

MARTIN LODGE *Summer of Euphony*

Despite the warm weather, the summer of 1979 was looking bleak. After a postgraduate year at Christchurch Secondary Teachers' College, we arrived in Wellington in December 1978. I had moved up to study composition at Victoria with Douglas Lilburn, David Farquhar and Ross Harris.¹ On arrival in Wellington, while my wife Gail Pittaway and I had found a house to rent in Newtown, we had no income at all.

After unpacking I phoned Jack Body, who I had met a few times while I was a student of English literature at the University of Waikato in the mid-1970s. Jack had attended the inaugural Composers Association of New Zealand (CANZ) conference in Hamilton in 1975 and had made quite an impression. His *Turtle Time* had been performed memorably during the conference and it remains a piece I enjoy. Jack was originally from Te Aroha and still had family connections that drew him back to the Waikato from time to time. I once took the waters in Te Aroha's original large Edwardian spa room with him, Gail, and John Dearnaley, a lecturer at Waikato University who was a brilliant scholar of Shakespeare and Joyce.

Now Jack suggested I call in at his flat on The Terrace, central Wellington (where I later was to meet Russell Haley, writer of the surrealist text of *Turtle Time*). Over a glass of wine Jack explained an experimental music project he had planned for

Martin Lodge at the site of Wagner's house in Riga, 2014. Wagner lived there when Riga was a provincial capital of the Russian Empire.

Gail Pittaway

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- ¹ David Farquhar (1928–2007) taught composition at Victoria University of Wellington from 1953 to 1993. He was appointed professor in 1976, and was a founding member of the Composers' Foundation and first president of CANZ.



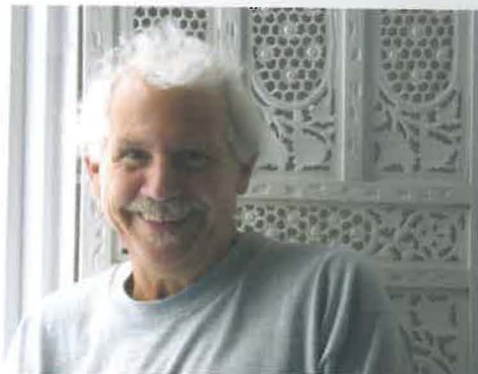
the summer of 1979. Amazingly, he somehow had managed to beat the odds and to get it funded so that participants would be paid. I was invited to join in and was pleased to become a member of the group that Jack named Euphony. Our base was a disused billiards parlour on the upstairs floor of an old building in Willis Street, in the centre of Wellington. This space, with its large central chamber and several attached smaller rooms, Jack designated a House of Sound. So it became, and the members of Euphony were encouraged to create whatever our imaginations and scavenged resources could yield. With Jack as the prime mover, other members of Euphony included singer/cellist/composer Pam Gray, pianist/composer Jonathan Besser, oboist Rodney Ford and bassoonist Mark McEwan.

The House of Sound eventually featured a large junk sculpture in the middle of the former main billiards room, as well as a few smaller sound stations. The sculpture comprised a bricolage of car parts such as suspension springs and brake shoes, along with diverse other bits of metal, wood and assorted materials. Anything could become part of the sculpture as long as it had some visually or acoustically interesting property.

Other rooms in the House of Sound included a Wall of Surprises, an Urban Jungle with electric birds, and a Room of Silence. The surprises were to be found in a bank of disused lockers from the billiard parlour days of the hall. Inside each small box some unexpected thing was created. While several had sound-makers of some kind in them, others held peculiar objects which sprang out when the door was opened, while a few were tantalisingly secretive — you were invited to poke a finger through a small hole and try to feel what was in there, or put your eye or ear close to the hole and see what could be detected that way. Not every visitor was game to try all the surprises.

The Urban Jungle room had what may charitably be described as general suggestions of trees and leaves made from cardboard and paint. Nestled into these trees were large garish birds made from old car horns, painted and furnished with paper plumage. Each bird was wired into a system of batteries and an electric keyboard. The birds could be commanded to sing by a visitor playing the keyboard. The keys deliberately were not identified, so when pressing a key one could never know what the next loud electric squawk would be or where it might come from. Some visitors liked to improvise group cacophonies with these strange birds.

When Jack asked if I had an idea for the backroom of the complex I suggested that since this was a House of Sound there should be a Room of Silence. To provide a focus there, I proposed painting an outsize reproduction of a Roy Lichtenstein cartoon of the Parthenon to cover a whole wall — to my youthful taste a fashionably postmodern reproduction of a reproduction of an icon. Sound would come from the environment and out of each viewer's memory and imagination. Jack was momentarily bemused, but then said to go ahead. He has always been willing to consider taking a risk, so allowing a young Turk to indulge a fascination with the ideas of American avant-gardists like Cage and Lichtenstein at that time wasn't going to phase him.



Jonathan Besser.



Martin Lodge.
David Lewis

As well as being a musical installation that people could visit at any time, the House of Sound also was a venue for some evening concerts by Euphony. Group members composed works especially for these performances, ranging from written-out and rehearsed pieces through satirical kitsch numbers (such as settings of William McGonagall, widely hailed as the world's worst poet) to free improvisation. The centrepiece of these performances was the impressive junk sculpture in the main hall. The pieces we played on it, led by Jack, were spectacular in effect. Found objects have rarely sounded so good.



Evelyn and Frederick Page.

Other experimental performances were more in the nature of happenings. One of Jack's typical challenges to convention and inhibition was his Scratch Music. Rather than being the usual scratch music, played by an ad hoc group of more or less able instrumentalists, this piece called for complete audience participation. Everyone was required to scratch things and generate a range of sounds and responses. There were surfaces and objects to scratch, but the maestro

also instructed everyone to scratch themselves — and then to scratch someone nearby. The resulting harrumphs and giggles were part of the piece.

As well as dreaming up the concept of the House of Sound and driving it through to realisation, Jack also promoted it tirelessly, drumming up a steady stream of installation visitors and concert audience members. One of these was Frederick Page, retired professor of music and cultural *agent provocateur*. He appeared to be nonplussed by the House of Sound — perhaps understandably since it had little to do with the musical dictates then emanating from the Darmstadt school for which he was a self-appointed evangelist. His response to the Euphony project was a retreat into obtuse references and grandiose pontification which, as a student, I found odd. But with characteristic diplomacy Jack passed lightly over that and went out of his way to make Freddy welcome.

Thirty-five years of friendship later, I remain grateful for Jack's generosity in inviting me, a little known newcomer at the time, to join Euphony and his House of Sound. It was an energising and stimulating musical experience on many levels as he so exuberantly wove together concept, philosophy, multimedia invention, performance, promotion and persuasion. Jack's unique blend of all these skills has been evident in the success he has won in numerous other events, ranging from festivals through opera to sonic circuses, but for me the Euphony project of the summer of '79 remains an especially fond memory.