

JAZZ PIVOT TO ASIA

by Ian Muldoon*

The greatest advance in music in the past 200 years has been the power and impact of rhythm - would you believe that? Cecil Taylor believes this advance remains undervalued and under-appreciated despite rhythm and blues, despite rock and roll. Because Taylor was artistically so deeply committed to improvised music, dance and later poetry, his comments may have referred to “serious” music.



Cecil Taylor, pictured in Prague in 1999: he believes that rhythm is undervalued and under-appreciated...

In the 1940s I felt that power through the music of Fats Waller, the Mills Brothers, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington. The sweeping intense melodies of Tchaikovsky and Sibelius, the structure and pianism of Beethoven, the delight of Mozart, and the beauty of Bach and popular music, and folk music and much more sang to me too but not with the same power. The music called jazz, with its focus on individual expression, has fused the powerful complexities of African rhythms with

**Ian Muldoon has been a jazz enthusiast since, as a child, he heard his aunt play Fats Waller and Duke Ellington on the household piano. At around ten years of age he was given a windup record player and a modest supply of steel needles, on which he played his record collection, consisting of two 78s, one featuring Dizzy Gillespie and the other Fats Waller. He listened to Eric Child's ABC radio programs in the 1950s and has been a prolific jazz records collector wherever he lived in the world, including Sydney, Kowloon, Winnipeg, New York and Melbourne. He has been a jazz broadcaster on a number of community radio stations in various cities, and now lives in Coffs Harbour.*

western music and western instrumentation and other world musics especially rhythm and percussion instruments into an unparalleled artistic, intellectual and emotional beauty.

Is it because this music mirrors the human in bringing together the force of the physical - the beating heart, dancing, diving, running, - with the spiritual and mental - thinking, imagining, dreaming? Does jazz mirror the drive to move the body as worshippers are driven to move in the African American churches? Is it beyond strange to see a thousand people sitting as if frozen listening to "classical" music? Are the thousands of young grooving audience members at (say) a Stones concert more "in tune" with life needs? Has Western music and intellectualism moved humanity into a sense of stasis where we lay around eating, ingesting mood enhancers and looking at screens? Both Thelonious Monk and Cecil Taylor would sometimes use dance as an expression of feeling during performance. Astonishing to consider how Taylor's piano trio is such a triumph in regard to rhythm and percussion using the most classical of instruments.



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Perhaps Cecil Taylor represents one of the most advanced artistic explorers in this regard. As a classically trained pianist building on the percussive approach to the instrument in the style of Duke Ellington, Thelonious Monk and Bud Powell, a typical Taylor wholly improvised performance would last about 40 minutes - a notable document is the *2 Ts for a Lovely T*, a 10-CD live album recorded during 27th August and the 1st September 1990 at Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club in London featuring the group known as the Feel Trio, with Taylor on piano, William Parker on bass, and Tony Oxley on drums. Such wholly improvised works of a piano trio - let alone other instruments - are rare, but Taylor's orchestral piano begins the live

performance with a single note and the piano is the centrepiece of that especially percussive and rhythmic improvised musical journey. It's constantly amazing what a piano trio - three artists - can create.



The other two members of Cecil Taylor's Feel Trio: William Parker (above, acoustic bass), and Tony Oxley (left, drums): the piano is the centrepiece of an especially percussive and rhythmic improvised musical journey... OXLEY PHOTO CREDIT STUART NICHOLSON

The 35-year-old Australian piano trio The Necks has a similar performance wholly improvised methodology to that of Cecil Taylor. Taylor tends to begin with a single note on the piano. In contrast any one of The Necks may begin a performance and their focus is more on explorations of rhythm than on explorations of the orchestral reach of the piano. The moments, even minutes, of silence at a Necks performance before that first note is struck or plucked helps to sensitise the audience for what is to come. It's not a familiar composition we are to hear, not the reworking of a standard, nor one rehearsed by the group beforehand, but music created in the moment.

The Necks are Chris Abrahams, piano and Hammond organ; Tony Buck on drums, percussion and electric guitar; and Lloyd Swanton on bass guitar and double bass, and is not dominated by one instrument - it is a democratic or collaborative trio if you will. A significant but not exclusive musical goal is the rhythmic explorations of the three instruments.

Swanton explains: "For about the last two decades, one thing we have very much been working with is the possibilities of the three of us all existing in different rhythmic planes - each one of us sustaining a self-contained motif, with the object being the sum total of the layered, ostensibly unrelated parts."(21/9/21).



*The Necks, L-R, Tony Buck, Lloyd Swanton, Chris Abrahams... This group is not dominated by one instrument - it is a democratic or collaborative trio if you will.
PHOTO COURTESY FACEBOOK*

This piano trio has gained an international reputation but Swanton's group The catholics is noteworthy for its extensive use of a wide range of percussive instruments including cajon, kendang, drums, and glockenspiel among a range of others. The music of The catholics has been one of the finest modern instances of exploring the magic of rhythm over the past 30 years using a wide range of rhythm instruments from a number of different cultures. Even so it's astonishing the impact the piano trio has had and continues to have in modern jazz and especially the way in which the reach of the piano provides so many possibilities for the artist.



The Dena DeRoseTrio (above): their arrangement of the standard "When Lights Are Low " is compelling...

The Dena DeRoseTrio, with the leader piano, vocal; Martin Wind, bass; and Matt Wilson, drums, on the document *Live At Jazz Standard, Volume 2* (2007) has a compelling arrangement of a standard *When Lights Are Low* (Carter/Williams). It is a very fine example of the piano trio and horn (voice) - an allegro take on the number featuring a vocal followed by scat in perfect harmony with piano notes and percussive melodic piano and bass and drums grooving like a very well-oiled Kansas City (of course!) locomotive (so to speak). A thrilling performance. But the Asian influence on the piano trio, and jazz and musicians, has been substantial. One doesn't have to look far for other notable instances in the piano trio format but with a pivot to Asia.

The trio Tethered Moon comprising Masabumi Kikuchi, piano; Gary Peacock, acoustic bass; and Paul Motian, drums; interpreting *Misterioso* (Monk) on the document *Tethered Moon: First Meeting* (W&W) 1997 recorded on 20th October 1991, engineered by Yoshiaki Masua, and produced by Masabumi Kikuchi, is a brilliant example. The percussive harmonic rhythmical powerful piano of Kikuchi, the melodic resonant bass of Peacock, and the delicately complex percussive fills of Motian create a minor masterpiece that would have had that modern master of rhythm Thelonious Monk, dancing, humming, maybe even laughing with pleasure. It's a great moment.



Masabumi Kikuchi: his interpretation of Monk's "Misterioso" is a brilliant example of the Asian influence on the piano trio...PHOTO COURTESY NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

Note if you will the use of the quintessential European instrument the piano used as a percussion instrument, and the quintessential African instrument, the drum. Note that the musicians' backgrounds include Japan, Armenia and the USA. Peacock also practices daily meditation rooted in Asian philosophy:

I think music actually prepared me in some ways in coming to zazen, because it was the only window in my life where I felt kind of a spiritual or religious sense. I looked at that, the essence of that and it was just bare awareness. Zazen is the same thing; it's a heightened sense of awareness. My daily mantra is a quote from my Zen teacher, John Daido Loori, Roshi. I asked him one time, "What is Zen?" He said, "Just do what you're doing while you're doing it." It's so simple, but it's so hard!" ("Gary Peacock: Zen Bass", article by Florence Wetzel, All About Jazz, 13/7/07).

The Japanese pianist and composer Hiromi Uehara (26/3/79) leads a piano trio which has included former Who drummer Simon Philip on percussion, and Anthony Jackson, former Steely Dan member on bass. It emphasises spectacular performance and startling energy. In the long tradition of music as entertainment, the hugely talented Hiromi has the goal of spreading joy through music. She opened the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Philips performs on a massive drum kit typical of rock - it includes two bass drums, seven tom toms, a gong drum, octobans, and three snare drums. Jackson pioneered a six-string contrabass guitar. As a child prodigy Hiromi has never forgotten the smiles generated every time she played as a tiny girl and she wishes that happiness to prevail always in performance. Her music blends jazz, classical and rock to spectacular effect.



Japanese pianist Hiromi Uehara: her trio emphasises spectacular performance and startling energy...

Pianist Satoko Fujii recorded the 32-minute track *Toward Go West* (Fujii) from the album of the same name on the 3rd November 1998 in New York with Mark Dresser, contrabass; and Jim Black, drums. It is especially well recorded by Ed Reed with a particular focus on the bass which is central to the melodic and harmonic elements throughout the performance where the pianist draws out the percussive and orchestral nature of the piano in the style of Cecil Taylor. Beginning in an extended silence within bass notes opening the work, it is a beguiling and ultimately satisfying listening experience.



Satoko Fujii: she draws out the percussive and orchestral nature of the piano in the style of Cecil Taylor...

Jazz is the quintessential inclusive music and if you can play it you are welcome to join the band, as it were, regardless of your age, education, heritage, religion, culture, or dress. The qualifying phrase “if you can play it” is one hinting at the fact that to play it well takes more skill, talent, imagination, and dedication than almost any other music. It is the musical expression of the individual voice married to a highly developed skill of the chosen instrument. Many of the instruments central to jazz and its complex rhythms are in the percussive school, and percussion has been central to cultures not only in Africa, but China, Japan, India and Indonesia. Indeed the Indian developments in rhythm and especially melody have been as advanced as any other culture.

In some ways, Asian culture has been involved with the evolution of jazz from its beginnings but exploded after WW11 during a period from 1945-1950 when the USA occupied Japan. Despite rumours to the contrary, Australia before its Federation has been influenced by Asian culture, especially Chinese, for nearly 200 years. Perhaps the finest recent Australian musician is Linda May Han Oh, composer, bassist, of Chinese heritage born in Malaysia on the 25th of August 1984 and raised in Australia. Her accomplishments already mark her as one of the most highly regarded improvising artists in the world, both by audiences and established masters like Pat Metheny and Dave Douglas. Oh’s graduation thesis from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) was the classical Indian music rhythms in Dave Holland’s solos.



Linda May Han Oh (above): her graduation thesis from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) was the classical Indian music rhythms in the solos of Dave Holland (below)...OH PHOTO COURTESY VILLAGE VOICE; HOLLAND PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ REFLECTIONS



I grew up in Sydney in the village of Manly Vale, adjacent to the famous seaside resort Manly and home to the Royal Far West Children's Health Scheme established in 1925. Manly was so named by Captain Arthur Phillip for the indigenous people living there, stating that "their confidence and manly behaviour made me give the name of Manly Cove to this place". These men were of the Kay-ye-my clan (of the Guringai people). Manly was established as a municipality in 1877. In the 2011 census nearly 30% of residents had no religion. On the Manly ferries there was a sign advertising Manly as "seven miles from Sydney and a thousand miles from care".



Captain Arthur Phillip: he named Manly for the indigenous people living there, stating that "their confidence and manly behaviour made me give the name of Manly Cove to this place"...

Manly Vale was a sort of afterthought, an appendage or little sister to her Manly big brother. We lived on the highest point of Manly Vale at No 12 Parkes Street. In the 1940s at the bottom of Parkes Street on the eastern side of the hill just along to the south on Addiscombe Road, opposite Burnt Bridge Creek, was a market garden which Chinese national Kong Sun and two other males managed. At the bottom of Quirk Road on the northern side of the hill, to the east along Campbell Parade near Manly Creek, was a market garden managed by Gee Lee Ah Mee which had been leased to him in 1895. Same-day-cut vegetables were in at least one instance delivered by horse and cart with the gardener sitting asleep on the shafts. When the horse stopped he'd wake up, deliver his wares, then resume his slumber. He travelled from Manly Vale to Newport delivering to shops on the way. My grandmother warned me to refrain from stealing watermelons from the gardens as the Chinese were known to cook and eat children's livers.

From about 1855 and the gold rush more than 100,000 almost exclusively male Chinese came to the Australian colonies either as free immigrants or indentured labour (a euphemism for slavery with some small amount of money thrown in). Half

had returned by 1900. Many others remained to establish market gardens. As very industrious, law-abiding citizens they may have been seen as an economic threat or simply as alien “others”.



Chinese immigrants working on the goldfields during the gold rush...

In any case the Immigration Restriction Act 1901, also known as the White Australia Policy, came into force in 1901 and remained until 1958. The “yellow hordes” were not welcome in what some may claim was for the first half of the 20th century the largest gated community in the world. Our “less civilised” Asian neighbours, near and far, were not impressed. Japan’s militarism did not help alter the image Australians had of its near neighbours, who were satirised in films, comics and books as buck-toothed, shortsighted, and barbaric. In September 2021 in Coffs Harbour a young man of Chinese heritage efficiently delivers my *Sydney Morning Herald* daily in his nifty Toyota Echo as a second job.



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Although Australia's White Australia Policy was not fully dismantled until 1973, there remains a subliminal sometimes overtly racist prejudice towards Asia, especially the Chinese, now somewhat compounded by the assertive recent policies of President Xi Jinping of the PCR. This is despite the fact that Australia's prosperity has largely depended on our selling our physical country to China in the form of mainly iron ore and coal, and have it sold back to us in value added products from the underpaid labour of millions of Chinese workers.



Xi Jinping, pictured in 1972, aged about 19: now President of the People's Republic of China, his recent policies have been assertive... PHOTO COURTESY NEW YORK TIMES

Asian art and artistry is part of our culture and has been for a very long time. Some of the singularly important inventions of the civilised world were Chinese inventions including paper, printing, clocks, iron smelting, paper money, gunpowder, the compass and alcohol. Capitalism was an invention by the West and mass consumerism became the means by which millions were lifted out of poverty. Even so during the age of industrialisation China languished in agriculture and feudalism whilst the West exploited China's inventions through the rich products of its colonial empire: cotton, tobacco, rubber, wool, minerals, into value added merchandise.

The AUKUS 2021 treaty to provide Australia with nuclear submarine capability as defence against communism (China) is part of the present strategic zeitgeist USA "pivot to Asia". It is recognition that China with its 1.5 billion people is not just big but that it is poised to overtake the USA as the largest economy on the planet. Furthermore, like every powerful country before it - Britain, France, Russia, USA, Spain, Italy, Germany - it has some territorial ambitions. Well hello! For 500 years the West has pursued its Eurocentric interests, territorially ambitious agenda, colonising countries, teaching English or French at school as the second language, fuelled prejudices about "Asian slanty eyed devils", and generally thinking of inter alia Chinese as peasant farmers and cheap labourers beavering away in

factories assembling Apple products for the teenagers of the world. In fact China has been a culturally rich and inventive society for thousands of years.

In jazz the xylophone/vibraphone in its various configurations and ancestry has been around from about 2000 BC (China) as well as known in Africa, India and South East Asia (gambang). Its importance in jazz cannot be overstated: Red Norvo, Lionel Hampton, Milt Jackson, Don Elliott, Bobby Hutcherson, Gary Burton, Eddie Costa, Walt Dickerson, Jay Hoggard, Stefon Harris, and Joe Locke are some artists who have made serious long-term contributions to the music as masters of either the xylophone or vibraphone. Jack Brokensha, John Sangster, and Garry Lee inter alia have contributed to its serious musical presence in this country.



Jack Brokensha, John Sangster, and Garry Lee (above, pictured in 2015) have contributed to the serious musical presence of the vibraphone in this country...

In jazz my first encounter with references to China was a comment made by Eddie Condon who said, in reference to the bebop revolution, “Sounds like Chinese music!”. Next reference was a picture of Thelonious Monk wearing a Coolie’s hat. But it was the confluence of Asian film and Asian music that had quite an impact on music generally and jazz in particular from 1955. In fact, I hesitate to speculate so dramatically, but I posit that the cinema’s reach propagated Asian (Indian) music more effectively than ever before and that Satyajit Ray’s *Pather Panchali* (1955), made for US\$45,000, was the spark that lit the international interest in Indian music and culture not least in jazz. It was the first chapter in what became *The Apu Trilogy*.

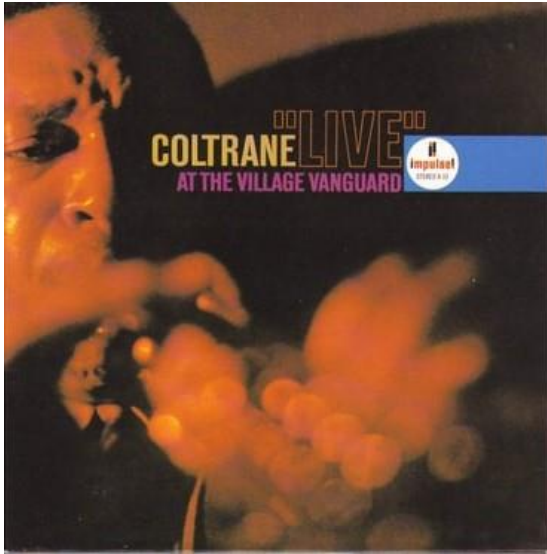
The soundtrack by Ravi Shankar to the widely acclaimed 380-minute masterpiece *The Apu Trilogy* (Ray) filmed between 1955-1959 revealed to millions outside Asia the charm, inventiveness, and beauty of Indian (Hindu) music. Its percussive and melodic beauty resonated profoundly to jazz musicians. The post-WW11 period was witness to a social and cultural revolution in the arts, especially cinema, being such an accessible public and powerful art, and jazz was part of that revolution.



Satyajit Ray (above): his masterpiece “The Apu Trilogy”, filmed between 1955-1959, revealed to millions outside Asia the charm, inventiveness, and beauty of Indian (Hindu) music. Ravi Shankar (below) was responsible for the soundtrack...



In 1961 John Coltrane on soprano sax; Eric Dolphy, bass clarinet; McCoy Tyner, piano; Jimmy Garrison and Reggie Workman on acoustic basses; Elvin Jones, drums; and Ahmed Abdul-Malik, oud; opened their historic three-night live gig at The Village Vanguard, New York, with the composition *India* (Coltrane). This moment was 50 years ago almost to the day. I play it as I write with its up-tempo rhythm, two pulsing basses, and powerful drumming by Jones throughout. The soprano sax enters in its lower register and a chorus of horns state the theme. The tune swings with melodic power and a long Coltrane solo featuring repetition and melodic invention with modal delivery similar to *My Favorite Things* (Rodgers/Hammerstein) powers through the middle section.



Eric Dolphy: in his bass clarinet solo he searches for the upper reaches of the instrument but returns to the affecting and memorable low end... PHOTO CREDIT VALERIE WILMER

In his bass clarinet solo Dolphy searches for the upper reaches of the instrument but returns to the affecting and memorable low end. Coltrane's second solo, perhaps inspired by Dolphy, reaches ecstatic expression and lifts Jones to another level of energy. A powerful opening moment to the historic 1961 gig which must have slowed the customers drinking. Perhaps they may have thought: "Hello, what have we got here?" After all the Kingston Trio had performed in the venue around that period within many other disparate entertaining groups. If patrons came familiar with *Kind Of Blue* and Coltrane on that album, this was another completely different experience altogether with instruments such as Middle Eastern oud, and classical cor anglais, bass clarinet and oboe.



Alice Coltrane: after John's death in 1967 she embraced Indian culture in a much more immersive way...

Coltrane's wife Alice worked with him from 1966 and, after his death in 1967, she embraced Indian culture in a much more immersive way, much in the manner that Coltrane himself had engaged with music and life generally with an intensity and focus. Following Coltrane's death Alice suffered a lengthy painful period which she described as *tapas* (Sanskrit). She turned to Hinduism and founded an Ashram and changed her name to *Turiyasangitananda*. She made albums based on Hindu music including *Turiya Sings* (1982); *Divine Songs* (1987), *Infinite Chants* (1990); and in 1995 *Glorious Chants*. Her documents *Universal Consciousness* (1971) and *Lord of Lords* (Impulse) 1973 may be considered the culmination of her devotion, at the least, the artistic highpoint of her music.

Putting aside the philosophical gobbledygook she embraced, which ignores the plight of women in Hindu society and the ugly caste system, her musical legacy in her 1971 document is considered to be an impressive one. In the 1973 document she sought to incorporate Indian classical music's drone centre into her work, and was literally obsessed with the timbral, chromatic, and harmonic possibilities of strings. Little is left to improvisation and the five-part suite is centred by *Excerpts From The Firebird* (Stravinsky). Some may find this work engrossing in its “classical” Third Stream ambition, others less so. Alice composed, arranged and conducted and is on piano, harp, organ, tympani, percussion; with Charlie Haden, bass; Ben Riley, drums, percussion; with twelve violin, six violas, and seven cellos.

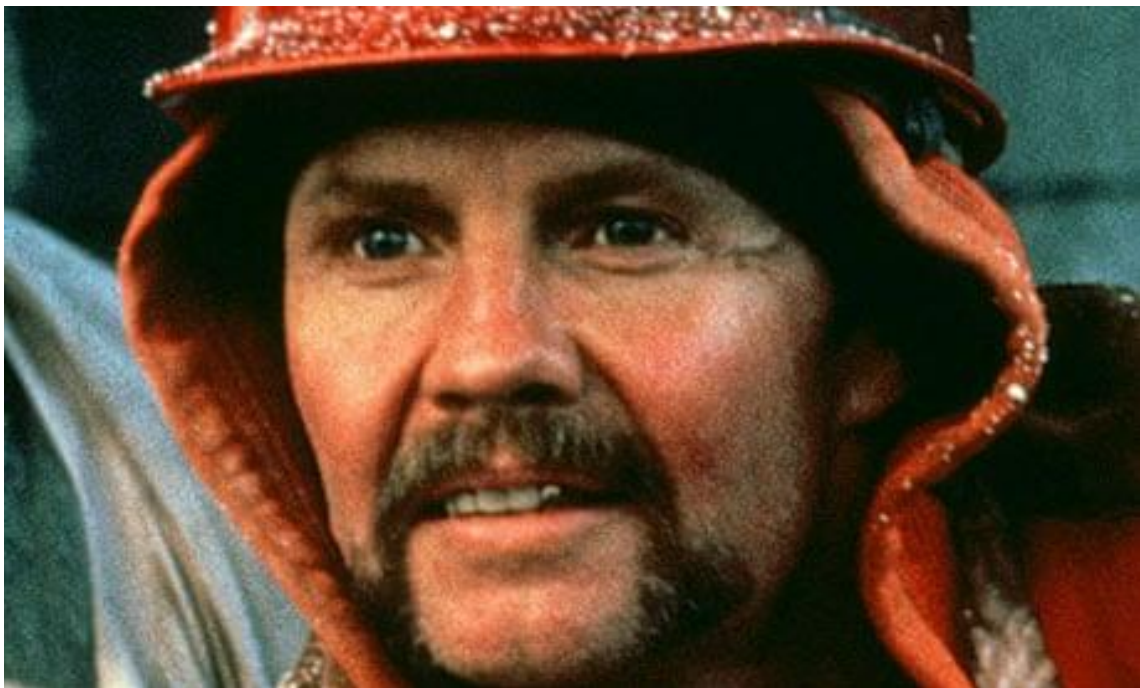
On *Universal Consciousness*, Alice composed and arranged the strings and played organ and harp. It has Jimmy Garrison, bass; Jack DeJohnette, drums; Rashied Ali, drums, wind chimes; Clifford Jarvis, drums, bells, percussion; four violins; Tulsī, tambourine; with transcriptions by Ornette Coleman. *Oh Allah* is a prayer for peace; *Hare Krishna* a mantra or chant; *Sita Ram* is a hymn; and *The Ankh Of Amen-Ra* a song to the glory of God. Percussion plays a major part in these works. To me the most musically appealing work is *Sita Ram* which has Alice Coltrane on organ and harp; Tulsī, tamboura; Jimmy Garrison, bass; and Clifford Jarvis, drums, bells and percussion. Her musical abilities involving larger works do not seem to match her ambition: personal enlightenment and honourable and spiritual “awakenings” don’t necessarily make for more resonant art however well-intentioned and sincerely felt.



But such Asian “spiritual” movements were very much of that time with thousands of Westerners departing for the mountains of India and Varanasi, with popular musicians such as John Lennon embracing the image and ideas(?) of Hinduism. The impact of these Eastern values and ideas may be seen in both music and literature: *Music for Zen Meditation* (Verve, 1964) is mostly improvised by Tony Scott on clarinet, with Shinichi Yuize, koto; and Hōzan Yamamoto, shakuhachi. As far as literature is concerned, the central idea of Robert M Pirsig’s book *Zen and the*

Art Of Motorcycle Maintenance (published by William Morrow, 1974) is that (referencing the notion of quality re Plato) to be fully connected and engaged in fixing that mechanical object was key to being at peace, and centred. There was no inherent beauty from nature for example that made it “superior” to the human manufactured mechanical creation. It made “take pride in your work” a philosophical mantra. My simplistic hint at the book’s “message” is no substitute for reading it.

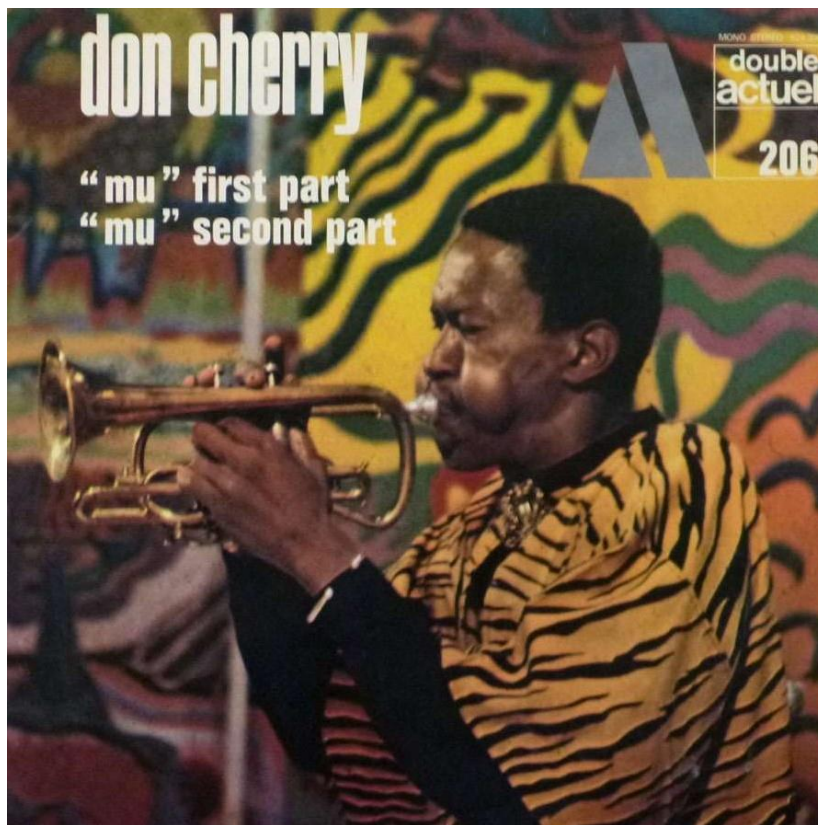
But in existentialism terms, there’s a very fine scene in the film *Runaway Train* (Andrei Konchalovsky) based on a screenplay by Akira Kurosawa, where the character Manny Manheim (Jon Voight) lectures the young idolising Buck McGeehy (Eric Roberts) (whilst together in a toilet urinal!) that he’d better stop wanting to emulate Manny's bank robbing exploits and think more about getting a job, a job job, in a bank maybe even as a toilet cleaner or his life will be wasted. And Manny explains that when his Bank boss tells him that he’s missed a dirt spot, an itty bitty spot, he should reply “Yes Sir!” and clean that spot, and rub that spot, and make that spot shiny and say “Thank you, Sir, is that good now, Sir” instead of spending his life robbing banks. The former means having a meaningful place in life, the latter means being divorced from life by taking other’s achievements instead of creating one’s own which are not all related to money.



The American actor Jon Voight in “Runaway Train”: he lectures the young idolising Buck McGeehy (Eric Roberts), whilst together in a toilet urinal...

If one feels Alice Coltrane’s ambitious explorations into Hindu music was not as artistically successful as its otherworldly expectations, or that Tony Scott’s dalliance into Buddhism was “interesting” but musically limited, there ought to be no doubt about the artistically satisfying, moving and beautiful document by Don Cherry known as *Mu* (the complete session) (Affinity 1991) reissued from Byg and recorded in Paris 22nd August 1969. Following shortly after the first Pan-American Jazz Festival in North Africa, Cherry recorded *Mu* with Ed Blackwell, drums, percussion,

and bells. Both Cherry and Blackwell were alumni of Ornette Coleman's small groups. Cherry managed to incorporate the influences of Gamelan music, Japanese Temple Music, Zen Buddhist chants, and African musics into what remains for me one of the high points of music that exploded out of the revolutionary sixties. It remains a remarkable musical suite of ten works and two medleys with pieces dedicated to pianist Dollar Brand and drummer Albert Heath. It is emotionally resonant, highly accomplished and a completely satisfying work of art and certainly a standout regarding the pivot by "jazz" to Asia.



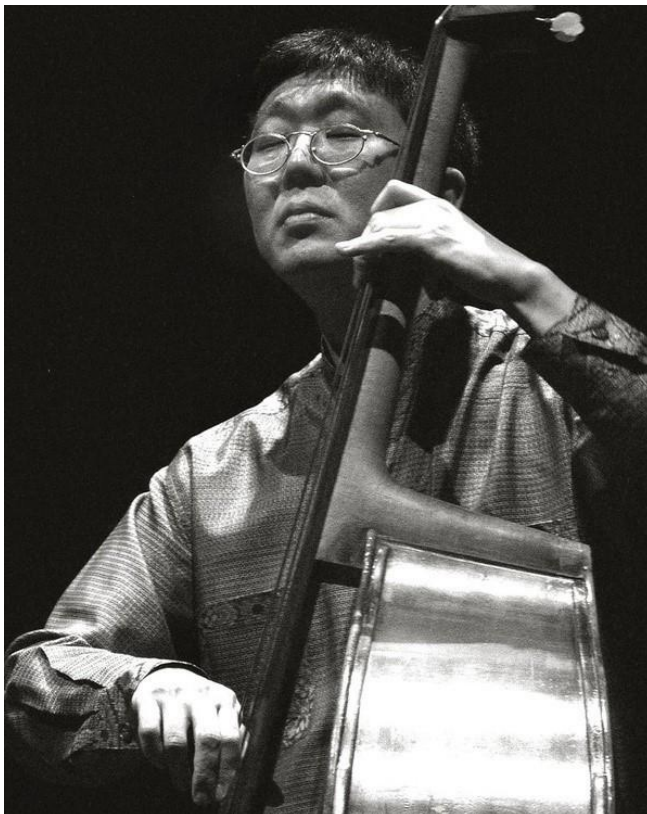
More recent jazz explorations into Asian culture include: Steve Lacy's duo performance *Shots* (Hatology 2015) recorded 15th October 1977 with Lacy, soprano saxophone and Masa Kwate, traditional Japanese percussion. Another is *For 2 Akis* (ECM 2018) recorded March 2017, by the Shinya Fukumori Trio. Apart from two standards, all works are by Japanese composers including the leader Shinya Fukumori, drums, who's supported by Walter Lang, piano; and Matthieu Bordenave, tenor saxophone.

Perhaps the most well-known Asian jazz musician is Toshiko Akiyoshi who was, in 1956, the first Japanese student enrolled at the famous Berklee School of Music. She married Lew Tabackin the American saxophonist forming the big band Toshiko Akiyoshi Jazz Orchestra featuring Lew Tabackin. More than 70 musical documents are credited to Akiyoshi and she has won dozens of musical awards including many from *Downbeat*. Japanese themes, harmonies, and instruments including the kotsuzumi, kakko, utai, tsugaru shamisen were part of her musical journey which was firmly jazz-based. My fondest memory is her fine solo performance as Volume 36 of the Maybeck Recital Hall Series on Concord which she recorded 10th July 1994 on a Yamaha S-400 grand piano.



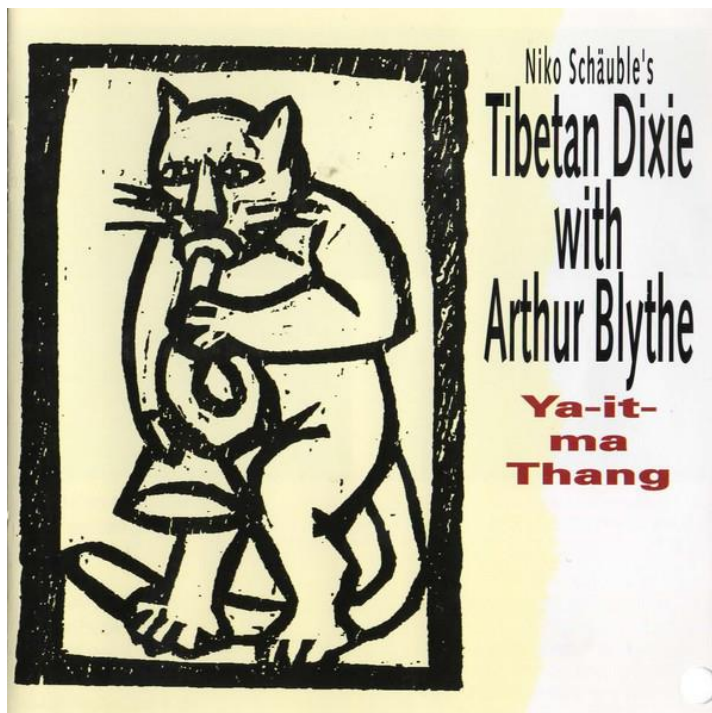
*Toshiko Akiyoshi & Lew Tabackin... PHOTO
COURTESY ENCORE MAGAZINE*

A major Japanese/American jazz collaboration has been the work of bassist Tatsu Aoki over a period of 20 years in Chicago. Instrumentation has included didgeridoo (Mwata Bowden); Chinese shenai (Bobbie Hunsinger); Korean Buk drum (Paul Kim); bamboo flute (Miyumi Aoki); and especially taiko drumming (unpitched percussion). It is this last that has tended to dominate the works with an insistent, somewhat metronomic, martial effect. Having said that, the improvisations over that rhythmic base have been creatively quite beautiful with woodwind player Edward Wilkerson Jr, cellist Jamie Kempkers, and baritone saxophonist Mwata Bowden among the improvisatory artists.



*Bassist Tatsu Aoki: taiko drumming
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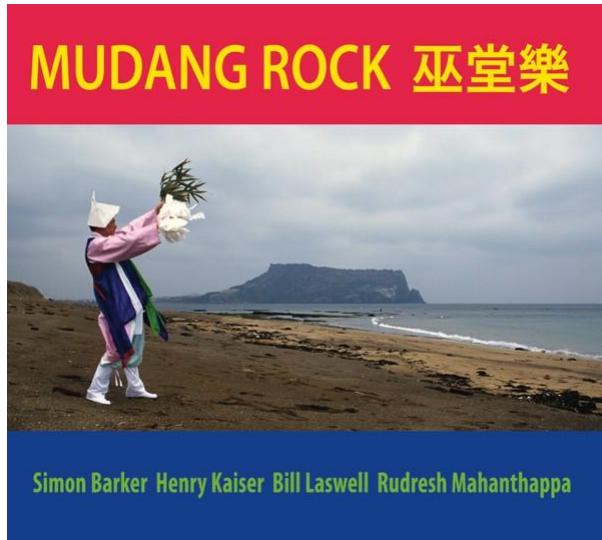
In Australia some notable “jazz” works include Niko Schauble’s Tibetan Dixie With Arthur Blythe on *Ya-it-ma Thang* (Trans, *Yes it’s my thing*) (Timeless 1992) recorded 2nd November 1992 inspired by Tibetan religious music with Arthur Blythe, alto saxophone; Niko Schauble, drums and percussion; Chris Skepper, trumpet; Scott Tinkler, trumpet; Simon Kent, trombone; Anton Delecca, tenor saxophone; Tim Hopkins, tenor saxophone; Paul Williamson, baritone saxophone; Stephen Magnusson, guitars and banjo; Philip Rex, double bass and tuba; and Ray Pereira, percussion.



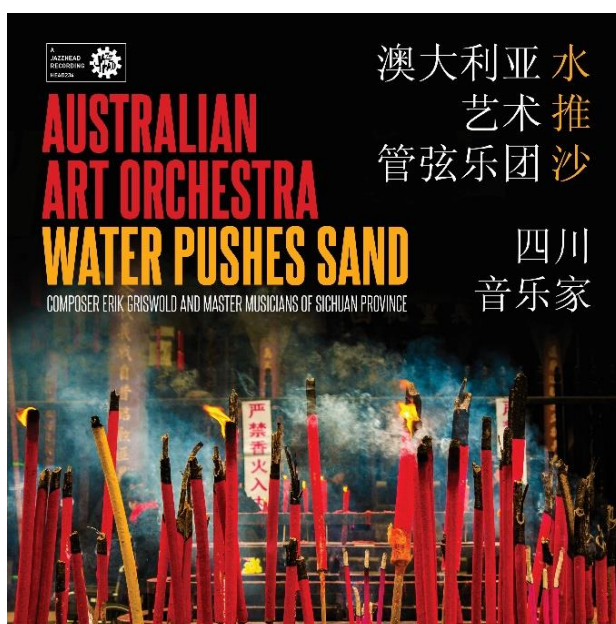
Others include the album *Chiri* (Narao 2011, Kinmara Records) with Scott Tinkler, trumpet; Simon Barker, drums; and Bae Il Dong, vocal, who is a Korean Pansori singer. Pansori was registered as the UNESCO's Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity of Korea. Percussionist Barker "saw ways of grafting jazzy flowers on to Korean roots".



And finally, *Mudang Rock* (Fracial Music 2017) with Simon Barker, drums; Henry Kaiser, guitar; Bill Laswell, bass; and Rudresh Mahanthappa, alto saxophone with Soo-Yeon Lyuh on haegum track 3, Tania Chen, piano track 4, and Daniella DeGruttola, cello track 4 and is music inspired by rhythms and “Spirit of the Korean shamanic tradition”.



An ambitious and major Asian/jazz work is from the Australian Art Orchestra entitled *Water Pushes Sand* (Jazzhead 2017). The first thing that must be said about *Water Pushes Sand* is that it spectacularly refutes the Eddie Condon sarcastic slight about “Chinese music”. In fact the engagement by the Chinese musicians, Chinese traditional instruments and folk musics have been to my (mainly) jazz ear seamlessly and beautifully artistically realised in a programme of jazz composed and arranged by Erik Griswold as if it were the most natural thing in the world. One example is *Bandong Chant* based on a Communist era work song which one would have thought was the antithesis of the nature of jazz. This work features the gu zheng (zither), percussion, Timothy O’Dwyer’s saxophone, and Zheng Sheng Li’s vocal in an up-beat tempo driving to an unmistakably and satisfying fine jazz climax.



The opening piece *Joy At The Sunrise* (Griswold) seems to feature the electronics of Peter Knight in the beginning with these sounds supporting a shimmering gong announcing Chinese language folk lyrics voiced by Zheng Sheng Li. An impressive sound collage follows with images of a waterfall of sound, birds, animals, the opening up of life with trumpet, baritone sax improvisations over the collage, ending with voice and a lingering acoustic bass note from Samuel Pankhurst. *Here Comes The Waves* (Griswold) has a strong repetitive rhythmic groove with the zither ascending and descending as if in reply. The up-beat melody is made by the horns with high pitched cries interspersed perhaps by the bamboo flute. The slower interval towards the end of the piece provides some pianism and haunting impressionism with silent moments broken by electronic sounds and a return to rhythm. The piece concludes with a single piano note from the leader.

At a tempo less than walking, perhaps *adagietto*, the acoustic bass of Samuel Pankhurst establishes and centres *Rivers of Bicycles* (Griswold) throughout. It's beautifully arranged and performed by all concerned, including the delightful trumpet of Peter Knight and bamboo flute duet with Shi Lei. The opening may be a lightly recorded street scene or electronics but it sets the atmosphere well. Melodically and rhythmically this is a warm, charming and heartfelt work which Griswold undervalues as "relaxed calm". It's a very fine instance of the entirely musically natural meeting between improvising artists of different cultures.



The engagement by the Chinese musicians, Chinese traditional instruments and folk musics have been seamlessly and beautifully artistically realised in a programme of jazz composed and arranged by Erik Griswold (left)...

In a similar tempo, *Forgotten Streets* (Griswold) is a striking even masterly instance of the universality of experience of childhood and of the music called jazz to communicate an atmosphere common to most - the simplicity, joyful freedom of the "common" where children play and adults converse and pass in community. My "common" was Parkes Street, Manly Vale which was unsealed until the early 1950s. In that half kilometre long street only three houses had occupants who owned a car, and there were numerous empty blocks including an abandoned quarry which was a useful site for tadpoles and frogs - and this only a few kilometres from Manly Village and Sydney Harbour. Cricket, chasings, rock fights, marbles, mud pie making,

skipping, firecracker night bonfires on a vacant block, playing Jacks using sheep's knucklebones, even talking and gossip were known to occur. I'm tempted to suggest this work by Griswold might also be titled *Unforgotten Streets*. As great as the invention of the automobile has been, its negative aspects have been profound in destroying the community and village aspects of life.

The work begins with the sound of sprinkling rain and the gu zheng (Chinese zither sounding much like the classical harp as played by Alice Coltrane) with echoes of lilting, tinkling, voices in Chinese almost musical but adding to the music in an evocative atmospheric way. A long impressive improvised zheng solo by Zhou Tao Tao responded to by occasional piano chords, after a simple repetitive motif suggests the simpler times of village and street life. The orchestral theme expanding climax raises to some piercing highs suggesting the end of a time and the music dies with the single sigh of a zither note.

Mapo Tofu (Griswold) as the name suggests is a spicy Sichuan food. This is a delicious up-beat romp with the baritone sax in conversation with the suona which Albert Ayler may have dug. *Remember Harry* (Griswold) is meditative and evocative composition with the acoustic bass and zither standouts. The eponymous final piece of the suite has the bamboo flute sailing over the chorus in a 3/4 jazz waltz as if singing the praises for the joy of living and Griswold reminds us of the blurry lines between our cultures.



"Mapo Tofu" is a delicious up-beat romp which Albert Ayler (left) may have dug...

Such a heartfelt and musically substantial work as *Water Pushes Sand* causes one to reflect once more on the role of art and the role of diplomacy in our culture. Our diplomatic service, our university "soft sciences" and arts, our foreign aid, our arts "industry" are all reduced to token support by the current Federal government to fund our bigger "guns" (like nuclear submarines) in order to make us "safe". Wasn't this the point and purpose of European nations preceding the "War to End All Wars"?
