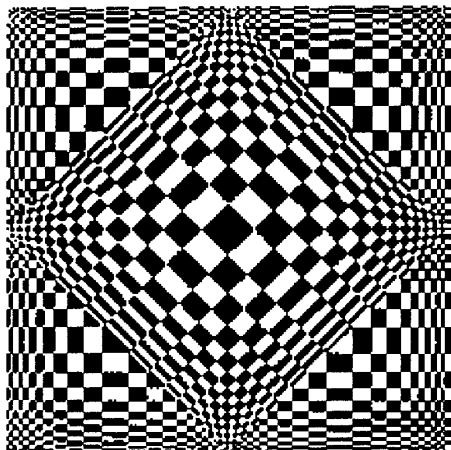
In its new venu, Soundasations began to thrive. I vividly recall Leeorah beating her shamanic drum and chanting before each gathering to "prepare the space". We would sit in a circle, and after a brief introduction (in which we would encourage listening and musical conversations rather than simply all bashing to the beat) the process would unfold, leaderless. And, unlike the common experience when amateur drummers get together (a solid tractorlike beat which goes on for hours), we found an organic coming and going of moods, rhythms, sounds and silences.

To help newcomers familiarise themselves with the evolving nature of Soundasations I put together a flier (opposite page).

Every now and then we had taped the sounds of our gathering and found pleasure in listening to the tapes afterwards. In October 1993, Anthony Banister recorded the first official Soundasations tape:

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*Sound and Dance Conversations
Improvised and Recorded Live
Saturday October 9th 1993*



SOUNDASATIONS

A short history.....

A group of likeminded folk have been meeting together once a month for nearly two years, to unleash their creativity and love of music and dancing. The groups have varied in size from two to thirty five people. A ritual space is created in which to celebrate and exchange non-verbally with each other in a meditation of sound and movement..

Recorded by: Anthony Banister at Mosman Community Centre on the 9th of October 1993. There were 35 participants.

For further information call Leeorah (02-901-4845)
or Rosey (02-816-4884)

SOUNDASATIONS

Produced by NANOTECH

In 1994, Leeorah left Sydney for Byron Bay. During that year, Alex had started coming to our gatherings and gradually Alex and I became a couple. So when Leeorah left, Alex naturally became the new co-caretaker with me, and he has been ever since.

Sound and Dance Conversations

"SOUNDASATIONS"

Announcing our next Music And Dance Group Improvisation
Gathering ...

Saturday July 9
6-8 pm

Mosman Community Centre
cnr Myahgah Road & Short St, Mosman

As usual we'll be grateful for your donation of \$3 to cover costs. Our intention is to have these Gigs on the second Saturday of each month from now on. We're also planning to have more regular outdoor gatherings on the fourth weekend of the month, (possibly on a Sunday afternoon), after having such a good time at both Cooper Park and Somersby Falls last year, Lane Cove Park in January and Balmoral island in February.

Still on sale are copies of our own Soundasations tape - expertly put together by Anthony Banister - take a piece of the action home with you!

Over the page is some background to what, perhaps, these evolving gatherings may be about. If you invite friends along, perhaps this can serve as an introduction...

Any questions? Call Leeorah (901 4845) or Rosey (816 4884)

Sound and Dance Conversations

“SOUNDASATIONS”

We'd like to share with you the history of these gatherings...

Once upon a time there was a small group of likeminded folk that wanted a place and time in which they could unleash their creativity and love of making Music And Dancing*. These GIGs rapidly became a space for our whole selves, “shadow” included (at that stage the acronym *MAD was rather appropriate!). The evolving role of “Soundasations” seems to be as a ritual space in which to celebrate and exchange non-verbally with others of our “tribe”.

In this “sacred” space we create:

- * everyone is a music maker and dancer (not just the trained performer)
- * the full range of expression is OK, from soft to loud, quick to slow, controlled to free...
- * “sacred” means both earthy and ethereal, allowing both polarities of contraction and expansion
- * group rhythm can support individual improvisation and self expression

For this adventure in freeform expression to work in large groups:

Listening to each other is vital... and we can leave space for this by alternating sound and silence so that not all of us are constantly making sound - LESS IS MORE, especially if you find yourself blessed with a loud instrument which can dominate the space. (BOOM BOOM!)

Watching the dance... the sound makers can be open to the flavour of the dancers, so that they are feeding back what they see to create a loop which unites and envelopes us...

Feeling for the mood...sometimes the group mood can change rapidly, needing us to be responsive; that is the beauty of Soundasations - it is a living non-verbal group conversation with no one person leading us, using performing arts without the traps of “performers” and “audience”. What happens evolves out of who we happen to be that evening...

We'd love you to come and participate in this experiment in group ritual, sensitivity and non-verbal communication... an exciting... evolving... urban... shamanistic... healing... celebration of life!

Join us!

Leeorah and Rosey
Current caretakers of Soundasations

✿ Outdoor Gatherings ✿

Middle Head picnic (Oct 27 1991)

Our outdoor gatherings began with a playful windy day picnic at Middle Head, on the old military site with labyrinthine-like bunkers and round canon mounting platforms. Leeorah videod some of our wind-blown scarf dances, and in the background one can hear some chanting from deep in the dark dungeons! (Too dark for me after someone mischievously blew out our candles!)



Greendale Park, Greenwich (July 31, 94; Sept 25, 94; 24 Jun 95; Nov 16, 1997)

Dean found us this site, to which we still return. It has a fireplace at the centre of log benches and is surrounded by bush, far enough from houses to be tolerated by the locals. Dean would bring firewood and set up the fire for us. I have visions of us drumming, singing, and dancing around the fire after sharing our picnic dinners.

(This site has a special significance for me as I remember first sharing a picnic rug with my friend Alex here. Alex became a co-caretaker of Soundasations when Leeorah moved to Byron Bay, and he has since become my partner. In '97 we celebrated Alex's birthday at one of these gatherings with sparklers)



Cooper Park Woolahra (Dec 18, 94; Nov 95; Dec 96)

Magic nights under the stars surrounded by trees. Our circle became a space for shaman-like drumming and swirling dances - we were free to unleash our natural creative forces and dwell in this lush place like a tribe-for-the-night savouring some ancient communal memory .



Centennial Park (Feb 18, 95)

For the first time our gathering became "too big". Many new friends of friends came and our circle was so large that the rhythm at one end was different from that at the other end!

Reminiscences - Outdoor Soundasations

By Dean Cooling

After the first one I went to at Somersby Falls - organized by others, we decided to arrange our own. With some apprehension (I hope enough people will show up, and they blend well together, hope it doesn't rain etc) we handed out the flyers, stuck a few up and generally spread the word. Mostly they began in early evening and went till we'd had enough - at venues around Sydney that we'd just chanced upon and thought appropriate. ie: somewhat sheltered by trees, grassy and flat and maybe with a central area to light a wood fire, and away from residents who may object to such ritualistic revelry.

Of course, everyone was welcome, from littlies to biggies, those that had some musical experience and those that hadn't, anyone who wanted to have the experience. Sometimes the event coincided with a birthday, which we honoured, or may have been to show our respect to the earth and its creatures during the solstice, or possibly an end of year celebration.

Food and drink were welcome additions and mostly people brought their own or a little to share. As with the indoor soundasations the evening generally started slowly as people took time to relax and feel comfortable expressing themselves in front of others. But as the night went on, and especially after it became dark we let go of our inhibitions more and more and our expression became freer and more natural.

Usually these events were well attended and it is such a great feeling being outside, close to nature, being able to watch the stars, the wind in the trees, clouds, the flickering firelight, and the twinkling eyes of friends, new and old.

In winter and summer we shared these nights - sometimes a lone flute would be all that could be heard, sometimes chanting with many voices, the didgeridoo could be heard with its primal drone, drums of course, of all kinds, shakers, gourds and anything else that could make a sound. It was beautiful to watch the dancers by the fire at these times too - and I always find movement spurs the musicians to give a little more and in greater harmony.

People came from all over to these outdoor gigs and new friendships are made. A new Japanese friend of mine came to one and expressed that it was one of the highlights of her visit to Australia. A friend from Czech Republic also enjoyed one of these evenings. It is also a good time to reconnect with friends that we don't see very often and there is plenty of joyful sharing. Sometimes there were those who needed some extra care or healing and there was time and space for this too. I've practised my shiatsu a few times here.

One doesn't need to be an expert to organise or be involved in these gatherings. Just a bit of sensitivity and appreciation of life and music. I'm asked from time to time "When are we going to have another outdoor one?" We don't do them often enough but we do come away nourished in our spirits and senses when we do.



An outdoor gathering, perhaps Cooper Park?...starting in the light...

...and continuing into twilight and darkness...



✿ Offshoot: The Ommlets/AUM-LETTS ✿

Soundasations spawned a performance group. The beginnings are described by Jonathan Rottanburg:

"It was the second Saturday evening of the month, Soundasations had been really alive and there were a few, about eight people left chatting. Someone began to drum a simple rhythm, very quietly. The rhythm was catchy, and one by one all of us joined in. We went on to make music which was celestial, it was on another plane, we were playing the music and being played by the music, and the lines between were quite blurred. After I don't know how long, it could have been five minutes or a half and hour, we gradually came back to earth, the energy was very high and an excitement filled the group. I don't remember exactly who suggested the idea of forming a group, but no sooner was the thought out and ideas began to fly, possible names, possible formats, possible this and possible that. Eventually the AUM-LETTS was settled on and a short while later we were booked for our first gig at the Subud Hall in Newtown, The rehearsals were a process unto themselves, discussions about whether the piece was too structured or not structured enough, personal conflicts, artistic conflicts, Stuff all over the place. Finally the day arrived and all 13 of us took our place on the tiny stage. Well we played, and the audience enjoyed. During interval we received praise and enthusiasm and I for one came home that night feeling full of warm fuzzies. The group has changed since then; just as the parent, Soundasations is different each time, depending who joins in, so the child, THE AUM-LETTS shares the same phenomenon. As the Buddha said "Change is the only constant." The AUM-LETTS remains in the wings, ready when the opportunity calls forth, to once again engage in the process of not only making music, but quite a bit more. LONG LIVE THE AUM-LETTS.

Note: The name AUM-LETTS was created with the meaning that we, the members were not the Great AUM (as in GOD) but rather smaller versions of the divine thus the LETTS part of the name."



The AUM-LETTTS continued...

Our performances were journeys through improvisations and songs held together by "timelines" that had emerged during rehearsals. These rehearsals were our growing edge because we deliberately wanted to be true to the spirit of Soundasations by having NO LEADER. This meant we began to learn how to let go of our preconceived notions of what should happen, and instead let that evolve gradually as each of us chipped in with ideas. This continues to excite me: how do we encourage the creative ideas to emerge and develop without jumping in and squashing what we disagree with?

One day at a rehearsal we pooled our philosophies - what we felt the Ommllets was about... (it is interesting that we still have several different spellings for the name of our group!).

The Omlettes - Our Stories

"...If we can do it, anyone can..."

"...having fun being part of something..."

"...playing music to convey feelings..."

"...loose structure important..."

"...doing what we do best, which is listening and communicating with each other..."

"...looking for myself, my potential through music..."

"...about a cultural heart, beating away, but lost..."

"... a musical journey across a landscape - what is music?..."

"...amateurs - don't have to be professional - everyone can have a go..."

"...feeling rather than serious..."

"...people with diverse backgrounds playing instruments not necessarily indigenous to them..."

"...making music, creating a harmonious whole from different parts of us..."

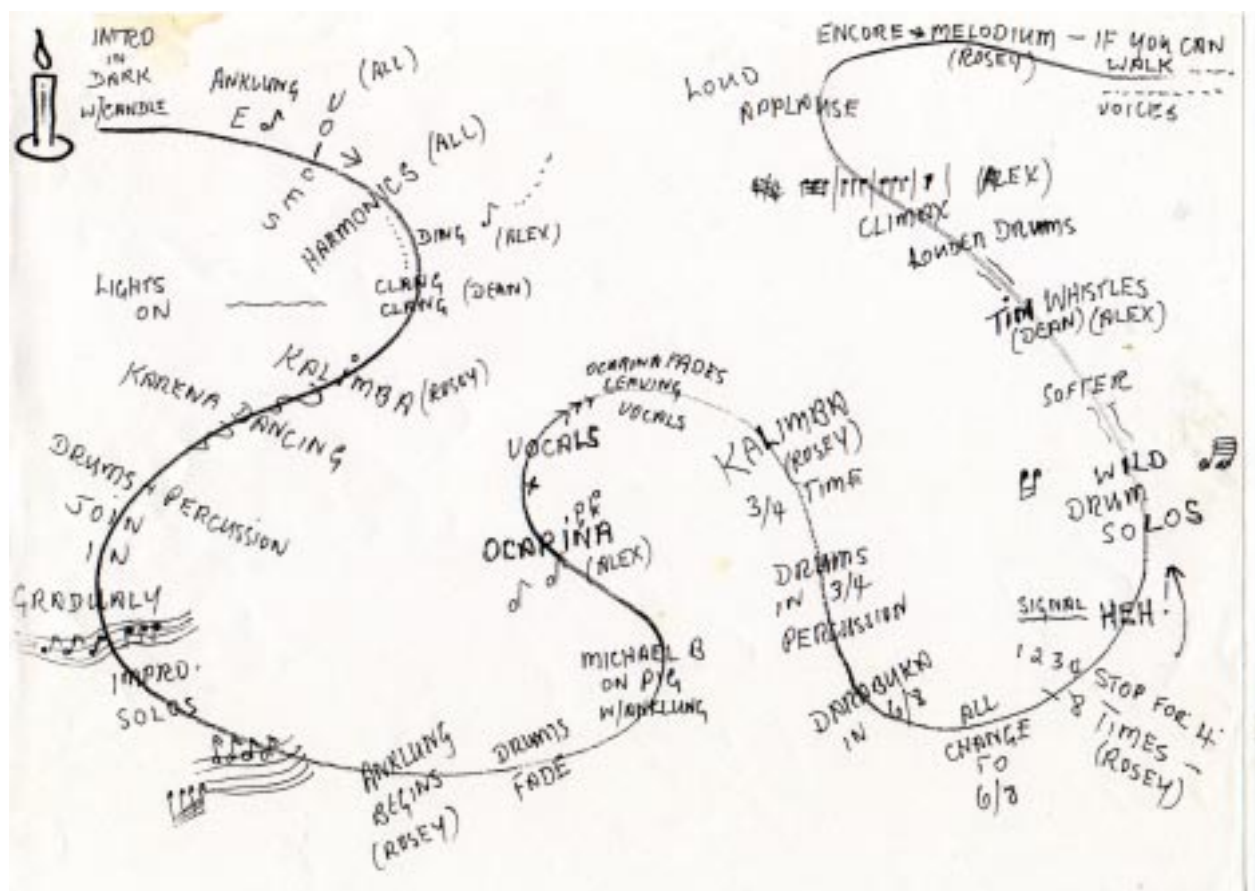
"...a tribe of multicultural Aussies looking for a musical identity - we want to reclaim music making for the people, not just professional musicians..."

Ommlets performances:

At Music Cafe Dec 10, 1994; Aug 5, 95; Dec 9, 95)

Music Cafe was a regular performance venue for budding artists, and Ulli scared us all by announcing that she had booked us in - ALREADY!

Below is an example of one of our timelines, in which we began with all the lights turned off. I remember the pregnant moment when we tried in vain to signal that it was time to turn the lights back on! Another of our Music Cafe gigs was memorable because Ulli got lost and just made it to join in on the performance! We had tremendously supportive responses from the audiences at Music Cafe.



The Ommlets...

At Leura (Spring 95)

We busked at the Leura Spring Festival and then posed for a group shot:



At Wollombi Folk Festival (Sept 1, 96)

This performance actually began outdoors with the sound of a conch shell booming across the festival fields, and our dancers leading the unsuspecting audience into our barn for a feast of Ommlets...



✿ Soundasations Spirals Outward ✿

Periodically some members of the Soundasations community took the spirit of Soundasations out into the wider arena:

Forest Rally (Sydney Domain, Feb 19, 1995)

Carrying our drums off the stage into the march, we led a chant:

*"We are the people,
this is our land;
to save the forests,
together we stand."*

*We are the people,
this is our land;
to save the forests,
it's in our hands."*



Soundasations goes to the Transpersonal Conference (Jan 26, 1996)

An evening of music and dance improvisation held in the main lecture theatre at Macquarie University (twenty years earlier I had sat here listening to psychology lectures - quite a contrast!).

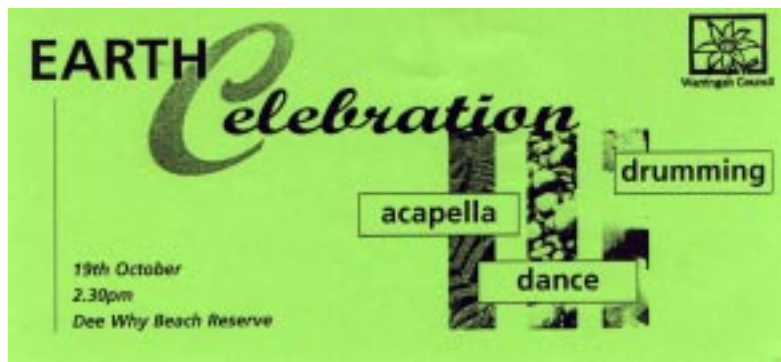


Cromer Community Centre Wellness Fair (May 19, 1996)

Members of the audience were invited up onto the outdoor stage to jam with our percussion beat - adults were reluctant but the kids loved it!

Dee Why Community Arts Performance (Oct 19, 1997)

We drummed and danced in the park beside Dee Why beach in an event organised by Yvonne Hall called "Earth Celebration".



Communities Making Music ('96/'97)

John and Alex and Rosey wrote to several local councils offering to start music and dance improvisation gatherings in other locations. We created the name: *Communities Making Music*, and the flier opposite. However, it seems we did not strike a chord with the councils, and Soundasations remained "one of a kind".

Communities Making Music

For the last few years, Mosman Community Centre has been the home of an exciting form of community art...

One Saturday night each month, people come from both sides of Sydney Harbour and sit in a circle. Some are musicians, but most of us wouldn't call ourselves that. Some of us bring our own instruments: drums, flutes, percussion, guitar... Others use instruments from our collection of standby's. By candle-light, we begin to make spontaneous music. No one leads, yet our music has coherence and beauty because we listen carefully to each other. People often find themselves singing. Eventually, as the rhythm builds, the music invites some of us to dance.

The dancers interact with the music makers and each other. It is like a group conversation without words.

That is why we named these gatherings

"Sound and Dance Conversations"
or **"Soundasations"** for short.

Occasionally, we also hold them outdoors in a park.

Some of us have been coming for years.

Often people bring friends, partners, children. Word has spread so that on an average evening there might be 20-30 of us. When asked what these gatherings mean to them,

participants say:

- they love being able to be creative, to just freely improvise without any set structure;
- they enjoy the sense of community and sharing;
- they feel an ancient,

Earthy quality of the ritual,

perhaps missing from ordinary life;

they are pleased when they can move through their personal fears about singing or dancing in a nonjudgemental atmosphere;

- they keep coming because it's such fun!



* Soundasations moves to Scots Kirk *

Our last gathering at the old Mosman Community Centre was in December 1997, as the building was due for partial demolition and renovation. Alex and I scouted around and found a hall at Scots Kirk, a church not far from the Community Centre. Despite our worries that Soundasations wouldn't survive the move, it recreated itself with the influx of energetic newcomers, and some of the "old regulars" came back as well.



One night was particularly memorable for the crazy antics of the adult "kids", much to the amusement of the youngest participant!



In June of 98 Leeorah and Judy came to Soundasations during a visit to Sydney (they both live in northern NSW now). We worked out that they hadn't been since 94-95. It was great to have them back to share another gathering, and the music we made that night was especially magic. I taped the first 90 minutes - and it got even more exciting toward the end, with lots of fast drumming and dancing.



Deano made his debut as a free-spirit dancer extraordinaire that night:

After years of providing the rhythms for others to dance...



...he received an invitation he couldn't refuse...



...and dance he did!



What was special for me that night was the acknowledgement that we'd kept the spirit of MADGIGs - Soundasations alive for so many years, since that first evening in 91 when we had the idea. It has kept evolving of its own accord without us trying to control it, and here we were experiencing that same spontaneity of self expression that we had craved in the very beginning.

✿ Other Perspectives ✿

Neils Ashby

Dear Rosey,

I was talking to my new partner the other day and trying to describe what Soundasations was about.

For me it was (is) a sacred space where I'm supported to DARE to Express - some times good, others not always happy.

I like very much that whatever happens is generally OK; not always though: in the early days when MADGIGs was open to friends some people didn't get what the space was about and took advantage of it and ran riot.

So various people would introduce newcomers to what Soundasations was about: Listen to what's happening, join in and don't override the main theme; ride the wave, allow the rise and fall of the tempo.

For me Saturdays, 2nd each month, were kept for exactly that. It always took effort as I worked at the markets doing massage so I'd arrive wired and tired; sometimes, more often than not, I'd muster up the Qi to get into it and overcame my tiredness.

I like that people basically come for the music and self expression and talking/social was not the main reason for meeting. I feel a spiritual egregore has been developed over the years that's special to the Hall - the energy stays there or we reinvoke it each month. Circles are powerful in their dynamics. There are no leaders - we are all equal. To take the centre of a circle was and is a challenge for me, all that energy that is potentially available.

I enjoyed very much, (once I got over my fear of seeming a big head, etc), playing and moving, antagonising, dancing with friends and strangers.

I moved a lot of the time from spirit, ego as little as possible, embarrassment sometimes and fear, with the hope I would overcome it. More often than not I left satisfied, happy, self expressed and grateful to the Universe and the hall organizers for providing the SPACE.

Outdoor venues I was more often than not dissappointed as the Soundasations Space didn't happen - no HALL, many different types of people, there to drum heavily and party.

Cheers guys

I'm going to start a Soundasations here in Thames - much needed as it's a rural backwater,

Thanks Rosey and Alex for the special space.

*Love
Neils*

Michael Williams (Mangalpuri)

Dear Rosie & Alex,

Thanks for the letter - it was good to hear from you, and a little surprising to receive your letter here in Rajastuan. Maybe Saliha had mentioned? I've been here about one year, will probably be back in Australia for Xmas.

So I could say it was Soundasations that landed me here in an ashram in Rajastuan. I now see Soundasations as a spiritual kindergarten. I don't believe any sort of spiritual discipline can be successfully undertaken without first opening the heart. In some way most of the people attracted to Soundasations are seeking their god, or inner spirit. Maybe seeking for ways to unlock the cage and to be free. It is one thing to read the scriptures or the Vedas or Bhagavad Gita etc, but somehow for me I simply needed a place to unwind first. Soundasations provided for me a chance to touch - or actually to see that, yeh, I did have music and dance inside. Having found that space, I went seeking for a Master, a tradition, something based on a long line of discipline, but Soundasations provided a very important first step.

I have had the great fortune to meet several great yogis here. Shanraracharya of Madras Matua being one of the more famous ones. One thing you first notice about these men is a great sense of joy, ebucence, peace. But strength and discipline. It is no good to the world or to yourself just reading scriptures, meditating, and becoming as dry as a stick.

So in retrospect this is how I now view Soundasations. Say a big hello to any of the regulars that might still be coming. Leora? Saliha? Deetree? Caroline? John? It would be fun to come again if I am in Sydney. I think you guys are doing good work. You are following you hearts and you have your discipline. I think this is how the life should be.

Hari Om,

Mangalpuri (spiritual name - mangal = divine happiness
puri = peace)

Betty Hickson

1997. *A year of revelation for me.*

As a new one to Soundasations gatherings. For me this year has been of much excitement as I had been searching for some way to express my love of music, and something I never expected was that I would love the drum - now with encouragement from Rosemary and Alex I have been able to channel my energies into the joys of drumming and to share this joy with others.

As a newcomer to this group I have been impressed by the warmth of the welcome and feel very comfortable in such a friendly creative atmosphere. Each time I go to the gatherings I look forward to the joys of the night for each one has its own?The character of each night unfolds as it comes alive with spontaneity, enthusiasm and freedom as we interact, explore sounds, movement and respond to it all, and most of all enjoy ourselves.

It is great to know that you can do whatever you wish: chant, sing, dance, play, watch or listen - in fact express any mood of emotion you may be feeling, and when the night is over you would like to sit down and start all over again. For me the Soundasations gatherings are not to be missed. I am looking to 1998 and thank you R & A.

Leeorah Hursky

The concept of Soundasation arose when 4 of us with a passion for expression wanted to let out that passion. Expressing in a non conformist way allowing the wilder aspects of self to dance and drum and let the tribal out. Especially in the city it is a great way of letting out and communicating with a group. Good on ya Soundasations. Keep going!

Ellin Krinsly

Dear Rosey,

*It was a beautiful gathering at the park in Greenwich for Soundasations and the atmosphere with the candles was full of feeling - and the hearth in the centre had a magic quality. Arie and I loved the warmth and friendliness of the people too. Here are a few photos from an early MAD GIGs. My memory is of your love of music and the delicious instruments you brought and how that brought out the ...(musical note) in people. I'd love to come to the next Soundasations in nature.
Cheers, Ellin.*

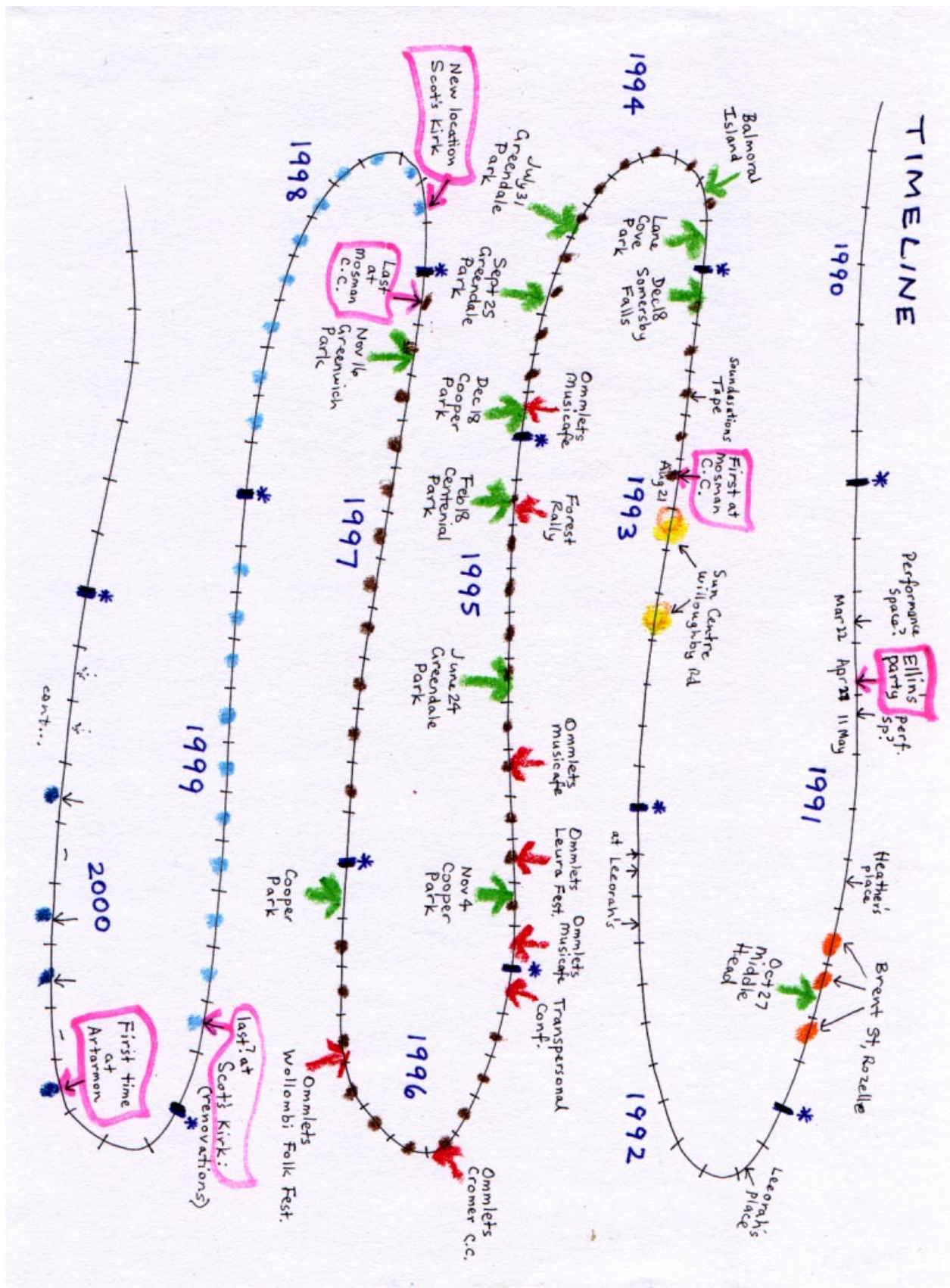
* Mapping the Evolving Process *

I have used old diaries, photos and the Soundasations written material collected over the years to reconstruct a timeline...

As of October 2000, Soundasations is now over nine years old. It has gone through several eras: Its first two years as MADGIGs, mostly in people's lounge rooms; then four and a half years at Mosman Community Centre, two years at Scots Kirk, and currently in Artarmon. The richest phase so far, in terms of spinoffs and associated creative events, was the phase at the Mosman Community Centre: the red arrows denote Ommlets and other spinoff events; the green arrows mark the outdoor Soundasations gatherings.

* The tapes *

Over the years I have periodically taped some of our music making and listened to the tapes afterwards. Apart from that first recording by Anthony Banister, however, we have not attempted to produce multiple copies for sale. It seems to me that the Soundasations experience is multimodal - ie, involves all the senses - and taking just the sound to listen to it afterwards can't hope to capture the magic of what it feels like to be enveloped and participating in the sound and movement.



* The Meaning? *

A Research Study of Personal Meanings

In 1995, as part of my Graduate Diploma in Music Therapy final year research project, I asked regular participants of Soundasations to fill in a questionnaire. I asked them to give me three key words or phrases to describe why they participate in this gathering/ what role Soundasations was playing in their lives. I also asked them to *"describe for me one (or more) memorable moment that has stayed with you from your experience of these gatherings"*.

The responses to these questions were then grouped into clusters of phrases/words with similar (according to me) meanings. The five main reasons people seemed to enjoy Soundasations and keep coming? (In order of popularity):

1) IMPROVISATION - *"playful, creative, exploratory, free, spontaneous"*

It is obviously of great importance to participants that there is no structure imposed from one person or from some social tradition which limits their expression. This has actually been one of the hardest features of the gatherings for the "caretakers" to maintain, ie, to not interfere when we think things aren't going the way they "should". However, our ability to set up the gatherings and then "step back" is apparently one of the chief reasons they are so appealing to the participants.

2) COMMUNITY - *"communication, group interaction, kinship, tribal, connecting"*

Perhaps Soundasations has been replacing the extended family or tribe which is no longer part of our nuclear family-based society.

3) TRANSPERSONAL EXPERIENCE - *"transcending, being danced, being with the flow of music, sacred, ancient, ritual, archetypes, singing the Earth"*

These spiritual/transpersonal descriptors were the most common ones used to describe memorable moments. They seem to reflect an organic reconnection with the essence of embodied spiritual experience.

4) PERSONAL GROWTH - *"expression, contacting my deeper self, facing fear, allows the cloud of repression to lift, safe, healing experience"*

5) BEAUTIFUL FEELINGS - *"fun, joy, fantastic, spectacular, pulsations of the heart, ecstasy,"*

Over the years, since this study, my continuing observation of the meaning and function of Soundasations is that it has been evolving as we evolve. At first, the emphasis was on unleashing our pent up self expression (our personal "shadows") and exploring our individual creativity. Later, it became the place to try on and act out archetypal characters with each other, reconnect to our animal nature, blur our self-other boundaries, explore the transpersonal. However, Soundasations on any one occasion is a process that emerges from who has come along that evening, and with its constantly shifting attendance, it continues to adapt to the needs of the moment...

Key Words

playing / play / playfulness
spontaneity / spontaneous
improvising
creativity / creating / create /
creative
freedom / free
exploration / explorers / explore
kinship / community / socialising
group interaction
warm friends
meeting with friends
communicate / communication
participation
ritual / ancient Earth
energies
sacredness /
sound rolling over-through me

express / expressive / expression
contacting my deeper self /
allows the cloud of repression
to lift / loosen up /
healing experience / time out /
facing fear
safe

pulsations of the heart
joy / fun

Memorable Moments

playful
spontaneously
improvised

with one or other people
group of people singing
in harmony and with
like minds & spirits /
this is my tribe / tribal /
connecting
everyone clicks onto this
archetype / singing the
Earth / jungle / ancient /
ritualised / channeling
living Earth energies /
knew instinctively
being danced /
being with the flow of
music

ecstacy
beautiful feeling
fantastic / spectacular

Musical Analysis

As part of my research project, I analysed the music from three Soundasations gatherings that had been taped. I found that the most commonly occurring rhythms were in 4/4 metre (16 out of 32 tracks), followed by 6/8 or 12/8 (7 tracks); 3/4 was rare (only one track). Other commonly occurring musical features were harmonic toning episodes and group catharses. Quiet, arhythmic instrumental pieces occurred in two tracks, and were also the first stages of pieces that later evolved into rhythmic 4/4.

The prevalence of certain rhythms could simply be due to their relative ease and familiarity among our participants, none of whom are professional drummers. However, one finding of this analysis that continues to be my experience years later is the prevalence within each gathering of the two extremes: the harmonic toning and the cathartic drumming. These seem to me to embody the polarities of order and chaos, or the Apollonian and Dionysian modes of expression. As a group we seem to need to express both these extremes, (neither of which usually find expression in daily life), almost like a monthly "purge and pilgrimage ritual"!

* Related Gatherings *

The labyrinth and toning group

Another gathering with considerable overlap (in terms of those participating in both groups) was the harmonic toning group which met fairly regularly on Thursday nights in the Uniting Church in Crows Nest (Holtermann St), during the same period that Soundasations was meeting at Mosman Community Centre. Its peak time occurred when the church pews had been taken out and the floor was covered with a gigantic labyrinth (a copy of that in Chartres Cathedral) painted on canvas.



We would enter the labyrinth in silence, one by one, making our way slowly in our own time through its twists and turns, a process which fostered the taking on of a meditative state. Once in the centre, we would sit in a circle on cushions, and when everyone was settled and ready, we would begin to tone, at first in unison, then creating natural harmonies and dissonances. Sometimes a didgeridoo gave us a rich foundation.

The soundscape would evolve and reverberate in the beautiful church; in the same spirit as Soundasations, the sound came forth without trying or judging, and blew us away with its beauty and depth. People would report later that they felt communion with others, healing, and altered states of awareness. Sometimes someone would suggest a theme for our harmonic toning, such as healing for a sick friend, or mindfulness of an endangered species. If group members felt ill or in need of nurturing, they would lie down in the centre of the toning circle and let the sound wash over them. It could tangibly be felt to be a sacred space that we created for each other.

On one memorable evening, an electrical storm began during our toning, and suddenly, the church must have been struck by lightning! What a shock! One particularly sensitive participant took a while to recover from that.

After the labyrinth was removed and the pews reinstalled, we continued to meet, albeit less regularly; John Butterworth has continued to hold toning circles at other venues since then. Ulli Hansen also continues to host music and toning evenings at her house.

✿ Related Gatherings ✿

Kinetoning-soundancing groups

While living in Philadelphia in 1989-90, I had been inspired by the example of *Group Motion*, a weekly gathering in Philadelphia started by Manfred Fishbeck, in which musicians played the improvised dance they saw in front of them. A feedback loop was thus created between the dancers and musicians, and this often set up an amazing spiral which led us into zones of unexpected creativity.

So, in '91 and '92, when *MADGIGs* started attracting people who wanted to experiment with sound and movement, I took the opportunity to facilitate some exploratory groups in what I was calling "*Kinetoning*" and "*Soundancing*"*.

"*Kinetoning*" was the name I gave to the process of converting the movement one sees into vocal sounds. This could be done in pairs, with one person the mover and the other the sounder, or in groups, with a mover in the centre and the kinetoners creating a soundscape out of the movements they were seeing. It was an amazing experience to be the mover in the centre - every movement was echoed back to you, every nuance of your expression, so that you felt really "seen", and the usual "self vs other" distinction was no longer tangible.

"*Soundancing*" was the name I gave to the more common process of moving the sounds one hears. Again, this could be done in pairs or as a group - the sounder in the centre directing the movers around her.

When kinetoning and soundancing processes were combined, they formed a loop, and no one was leading the process. I called this "*Looping*"! In looping, boundaries became fluid and one's "self" expanded playfully to include the other. (The same experience comes in a form of T'ai Chi push hands, when two people are connected through their hands in motion, and no one is leading.)

We had fun playing with this idea, meeting twice at Brent St in Rozelle, and once or twice in a converted church in Turrumurra. I remember some hilarious attempts to apply the same principle of converting shape-dynamics to other modalities, such as smellodancing and tastotoning when Ari had brought along some chocolates!

*(Why am I so Loopy? As a child, I was used to converting sound into movement in my improvisations in Bodenwieser Dance classes; later, I got the job of improvising the piano accompaniments to the dancers' acting out of stories. In the eighties, I became once again intrigued by the idea of translating the dynamic forms of movement to sound, when I met Manfred Clynes and his ideas of "essentic forms" - the sound-shapes of emotional responses. Clynes had developed a method for converting the expression of an emotional state, through finger pressure, into an oscilloscope trace, which could then be converted to sound and recognized by listeners as representing the original emotions. I was excited by the possibility that not only a handful of emotions, but the whole subtle repertoire of human expression could undergo such intermodal translations; I had envisioned an electronic-computer instrument which I called the "Soundancer", which would convert the movements of a dancer directly into sound. Primitive versions of this instrument have been developed, but I await with eagerness a method for converting the subtle movements of, say, T'ai Chi, or an Alexander Technique lesson, into sound feedback. However, the ability of the human voice to translate the richness and subtlety of human movement is presently still more interesting to me than a mechanical version. Hence my current attraction to Intermodal Expressive Arts Therapy as taught by Paolo Knill in Switzerland).

✿ Soundasations is Continuing ✿

In November 1999, we lost our venue at Scots Kirk, due to renovations and then a prolonged legal dispute about the building. We have continued nevertheless in a new hall in Artarmon, which is actually better because it's smaller with a good vibe. March 2001 was a very special Soundasations: our **TENTH ANNIVERSARY**, and although we hadn't advertised this fact, lots of the old gang turned up out of the blue! Typical synchronicity.

It is an honour to be part of the caretaking of this community ritual. It has given us so much nourishment and renewal over the years - long may the energy continue!

...and continuing? (2006)

After a few good years in the Artarmon Uniting Church Hall, we moved again, due to sale of the hall and subsequent renovations, to the Chatswood Youth Centre for a while (May 2003). The fluorescent lights and drink machines hummed and the lino floor would have invited rap dancers if we'd had some...but the atmosphere lacked something. Although we had been promised that we could come back to Artarmon when renovations were complete, unfortunately, the new owners of the Artarmon Hall changed their minds about letting us back and informed us of this in March 2004. Homeless once again...

Then we finally (May 2004) found another great hall in Northbridge War Memorial Hall - and, as usual, some of the "old crowd" returned just by "coincidence", including Leeorah, to initiate this new hall with a lively celebratory evening. However, after less than a year, we began to have problems with the council caretakers of this hall, first with a draconian electronic key system that didn't work (locking us out to drum in the winter cold!) and then with a mysterious chemical treatment which stank so much and, despite airing, for so many months (again leaving us to hold Soundasations on the lawn outside the building), that we gave up in disgust in November 2005, in our fifteenth year.

Back to Merle's and Ulli's lounge rooms...where to from here? Has Soundasations run its course? Have the councils become more interested in insurance and keys and creating upmarket art galleries instead of community centres which foster community groups that aren't "incorporated" and don't charge high fees? Am I becoming a grumpy old woman?

Whatever eventuates, Soundasations has been an ongoing source of creative replenishment for us and I hope you've enjoyed reading this little potted history.

There is also a short article about Soundasations in *MCA (Music Council of Australia) Music Forum*, 8(2), December-January 2002, p34-5.

Epilogue

I would like to leave you with a story, *Rosebud*, that came to me in September, 1991, when MAD GIGs had only just begun. (Spontaneous stories have been part of my own healing journey, but that is the subject of another book: *Stories from Out of the Blue - Spontaneous Self-healing Fairytales for Grownups* - see the following website <www.zulenet.com/ecosomatics>)

I had the pleasure of reading this story at a MAD GIGs gathering at Leeorah's house after a night of music making and dancing, with everyone lying on couches and rugs and cushions...

Rosebud

Once upon a time...

...there was a little girl called Rosebud who felt decidedly cross. She had been sick in bed for a whole week and now that she was up and about again, everything seemed difficult, as if the whole world was against her. She felt tired, irritable, and crosser and crosser as the day went on.

"I hate everything!" she began to grumble. "I hate the world!...I hate everybody!...I hate myself!...I hate everything!" And her mood became blacker and blacker, and her world bleaker and bleaker.

Finally, as she was about to burst with frustration she broke away from the chores she was supposed to be doing, crying "I DON'T CARE ANYMORE! I HATE EVERYTHING!" And she began to walk.

She didn't know where she was going at first, she just walked away, and away and away. Guilty thoughts about what she should have been doing followed her for a while, but she chased them away, saying: "Go away and LEAVE ME ALONE!"

"But we're just doing this for your own good!" the guilty thoughts would say. They were persistent.

"Leave me BE!" she finally began to wail, collapsing in a heap. The guilty thoughts must have felt guilty for upsetting her so, because they decided to go back and leave her to herself.

After a while she felt herself to be finally in a quiet place. She got up again and walked on. The path grew narrower and climbed ever upward. Up ahead she realised her destination was the top of the tallest ridge in her county, and she felt buoyed by the anticipation of the view. With each step she felt less burdened by her hostile environment.

Soon she was joined on her walk by her animal friends: Willie the Wombat, Kanga and Joey, and Cuddles the Wise Bear. She didn't mind them coming too, as they were good listeners and never asked her to do anything she didn't want to do.

It wasn't long before Rosebud and her animal friends reached the top of the ridge. The view was exquisitely beautiful - on one side lay the river valley and the town from which she had come, on the other, a narrow belt of green forest met the vast blue ocean, and a yellow strip of sandy beach tickled their borders.

Rosebud sat...

After a while she said to the others: "I still feel GRRR! I wish I could feel something else!"

Cuddles the Wise Bear asked, "What made you walk away from your chores?"

"I hate everything. I hate everybody. I hate myself," she replied, with more sadness than anger now. She began to cry and the animals formed a big group hug around her and stroked her hair.

"It's OK, Rosebud. It's OK, to hate everything. And everybody, and yourself," they whispered.

"Well, I don't hate all of myself," she conceded. "I like the part of myself that took me away on this walk."

"And, and I don't hate Everybody and Everything," she said. "I don't hate Nature and the Earth, and I don't hate you animals, or the other animals for that matter. It's just people I hate."

"I see," said Cuddles the Wise Bear. His big brown eyes twinkled and we all know something good is cooking when that happens... Rosebud and the others waited. You can't rush Cuddles the Wise Bear.

Then, with a slow blink, the Wise Bear asked, "Rosebud, do you know where people came from?"

"Well...no...not really," she said.

"Well a long time ago there was a tribe of ancient peoples known as the Rainbow people. This tribe lived in a fertile valley not unlike the one we see below us, except in those days they were the only people in the county and numbered a total of thirty.

These were such ancient peoples that they had not yet learned to speak in words. They gathered food and made light clothes and shelters for themselves, and several generations: grandparents, parents and children of a few families in the tribe lived harmoniously.

Not that they never got upset. Of course, life being as untamable as ever, there were numerous frustrations, fears and sadnesses for the tribe members to endure. But they were a close tribe. They had rituals.

At the end of each day, as the sun set, they would gather in a circle around a fire, and begin a rhythmic chanting. Although the tribe had no words, they had lots of sounds, and lots of dances. But the most important part of this nightly rite was that each member of the tribe would have a turn, in the midst of the rhythm circle, to dance and sound their day. And the tribe would echo it back.

Now if one had had a good day, one would jump and shout or skip and the whole tribe would join in one's frivolity. If one had an angry, frustrating day, one could stomp, scream, and the tribe would echo with more stomps and screams. If one was sad, one could wail and all would wail. And if one was frightened, all would shiver and quiver back. After so much skipping, crying, quivering and stomping the people of the tribe considered their emotions were no longer owned by them, but by the whole tribe, and so they were free to feel something different the next day. In fact, once this ritual had been performed it didn't occur to them that they should still hang on to any particular emotion except contentment and sleep, as they cuddled up close for the night."

"What a beautiful ritual," said Rosebud. "But where did it go, what happened?"

"Well, gradually, as people learned to use language, they would start asking angry people, "Why are you angry?" "Who are you angry with?" "What is the anger about?" And dozens of other questions would begin from each answer. The people became so caught up in their stories and dramas about where, why, whom and how, that they forgot to dance and shout and the whole ritual was forgotten.

It only remains as a vestigial greeting: "How are you?" which is not even meant to be answered most of the time."

"What a pity" said Rosebud.

"The worst part being," said Cuddles the Wise Bear, "that people now think they own an emotion once it visits them, and they attach it to things and people around them so that they will be sure to find it again in the morning."

"You mean, like my: I hate everyone, everything and myself?" gasped Rosebud suddenly.

"Yes, Rosebud, little one."

"But that's how I felt," she said, confused. "I hate everything! I hate everybody! I hate..."

"Exactly - simply: I hate," said the Bear.

"Oh, I see..."

"Now, let's get back to basics, even further. What is: I hate?" he asked.

She closed her eyes and felt the feeling in its raw essence still warm within her.

"Grrr! Grrrr!! Grrrrr!!!" she began to stomp, and the "I hate" became a rhythm in her whole body.

The others followed her around in a small circle. all echoing "Grrr! Grrrr!! Grrrrr!!!" Stomp. Stomp.

And as she stomped and raged she took in the ocean and its pounding waves... and the river with its swift currents... and the ridge with its rocky boulders. She took in her stomping pals. She took in all those "people" down there in the valley she "hated". She took in the millions of sad, angry, frightened people who lost their precious ritual because they got caught up in their words, and who thought they owned their emotions instead of letting them loose at the end of each day. She understood...

...Rosebud

And soon she was in a cosy group hug with her animal pals with grateful tears in her eyes. She looked at Cuddles the Wise Bear.

"One day, when I grow up, I'm going to join a group of people to be a tribe just like the Rainbow people," she said. Their eyes sparkled together.

And..... She DID.



Soundasations

Sound and Dance Conversations: The Story of an Evolving Community Improvisation Ritual

This is the story of a remarkable monthly gathering that took place in the northern suburbs of Sydney from 1991 to 2005. Started by a small group of women friends who were sick of being in audiences watching others make music and dance, it gradually evolved into a leaderless ritual "jam session" of spontaneous communal play with sound and movement.

"It has gradually dawned on me that the creativity of human spirits engaged in the process of freeing themselves cannot be confined within a narrow definition of "therapy".

When our culture (with its labels of performer/ audience, therapist/ client, clergy/layman) failed to provide us with what we needed, we invented our own vehicle for growth, self-expression and spiritual renewal..."

R.J.Faire (2002) MCA Music Forum 8/2, p.35.

