

30 YEARS OF PILGRIMAGE: AUSTRALIANS AT THE KODÁLY INSTITUTE, HUNGARY

by Aleta King



Aleta King (second from right) and Jenny Gijssbers-Gillan (right) with friends at the Kodály Institute, Kecskemét, Hungary

As an Australian musician and educator I consider it a privilege to have been given the opportunity to study choral conducting and music pedagogy in Hungary at the International Kodály Institute for two academic years (2002-04). What began simply as reflective diary entries during this time eventually evolved into a Master of Music Studies thesis entitled *Australians at the Kodály Institute: Reflections on the Journey* held at the Armus library, School of Music, University of Queensland. This paper is based on an excerpt of the thesis.

Genesis of the study

Whilst a student of the Kodály Institute, the author, by chance, discovered an archive listing of all Australians who are past students of the Kodály Institute¹. This prompted the author's curiosity about the reasons why so many others were inspired to make a similar journey to Hungary. The purpose of the resulting study was to investigate the motivating reasons for Australians to pursue studies at the Kodály Institute, Hungary, reflect on the nature of these

unique experiences whilst in Hungary, and discover the effect these unique experiences may have had, both personally and professionally, upon returning to Australia.

The ensuing study involved sending questionnaires to a sample drawn from the archive listing. The participants selected had to be Australian by birth or by citizenship, enrolled in a full academic year program (for which the Institute accepts only post-graduate students), spread equally across the thirty years and across all states of Australia, and actively involved in Australian music education for substantial periods throughout their professional career. Those selected were enthusiastic in responding, and the responses led the author to reflect upon personal motivating reasons for pursuing this journey to Hungary.

What was the reason for this steadfast dream, sustained for ten years, that eventually led to separation from home and all that was familiar in order to embark upon a journey to Hungary - the outcome of which was unknown? Why was

it so important that the author made this journey destined to be fraught with trials and tribulations whilst passing through strange lands to which they did not belong? And, what did the author make of the anticipated token of dispensation - wisdom, grace or gifts - at the 'source' or 'sacred' centre? Finally, how did this token of the journey transform the author's identity and influence the future upon returning to their homeland?

Upon deep reflection on questionnaire responses and the author's own experience, and reading extensive research, the notion of pilgrimage has emerged, both in terms of the author's own journey, and in terms of the journeys of the other selected past students (referred to as 'participants' in this study). Thus, while the data that has been collected has been initially viewed from a musical and educational standpoint, it is apparent that this data may also be seen from the more anthropological perspective of pilgrimage.

Defining pilgrimage

At this point it would seem appropriate to define what is meant by the term *pilgrimage* in order to gain a deeper understanding of why this term is relevant to the context of this study. A broad survey of the literature would suggest that the concept of travel for a sacred and/or secular reason appears to be a recurring historical phenomenon.² A review of academic research and writing reveals that the study of pilgrimage falls under the discipline of anthropology and more specifically the study of ritual. Owing to its ritualistic nature, pilgrimage is considered to be one of the various 'rites of passage'.

This now familiar term originated with anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957) and eventually became the title of his published work in 1908.³ Essentially, van Gennep was interested in the analysis of ceremonial patterns connected to certain significant events that he refers to as rites of passage in the life of an individual.⁴ Appropriate examples of rites of passage might include the following events: birth, baptism, graduation, initiation, death and most significantly pilgrimage.⁵ He concluded that each rite of passage comprised the following three stages: preliminal rites, liminal rites and postliminal rites.⁶

Continuing on from van Gennep, British anthropologist Victor Turner (1920-83) and his wife Edith⁷ further explored the notion of liminality and in particular that of the liminal or transition stage which Turner describes as 'betwixt and between'.⁸ American mythologist

Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) was influenced by both John Bunyan's three-stage journey in *Pilgrim's Progress* and van Gennep's idea of a three-stage rite of passage. In part one of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* Campbell's archetypal hero follows the three-stage pattern of adventure appropriately renamed departure, initiation and return.⁹ Contemporary schools of thought¹⁰ (Coleman, Eade, Tomasi, Swatos, Badone & Roseman et al.) attempt to reinstate the importance of the study of pilgrimage by exploring its relevance to the concept of 'cultural mobility' that moves modern pilgrimage away from its traditional religious roots into the secular realms of tourism.¹¹ However, further exploration of this link between pilgrimage and that of tourism is outside the scope of this study.

Perhaps the most concise yet descriptive explanation of pilgrimage is illustrated through Catherine Bell's definition that highlights the nature of the three (before, during and after) stages and the importance of the token of dispensation at the sacred centre:

"... setting out from home and a familiar world, the pilgrim endures the trials and tribulations of the journey, passes through strange lands to which he or she does not belong, and finally arrives at a place considered holier than others, a sacred centre where wisdom or grace or gifts are dispensed. Securing a token of that dispensation, the pilgrim returns home bearing the transformed identity of one who has made the journey, touched the sacred objects, and received heavenly boons for the effort."¹²

Parallels between pilgrimage and this study

Seen in this light the concept of pilgrimage is certainly applicable to the context of this study as there are obvious parallels between the anthropological definition of pilgrimage and both author and participants' descriptions of the journey undertaken. Firstly, the idea of van Gennep's preliminal, liminal and postliminal stages of a pilgrimage directly parallels that of the three stages (before, during and after) of both the author and participants' journeys. The purpose of this study was in fact to highlight the unique nature of these three stages of the journey. Secondly, the idea that it was beneficial to go back to the perceived 'source' emerged as a recurring theme in the research findings and shares similarities to Bell's concept of a sacred centre where wisdom might be obtained. Thirdly, Bell's token of dispensation is evidently the Hungarian folk song *Esti Dal* for the author. Lastly, the notion of a transformed identity is analogous with both the author and participants'

responses to how they had changed personally, musically and culturally as a result of their journey.

Implications from the research findings

These parallels will be explored in greater detail through the following analysis of the implications from the research findings.

Three stage journey

The idea of pilgrimage resonates well with the overarching three stages (before, during and after) of both author and participants' journeys. Reflective comments about the *preliminal* (before) stage of the journey indicate a common willingness among the author and participants to abandon 'home and a familiar world' in favour of a journey into the unknown. Secondly, in response to the *liminal* (during) stage of the journey both the author and the participants freely acknowledged the 'trials and tribulations' that came with being a foreigner in a 'strange land'. No amount of prior knowledge or understanding can prepare one for the unexpected personal, musical and cultural challenges which must inevitably be faced during the 'betwixt and between' stage of the journey. Lastly, responses related to the *postliminal* (after) stage of the journey support the idea that both the author and participants considered themselves personally and musically 'transformed'.

The 'source' as a sacred musical centre

Whilst the research data suggests that participants were clearly motivated first and foremost by personal relationships, the data also suggests that participants would not have made the journey unless they believed that there was a certain level of musical expertise to be gained. Both the author and participants highlighted their desire to return to what they saw as the 'source' of this musical expertise. It follows that Hungary as the perceived 'source' of musical wisdom could be seen as the 'place considered musically holier' or the 'sacred centre' of the pilgrimage.

Token of dispensation

Throughout the research for this thesis *Esti Dal* has clearly emerged as the 'token of dispensation' for the author who has come to understand that this unique journey can be viewed as a musical pilgrimage to Hungary. The concept of a musical symbol, icon or token interweaves or frames the idea of pilgrimage. Parallel to this is the question of what the unique 'tokens of dispensation' were for each participant. However, this question was regrettably left unexplored in the survey questionnaire. This question of defining unique

'tokens of dispensation' within the framework of a specifically musical pilgrimage is an intriguing topic for another time. A better understanding of the nature of a specifically musical pilgrimage, together with the identification and analysis of an individual's 'token of dispensation' of that pilgrimage, would contribute knowledgeably towards a heightened awareness of the universal, innate human need to understand one's self better.

Transformation

The process of personal and musical transformation is evident in the responses from both author and participants. Personal transformation was seen to be evident through a growth in self-confidence as a result of negotiating personal, musical and cultural challenges associated with the journey. Musical transformation is also evident in particular reference to the comments about becoming a better musician as a result of time spent in Hungary. Importantly, the ongoing process of continually striving to become a better musician was acknowledged and highlighted as part of this transformation process. In terms of cultural transformation, evidence from the research data suggests a heightened awareness one's own unique identity as an Australian music educator together with more of an appreciation of, and sensitivity to, the diverse cultural influences surrounding the context of any given educational situation. Again, more specifically targeted questions may have illuminated participants' sense of transformation.

Further implications from the research findings

The following additional themes emerged as a result of the research findings. However, these themes are also shown to have strong connections to the anthropological concept of pilgrimage.

Unique journeys

It has become clear that while all participants embarked upon what initially may have been defined as a 'similar' journey to Hungary, the unique nature of each journey is as individual and diverse as the unique person to whom the journey belongs. Therefore, because of the characteristic uniqueness of one's journey, the term pilgrimage is perhaps a much more accurate way to describe each participant's journey.

Personal relationships

The results of this study advocate the overarching

belief that personal relationships have a significant influence on the entire journey from beginning to end and are therefore difficult to separate from musical and cultural experiences. The research findings suggest that personal contact was the most important influence on the decision to pursue further study in Hungary at the Kodály Institute. Personal relationships also appeared to have had a direct influence upon whether an experience was most memorable/cherished or most difficult/challenging whilst in Hungary. Likewise, a heightened sense of personal self-worth together with an ability to interact confidently and flexibly in personal and professional situations appears to be essential to the successful adaptation of one's experience in Hungary to the demands of the Australian context. Personal relationships appear to be an extremely significant part of each individual pilgrimage, perhaps even to the point of being considered essential to obtaining the 'token of dispensation' in the case of the author. In relation to the limits of this present research, the degree to which personal relationships influence one's ability to obtain the 'token of dispensation' is regrettably outside the scope of this thesis. However, the significance of this connection between personal relationships and 'tokens of dispensation' would benefit from further research.

Summary

While the original purpose of this study was to reflect upon the uniqueness of the journey of Australians who are past students of the Kodály Institute, Hungary, it has become apparent that these journeys could equally be viewed and analysed from the perspective of pilgrimage. Implications from the research findings suggested parallels between pilgrimage and the journey of both author and participants. These parallels were illustrated through examining the relevance of the following to the pilgrimage or journey: a) three stage journey, b) token of dispensation, c) 'source' as a sacred musical centre and d) transformation of identity. Further implications from the research findings include the following: a) personal relationships were shown to have had a significant influence on each stage of the journey, with particular reference to securing the token of dispensation and b) the concept of pilgrimage would more accurately define the uniqueness of each journey.

Conclusion

Finally, there is an innate desire in each one of us to search for truth and meaning in life. What began as a quest by the author to find truth

and meaning music eventually became a much greater journey of discovery about truth and meaning in life for both author and participants. While music may have the ability to illuminate the truth and give meaning to life, the exact nature of this truth and meaning is unique to the individual to whom the journey belongs. As long as there is a desire for truth and meaning in music, which in turn gives truth and meaning to life, there will be the desire to embark upon a musical journey of discovery perhaps more aptly described as a musical pilgrimage.

Australian past students of the Kodály Institute (1976-2006)

Participants for this study were chosen from the following list of Australian students of the one-year courses at the Kodály Institute during the thirty year period 1976-2006. (* denotes IKS scholarship)

McLAUGHLIN Heather 1976-77 (Dec-Apr)
 HARLE Rosemary 1977-78, 1978-79
 HARRISON Ian 1977-78*
 TOTH Julie 1978-79
 PALLOS Agnes 1978-79
 WEST Susan 1978-79
 BINGHAM Lindsay 1978-79
 DEBSKI Merrill 1979-80
 KISHI-DEBSKI Sayuri 1979-80
 FROMYHR Judith 1979-80
 BEATON Patricia 1980-81
 CLINGAN Judith 1981-82, 1982-83
 LEEK – KOWALIK Lynne 1981-82, 1982-83
 CAMPBELL Vincent 1982-83
 HILL Anna (Deborah) 1983-84, 1984-85
 MACINDOE Hugh 1983-84
 PARSONS Lynette 1983-84, 1984-85
 STEVENS Lynne 1983-84
 CHRISTIE Angus 1984-85, 1985-86 *, 1986-87
 PICKERING Judith 1984-85
 OLDHAM David 1984-85, 1988-89
 COLE Malcolm 1985-86
 CONWAY – CHIEL Danielle 1985-86
 MOLLOY David 1985-86, 1986-87
 HOLSMAN – ZIRKIND Natalie 1985-86, 1986-87, 1987-88, 1988-89
 BLAKE Rosemary 1986-87, 1987-88
 JOYNT Danielle 1987-88
 MYERS Bronwyn 1987-88
 COLWILL John 1988-89
 CHRISTMASS Celia 1989-90
 HOLMES Lucie 1989-90, 1990-91
 AYSON Julie 1990-91
 SHEARER – DIRIÉ Debra 1990-91
 TENNANT Lindy 1990-91, 1991-92
 YEMM Jodie 1990-91
 MARTIN Wesley 1991-92

GUICHARD Egbert 1992-93
 HOWELL Gillian 1992-93
 WALSH Fiona 1993-94
 HUDSON Julie 1994-95, 1995-96
 WATSON Carolyn 1996-97, 1997-98
 SCOTT Elizabeth 1998-99, 1999-2000
 SWAN Helen 1998-99, 1999-2000
 LYNCH Jamie 2000-01*
 FERRIER Isobel 2000-01
 GJISBERS Jennifer 2002-03
 KING Aleta 2002-03, 2003-04*
 TU Amy 2004-05
 N.A. 2005-06

Endnotes

- 1 See listing of 'Australian Past Students of the Kodály Institute (1976-2006)'. See also the 'Yearbook of the Kodály Institute, IV. (2001). Kecskemet, Hungary: Kodály Institute.
- 2 Perhaps one of the oldest recorded sacred journeys is to be found in the biblical account of Abram's trek in the book of Genesis Chapters 12-17. Classical antiquity (circa 8thC. BC – 5thC. AD) attests numerous illustrations where travel was undertaken for either sacred and/or secular reasons (see L. Tomasi 'Pilgrimage/Tourism' In *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society*. (W. Swatos, Ed.). (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1998) p.362-363). During the Middle Ages (c. 5th-16th centuries AD) an increase in travel to holy places for religious reasons paralleled the rise of Christianity and gave birth to what later became known as the pilgrim whose sacred journey was appropriately called a pilgrimage. Investigation of the literature confirms the idea that religious pilgrimage dates from medieval times up to the present and is both historically well-established and geographically wide-spread. Well known examples include *Canterbury Tales* (Geoffrey Chaucer, 14thC), the Chinese tale *Journey to the West* (c.1590), *Pilgrim's Progress* (John Bunyan, 1678/1684), and Malcolm X's journey to Mecca in his self-titled autobiography(1965) (see C. Bell *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 102). *The Pilgrim's Guide* was considered an essential reference book for travellers to religious sights during the 11th – 18th Centuries (see P. Cousineau *The Art of Pilgrimage: the Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred* (Boston, MA: Conari Press, 1998) p. XXV).
- 3 Originally published in French, *Rites of Passage* is generally considered to be van Gennep's unique contribution to the field of anthropology. Ironically, van Gennep's rite of passage theory does not appear to have had significant influence on subsequent anthropological research until the later half of the 20th century. One explanation suggests that his work was not widely read until the 1960's when it was translated into English and subsequently re-published. See S. Kimball 'Introduction' & M. Vizedom 'Translator's Note' In Arnold van Gennep *The Rites of Passage* [1908] (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960) p. vii, xxi. See additional explanation at endnote 8 below.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p.10.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 3. See also Catherine Bell *Ritual: perspectives and dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) p 94 -102 and S. Glazier 'Rites of Passage' In *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society*. (W. Swatos, Ed.). (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 1998) p.423,424.
- 6 *Liminal* is derived from the Latin *limen* meaning threshold which is an appropriate description of the transitional state between the two stages in which one is said to be neither here nor there. See *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (7th Ed., J. Sykes, Ed.). (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).
- 7 V. & E. Turner *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1978) p. 1-39.
- 8 Believing at the time that pilgrimage was an exceptional rather than a normal occurrence (i.e. outside the realm of normal 'ritual' events) in an individual's life, Turner therefore refrained from further study of pilgrimage. Turner's disregard appears to have also influenced later anthropologists by way of temporarily discouraging further research into the notion of pilgrimage.
- 9 P. Cousineau 'Introduction' In J. Campbell (1990). *The Hero's Journey: Joseph Campbell on His Life and Work*. (S. Brown & P. Cousineau, Eds.). (New York: Harper & Row) p. xix. See also J. Campbell *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2nd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968) p. 8,9 and contents page where he makes reference to van Gennep's Rites of passage.
- 10 See S. Coleman & J. Eade (Eds.) *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion* (London: Routledge, 2004). See also E. Badone & S. Roseman 'Approaches to the Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism' In E. Badone & S. Roseman (Eds.) *Intersecting Journeys* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004). See also W. Swatos & L. Tomasi (Eds.) *From Medieval Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism* (Westport: Praeger, 2002).
- 11 These recent international anthropological responses appear to support this link between pilgrimage and tourism as evidenced by the following quote: "rigid dichotomies between pilgrimage and tourism, or pilgrims and tourists no longer seem tenable in the shifting world of postmodern travel." E. Badone & S. Roseman 'Approaches to the Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism' In E. Badone & S. Roseman (Eds.) *Intersecting Journeys* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004). p. 2.
- 12 Bell, Catherine. *Ritual: perspectives and dimensions*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 102.