



Mystics and Scientists 38 - Harmony: Cosmos, Nature and Self

Eleanor Stoneham

The 38th conference in the annual Mystics and Scientists series was held at the Horsley Park Hotel in East Horsley, deemed in 2011 to be Britain's "richest village" in material terms.

After welcomes by Chair **Prof Bernard Carr** and President **Dr Peter Fenwick**, we were introduced by **David Lorimer** to the sacred meditative dance of Paneurhythmy, a system of exercises performed in a circle outdoors, developed by the Bulgarian philosopher and spiritual teacher Peter Deunov. Its three movement sequences together simulate the giving, receiving and renewal between ourselves, nature and the cosmos, and are designed to invoke a great universal cosmic harmony of movement and expansion of consciousness. The annual summer camp at Seven Lakes in the Bulgarian Rila Mountains is attended by hundreds, and many of us practised the dance outside on the grass before breakfast each day as an alternative to Peter Fenwick's traditional meditation sessions.

Someone very much in harmony with nature is **Dr Lucy King** who had flown in from Kenya to inspire us with her research project in collaboration with Save the Elephants, Oxford University and Disney's Animal Kingdom. The age-old pastoralist lifestyle of the Kenyan Samburus has been compatible with the free roaming elephant herds. Modern farms with arable fields are susceptible to the destructive trampling and grazing of roaming elephants, posing a real threat to the animals from angry farmers. Using in-depth studies of elephant behaviour Dr King's team are protecting the fields with beehive fences, the beehives linked with wires, which when disturbed provoke the bees and the elephants retreat. The idea is spreading beyond Africa to projects in India and Sri Lanka, helping to restore harmony between farmers and the elephants. The bees also improve crop pollination while providing extra income from the honey. Continuing research is limited by resources, but the conference delegates raised £1,459 (grossed up by Lord Stone to £2,015), enough for two more beehive fences.

Spiritual leader **Satish Kumar**, for more than 40 years the editor of *Resurgence*, expanded on the theme of living in harmony with the natural world and with each other, and inspired us with the story of his own pilgrimage through life. To be a true pilgrim we need humility, and the trust that the universe will provide our needs. We should expect nothing from life and accept everything. Thus we find courage to cope with life's difficulties and experience unity and harmony in our relation with all humans. We need cultural change, particularly to move towards a respectful and reverential love for the female and her qualities, to bring dignity and value back to our farming and to change the prevailing worldview of the general superiority of humans over the rest of the natural world.

The emphasis of the conference then switched to the arts and first to **Dr Chika Robertson**, concert violinist and teacher, who showed us how to discover our inner and healing gifts through music. With her husband **Paul Robertson** she founded the Music Mind Spirit Trust, a charity which through its SongTrees Academy designs programmes enabling talented musicians of all ages to develop their musical gifts and enhance their creative potential. The Trust also researches the many health benefits of music, showing how lives can thereby be enriched. She showed us examples of how her young students had felt the positive effects of her methods on their own performances. Some of us found it hard to let go of inhibitions and become imaginary conductors and percussionists. Tea bags will forever be seen in a new light as percussion instruments!

Veteran BBC broadcaster and chairman of the Temenos Academy **Ian Skelly** worked for many years with HRH The Prince of Wales helping to articulate the Prince's vision for a more balanced, sustainable world which we as the human race must create to survive, set out in the Prince's book *Harmony*, co-written with Tony Juniper and Ian Skelly. We have fragmented so much of our world through science and whilst it is true that much has been achieved, in the process we have lost our essential understanding of the unity of everything and sense of the sacred, leading to an alarming exploitation of the world's resources. There is a similarity between the Sacred Geometry in the design and symbolism of the architecture of the great religious buildings of the world, and the ratios and proportions that define the way the natural world is formed, observed throughout nature in the Fibonacci sequence. We can resonate with these patterns of the natural world, and with music and architecture and sculpture when designed or composed on similar principles, because they reflect our own natural make up.

After dinner on Saturday evening **Paul Robertson** delighted us with his sublime violin performance and fascinating anecdotes. The beautiful and moving Sonatas and Partitas masterpieces written by J S Bach for solo violin are in many ways mysterious. Drawing on scholastic research and his own intuitive awareness Paul showed us how the composer was practising a very personal, spiritual, algorithmic system or schemata within these works. They were in fact secretly encoded with sacred melodies and texts as well as with hidden numerical references to his family, expressing Bach's own faith and hope in redemption and resurrection, and his personal love and dedication to his wife and children. For J S Bach it is clear that the human and the Divine were uniquely and intimately integrated. Within his personal Bible, near 1 Chronicles 25, which is a listing of Davidic musicians, he wrote: "This chapter is the true foundation of all God-pleasing music."

Isn't space an unlikely place to look for music? The cosmologist **Dr Jean-Philippe Uzan** demonstrated otherwise as with great energy and enthusiasm he explored how we can see and hear the shape of the universe by transforming different vibrations in the universe into sounds, and we heard for ourselves some of these "sounds" made by different planets in space. The ancient Greek Pythagoreans were considerably influenced by the relationship between the cosmos, music and mathematics, believing that heavenly bodies give forth musical "sounds" as they move in the cosmos, called "the harmony of the spheres". From Pythagoras we travelled through twenty-six centuries of many different ideas linking science and music in the universe, considering for example: Kepler and his *Harmonices Mundi* in 1619, in which he attempted to explain in terms of music the proportions of the natural world, particularly the astronomical and astrological aspects; Marin Mersenne with his theory of vibrating strings in 1636; Joseph Fourier's eighteenth century theory of periodic signals; and the late rock musician Frank Zappa's "big note" theory, that the universe consists of a single element, and that atoms are vibrations of that element, or one "big note". Now the Kepler space telescope can listen to the soundwaves bouncing within a star, a study called "astroseismology". Other natural musical instruments around us include the Northern Lights, thunder and lightning, the pulsation of stars, the music of sand dunes; in so many ways we can see and hear the shape of the universe.

Our final speaker was the landscape architect **Professor Charles Jencks** who illustrated his own perspective on the relation between the universe, earth, ecology and nature, through his own inspiring landscape designs. Both harmony and disharmony are observed in the universe and his work

seeks to mirror that reality of contrast and to dramatise the differences. His swirling 'land sculptures' are inspired by molecular biology and outer space. The many illustrations of his work included his Ecoline design for Suncheon City in South Korea where even the opening ceremony demonstrated the ugly as well as the beautiful in life.

He also explained the ability of buildings to uplift people as illustrated by the sympathetic architectural designs for the Maggie's Centres for Cancer Care which he co-founded in memory of his wife. During her own final cancer illness Maggie designed a blueprint for these places where cancer sufferers and their families and friends can find both physical and emotional support in a caring environment and not "lose the joy of living in the fear of dying".

There was plenty of opportunity for open discussion throughout the weekend. There is a saying that converting good ideas to action is like crossing an ocean. We had heard many examples of good ideas converted to very positive action. In the light of current terrible world events Satish Kumar reminded us how the vast majority of the 7 billion people in our world want nothing more than a life of peace and harmony with one another. Remembering Gandhi's oft quoted remark that we must be the change we want to see in the world, we came away inspired by how in many different ways all our speakers were changing themselves and others through their own actions; a message for us all from a practical and socially aware conference.

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Exploring the Frontiers of Consciousness: Peter and Elizabeth Fenwick 80th Birthday Celebration

John Clarke

This day conference was a very special occasion, organised jointly by the Network and the Study Society, an 80th birthday party for **Peter** and **Elizabeth Fenwick**. It was an opportunity to express the thanks of us all for their contributions to our spiritual and intellectual life 'at the frontiers of consciousness', and above all for their inspiring and loving presence amongst us over so many years. The large hall at Colet House was full to overflowing with friends and well-wishers.

The conference began with a short meditation led appropriately by Peter who has always given an important place to this reflective overture to SMN proceedings, and who has been deeply involved in the meditation practice of the Study Society. **David Lorimer** introduced the talking part of the day with an affectionate sketch of Peter and Elizabeth who, with their family, always worked together as a team on their many projects. He reminded us that Peter was a man of great spiritual and intellectual qualities, of eminent compassion and clarity of mind, and that he was also a man of many parts, a very practical person, quite a handy-man in fact, who enjoyed messing with gadgets and was a keen amateur pilot. On a more serious note, Peter made significant contributions to the neglected but now burgeoning scientific study of consciousness, and subsequently with Elizabeth worked on another important new area, the study of near-death and extended-life experiences. Both these major projects required courageous confrontation with entrenched academic interests and prejudices.

Peter then gave a fascinating account of his scientific and spiritual journey, starting with a family farming background in Kenya which early imbued him with a sense of freedom and harmony with nature, and on to Trinity College Cambridge. There he studied medicine and proceeded from there to gain experience at St Thomas's, the Maudsley and Broadmoor hospitals in pursuit of a career in neuropsychiatry. His early spiritual influences came from such works as Colin Wilson's *The Outsider* and Richard Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness*, as well as from the Study Society with its interest in Gurdjieff and Ouspensky.

Alongside his work in the field of neuropsychiatry, and influenced by the work of Raymond Moody, Peter began to develop an interest in transcendent and altered states of consciousness and their relation to the brain. He wrote his first book with Elizabeth, *The Truth in the Light*, and from this emerged his research into near death experiences (NDEs) and his realisation that there is only a thin veil between the conscious self and higher reality. Their most recent work, *The Art of Dying*, is the outcome of a life-long commitment to the integration of the scientific and spiritual outlooks, an enterprise that found public and personal expression in their forty years of close involvement with the Scientific and Medical Network.

The remainder of the day took the form of presentations by a number of eminent speakers – colleagues and friends - who gave voice to their own special reflections on these core issues and on the life-world of Peter and Elizabeth.

Rupert Sheldrake, in elaborating his long friendship with Peter and Elizabeth, outlined some of his own recent investigations, giving an overview of the philosophical and scientific investigations into consciousness, and the challenges this has posed for prevailing orthodox materialism. Referring especially to speculations and research concerning the concept of the extended mind and the extension consciousness beyond the brain and body, he went on to characterise this whole field as nothing less than a new Enlightenment, an endeavour in which Peter had played a leading role.

There followed a joint forum on Death and Dying, beginning with **Ornella Corazza** who argued that the study of NDEs was not simply an esoteric matter but helped to lead us back into a better appreciation of life itself, the here-and-now, and at the same time to the realisation of the impermanence of life.

Contrary to the belief that consciousness dissolves at death, David Lorimer argued that NDEs supported the idea that death is a transition rather than an extinction, and that the sense that we are able to know what it is like to be another conscious being points to the idea of One Mind, the basis of the Golden Rule. This sense of transcending the purely personal manifested in NDEs, Rupert Sheldrake argued, is also evident in the use of drugs such as Ketamine, in certain powerful rites of passage, in dreaming and in out of body experiences (OBEs). A rather different perspective was offered by **Sue Brayne** in her narration of the profound change in her life which resulted from a plane crash, giving rise to a healing journey which has led her to see NDEs as precipitating a fuller realisation of our inner identity and a reconciliation with the prospect of death.



Following a shared lunch, and the opportunity to explore the historic interior of Colet House, the home of the Study Society, **Max Velmans** spoke about the evolution of consciousness studies. He spoke about the 'outward journey' of this history, embracing the pioneering nineteenth century work of Gustav Fechner who introduced the idea of grades of consciousness and outlined a double-aspect theory of mind and brain, the speculations of William James on altered states, and the more recent developments in cognitive psychology and the influence of computer technology. Max then turned to his own 'inward journey', from engineering to psychology, from the influence John Crook, David Fontana and the whole Eastern way of thinking about the mind, to the recent work of David Chalmers and his own reaction against current reductionist orthodoxy.

Andrew Powell spoke movingly of his long friendship with Peter, and of the latter's unquenchable optimism, a quality which he shared with Elizabeth, and entertained us with some alarming stories of Peter's exploits as an amateur pilot. Andrew was particularly grateful to Peter for his encouragement in the exploration of links between spirituality and psychiatry and for the establishment of a transpersonal section within the Institute of Psychiatry.

Andy Ioannides spoke about his collaboration with Peter on new forms of neuro-imaging, partly in Japan.

In her talk on meditation, **Sylvia Leiserach** outlined the history of meditation practice at Colet House from Ouspensky to Shankacharya, and paid tribute to the long and unstinting support given by Peter and Elizabeth to the work of the Study Society.

Martin Redfern, also a long-time active supporter of both the Study Society and the SMN, and chief panjandrum of the day's proceedings, spoke on the subject of Non-duality and the Vanishing Ego, making use of poetry by Yeats, Rumi, Dickinson and Rupert Spiro, and concluding with the verse 'Thou art that' of the Upanishads.

The final talk of the day was given, appropriately, by Elizabeth who, 'filling in the gaps', recalled her first awkward meeting with Peter at Cambridge, and spoke amusingly about 'life with Peter', about his work as a medical expert witness, his early interest in computers, and his inability to spell 'dying'. Their daughter Annabel concluded by reading a poem which summed up, in the way that only daughters can, their family life together.

Following which there were three short speeches, two big cakes, and one very convivial reception.

Prof. John Clarke is a former Chair of the SMN and a Vice-President.



Beehives Funded by the Scientific and Medical Network Installed in Kenya

Lucy King

A letter from Dr. Lucy King, speaker at the SMN Mystics and Scientists Conference 2015. In response to her presentation, members collected £2,015 toward beehive fences to protect two villages against elephant incursions.

More pictures on inside back cover

I hope all is well! I just wanted to send you a file of images to show you photos of all the SMN donated beehives that have been painted, taken to our new village project in Mwambiti Village in Sagalla Community and hung up in our two new beehive fences! We have managed to build two fences with the hives donated from your wonderfully generous SMN members, one for Nashon and his young family and one for an old man who lives on his own called Bliston. Both farmers were selected as the no. 1 and no. 2 worst effected by elephant crop-raids in a big village meeting we had last month.

We have ALMOST finished building the last few posts on Bliston's farm (should be finished next week) but Nashon and his wife are totally up and running and we are now waiting for bees to find the new fresh beeswax installed in the hives and settle in!

Thanks once again to all your members at the SMN conference for helping these two farmers both receive a beehive fence sooner than we thought. I know this will help them hugely as they learn to live more successfully with elephants in this community on the edge of Tsavo East National Park in Southern Kenya. (www.elephantsandbees.com)

