

## **Bill Connor: "Letter to a Friend"**

A letter to anyone from anyone...from any time to any time and for any purpose...maybe from the past to the future, the present to the past or the future....a warning, a greeting, lost love, new love, to family and friends, a letter of fact, a brush with history.....this is **Letter to a Friend**; a creative music project with schools and young musicians and choirs in Zagreb the focus being on communal creativity; what do you do with an idea once you've got one and how do you find it in the first place?

### **The Process:**

The "letters" are derived from the children's ideas conceived and shaped, developed and expanded upon in creative workshops into performable materials with teachers and musicians and composer Bill Connor covering many different musical genres but all appropriate to the age group, idea and circumstance for you....your family and friends....in Zagreb.

The focus is on how to make an idea work...how do you get an idea and develop it with others, process of communication, talking to those around us, creative exploration dealing with other's points of view, honing and sifting to arrive at a point when we all say...yey done, finished...tadaaaaaarn this is it....

**HOW** - We sit on the floor in a circle. I start a pulse, both hands on thighs, nothing is said, just eye contact and body movement. Every group is different, responses will be different but soon all understand and join in. Pulse is music's life blood, the internal engine that drives and defines every musical gesture. No musical gesture exists without an understanding of the pulse that carries us forwards. 1.2.3.4.STOP!....solo....I point to an individual and they respond in whatever way they wish influenced by what has gone before. Lots of giggles and smiles and all of us climbing over the embarrassment barrier....eeerm....tee hee....1.2.3.4...goooo....could be shouts or laughs or sighs or...silences....all are addressed tired out retained or passed over...

.1.2.3.4.STOP and solo again and so-on....the soloist leads us on the next stage...they count us in...1.2.3.4. in different languages.....different pulses....different meters...sounds are turned into single words, single words are connected by other words....the words are vocalised, fragments of melodies appear,..."Fire Flies Flying in the night sky"....."Chill Out!...Chill Out!"....."Steeeeeeeeeeve Jobs!"hahahahahaha....."Changes, changes, changes, always changes....."....the ideas are assessed and sometimes voted on but all are notated for future reference and so we continue and explore whatever is placed in the circle. Eventually we split up into smaller groups to discuss and shape the subject/word ideas that have come out of the communal circle. We share the expanded ideas and within the time frame of the session either carry on or those ideas are worked on and thought about for the next meeting and so the letters/songs evolve over months.

The human being is the main instrument here; we apply our heads, hearts, hands, feet, ears, arms, sinews, muscles, our knowledge and experience to the moment to express our own

and other's ideas. We express ourselves *through* the chosen sound sources around us; ourselves, the floor, the walls, desks, chairs, litter bins (empty ones hopefully!) paper anything and everything is a potential sound source.

We make no distinction between those who own and/or play instruments and those who do not. The implementation of instrumental colour will come later once the ideas/letters/songs are complete and ready to be clothed. This is not an exercise for display but a quest for ideas....

**THEN** – we clothe the ideas in colours and textures of the available instrumental and vocal forces with the appropriate musical gestures; genre?...does the song need strings or winds or accordions, or just piano or percussion or voices or all of the above?...who does solos?...how do we bring all these things together in the time available?.....exactly as we do in the profession. It's a communal effort and everyone involved is important...

In all cases the process, the evolution of the letters/songs was the same over a six month period. We'd work ideas in class, I'd take them home, work on them some more then bring the ideas back and work more in class until we were all happy with the final version. Once the songs were completed we discussed how they should be clothed, what accompanying sounds should there be.

We wanted the kids to experience a whole range of vocal and instrumental sounds and techniques from rock to classical but all appropriate to the materials in progress, a reflection of the huge musical world we can all dip into and join with. To that end Boris Klarić and Jasenka Ostojić both agreed to include their choirs, Boris's children's choir and Jasenka's Boys choir and mixed choir with soprano and baritone soloists.

Many thanks to both! I've written for the ensemble players just as I would for any professional group. There is no holding back with these materials so some of it is quite challenging in a very short space of time. All the players and conductors/leaders have risen to the challenge and brought our project to life!

The end game, the performance is not the focus of the project but is a sharing of the conclusions we have come to at this point. We have children who have never performed on stage before we have a huge range of abilities across a large age group from beginners to professional musicians, we have materials that were completed only very recently, but everyone performs to the best of their ability, their age and experience; all are included.....enjoy!