

An Interview with Music Composer *Yuval Ron*

INTRODUCTION

Pacific Symposium is happy to welcome and present to our Oriental medicine community the award winning and world-renowned composer, performance artist, lecturer, and peace activist, Yuval Ron.

Oriental Medicine Newspaper: What brought you to America and when was this?

Yuval Ron: I came to America in 1985, directly from Israel. I came to study music at Berklee College of Music in Boston where I majored in Film Scoring.

OM: How did you decide to attend Berklee? Did they find you or did you find them?

YR: No, I found them. I was into jazz when I was in high school in Israel. I found a great jazz guitarist who just came from Boston back to Israel. He was the best jazz guitarist in Israel and he was an alumni of Berklee. He was the first jazz guitarist from Israel who graduated from Berklee and then returned to Israel. I was so impressed with his level. I studied with him privately for several years and he recommended that I go to the school where he went; that led me to the school in Boston.



Yuval Ron in action

OM: What drew you to majoring in Film Scoring?

YR: When I was nineteen, I was in the military band in Israel. I met theater people in that troupe. I became really fascinated with the theater and they asked me to compose music for a play. It was a Beckett play that was very successful and the music was very well received. Then, I was asked to compose for another play and then another play, and I really fell in love with composing for theater. And that's what I did in Israel for three years, from age of nineteen to twenty-two. From these experiences, I changed my direction from being focused on jazz performance to being interested in composing music. By the time I came to Boston, I focused on writing music for film.

OM: How'd you end up in L.A.

YR: Well, the film music business brought me to L.A. I got a job while I was still in Boston; I was contacted by Fox Kids TV channel, and they asked me to come to L.A. to replace a friend of mine that had gone with me to school in Berklee and had recommended me for the job. Fox TV listened to my compositions and after a couple of weeks they called me and said we want you to move to L.A. in one week and start working on that series. Fox Kids TV brought me to L.A. in 1994.

OM: So, it was a children's show you first worked on?

YR: Yeah, I started my career in TV scoring a lot of the cartoons, Saturday morning cartoons, some live-action shows...I've done a lot of shows for kids.

OM: What is some of the other work you have done?

YR: Well, I started in theater and modern dance scoring productions such as Shakespeare's "The Tempest" in Boston. I've also done Beckett and Yeats in theater. I've done music for musicals like "Masada: The Musical Saga," which was a Broadway musical. I've worked on a lot of TV shows such as C.S.I., Two and a Half Men, Late Show with David Letterman, 60 Minutes, Grey's Anatomy, Oprah Winfrey, amongst many others. In 1998, I got into the record business thanks to Omar Faruk Tekbilek, a great Turkish Sufi musician who asked me to produce his album. This got me into producing albums and recording and working with record companies. And that led me to performing again, to go back to the stage, which I had not done for about sixteen years. I had become a full-time composer and I didn't even play my instruments. I wouldn't practice. I didn't even dream that I would ever play again, much less perform on stage. Since 2000, I have returned to performing in addition to composing and producing.

OM: So, when did you first work with sound and the brain function?

YR: Okay, that's interesting. In 1989, after I graduated from music school, I saw an ad in a Boston

music magazine from the Monroe Institute. They commissioned me to create works for getting the listener to go through a half hour trance, an emotional journey that would be accompanied by aural beats that they had created. So, they created a map of those frequencies of tones that they would play to the listener through headphones. One frequency in one ear, another frequency in another ear, and a third frequency would occur in the brain (this is known as binaural beats). They claimed, and still claim that by creating the third frequency in the brain, they can affect the emotions and the state of mind of the listener.

OM: So this was quite early on in what has become a rather big creative category of applied neuroscience through sound.

YR: Yes, the Monroe Institute was an early and important place where sound and brain science developed and has continued to be refined.

OM: What is your personal experience with acupuncture and Chinese medicine?

YR: I've been receiving treatments of Chinese medicine for many years since 1996. I used to get sick every winter with bronchitis, flu and colds, no matter what I did. I would lose a lot of workdays because, as a musician, if my ears were congested and I couldn't hear, I just couldn't work. And so, I had very strong experiences with the needles and I came to acupuncture to improve my immune

system. I went to Dr. Ilan Migdali and he put me on a protocol and he really boosted my immune system and taught me a lot about myself, my system, and my body. And since then, you know, I've been in really good, strong and stable health. So, that was my first encounter of Chinese medicine and I've gone to, I think four or five different doctors over the years.

OM: Did practitioners play music during your treatments at the different offices?

YR: Yes, they always played music and I always had problems with the music they played. I always had a problem. That was an issue. I couldn't relax. Because I would analyze the structure of the music and I would have critique and I would be annoyed by the fake instruments, fake synthesizer sounds and things that were really not sophisticated. And this bothered my relaxation. Eventually, I requested to receive my treatments in silence.

OM: What interested you in the six healing sounds in Chinese medicine?

YR: My various practitioners learned that I'm a musician and composer and they started telling me about the five elements and they said, you know, we wish we could have music for the elements. And one of them, Dr. Moshe Barkan started giving me material and information and he was really hoping

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that I would compose something. Dr. Barkan revealed that to me because he was hoping that I would compose music for those elements because he felt that they didn't have anything good to play that would invoke those elements. But he never followed up with me and I didn't have time to get into it without support. I researched it a little bit and put it aside and moved on because I was very busy with other projects.

OM: So, how did you meet Dr. Rick Gold and what initiated the Metta Mindfulness Music project?

YR: I met Dr. Rick Gold at Esalen Institute three years ago in 2011. We were both on faculty that summer. He was teaching his course on traditional Thai Bodywork and I was teaching my course on sound and mysticism and the impact on the brain.

OM: So by this time, you're deeply into neuroscience and sound?

YR: Yes, because I've been teaching already for three years with Dr. Mark Robert Waldman who wrote the book *How God Changes Your Brain* that is all about the neuroscience of the brain and music and chanting and spiritual work. I met Rick briefly on the grounds of Esalen and I heard about him from a friend who took his course. And she said, "oh you have

to meet Rick, you have to meet Rick Gold." We didn't get to connect at Esalen and then I 'bumped' into him on the way back to L.A. in a restaurant between Esalen and Los Angeles in Morro Bay. His family stopped in one restaurant and my family happened to stop in that very same restaurant at the same time. We ended up right at the same table at the same restaurant, without planning it ; but it was planned by greater powers. Rick and I started to have a dialogue about music, about art, about medicine and then after awhile, Rick told me that he has a project he wanted to talk to me about, the Six Healing Sounds. And then we started talking about sound and the impact of sound on healing and the brain and we started shaping what would become the Metta Mindfulness Music project.

OM: In the Chinese medicine theory of the five elements and six healing sounds, each of these elements is assigned a musical tone. So, as a composer, what did that mean to you as you began to create the music?

YR: The first clue about what to do with the elements was that I found that the ancient Chinese indicated that there's a certain tonal center, a certain tone that is the home, that is the center for that element. And I followed their ancient guidance on that. I didn't deviate from it at all. And they indicated that a certain musical note is the one for Earth, so I centered my whole

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composition for Earth around that tone. And actually, that tone is holding on throughout the whole music composition, through the whole CD, that one tone is there. And around that tone, there are musical developments that always come back to that home, that one, that center that is the one tone that the Chinese indicated that is the natural vibration, natural frequency for that specific element. Each tone is a different vibration. It's a different resonance on our body. And it makes us feel differently, it vibrates us in a different way. So, if you have a tone that is slightly higher, it may resonate in a different chamber in our body, in a different chakra, in a different center. And so it was very important to choose the right tonal centers for each of the elements. I didn't experiment with that. I trusted the ancient Chinese. I stayed with that.

OM: At a certain point, Rick Gold commissioned you with a task of creating music that affected each of the elements and all the emotions and vibrations associated with each of those elements.

YR: Yes, exactly, he tasked me with creating music that would invoke the elements.

OM: And part of that creation was he wanted to utilize your skill with sound and neuroscience. So while you were building it with the vibrations of the elements and the tones, you were also shaping the music for particular effects on the brain?

YR: Yes, what I wanted to do is to consult Western science literature on what has been proven through neuroscience and music therapy studies. I wanted to find what was proven to work in specific ways on humans in clinical trials, in studies. I wanted to find out which musical modes promoted healing, which music was used to reduce blood pressure, to increase relaxation, to increase the rate of recovery after stroke and surgery. And I looked at all those studies and I gathered all the materials that were out there and I used that for each of the elements whenever I wanted to invoke something specific. What we have created for Metta Mindfulness Music utilizes both the ancient Chinese observations on what works, plus the Western scientists and neuroscientists that are researching what works and how it works on the brain.

OM: You chose, in the Metta Mindfulness Music production to use live musicians and not synthesized music. Why?

YR: Right, that's very important for this project because first of all, there's a lot of music in the marketplace that is solely synthesized and I believe the

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sound waves that are originated from electronic instruments are different than the sound wave that is being generated by acoustic instruments. It's a measurable difference if you look at the vibrations. When we look at the amount of vibrations in the synthesized sound, we see a reduction in the complexity and the dynamics. What I mean by dynamics is that a live instrument is ever changing. When a live musician holds a note on a woodwind or a violin or a guitar, the note is ever changing. It's like life. It's like a river. A river is never the same. It's never the same when you walk into a river, it's never going to be the same river. It's always ever changing and that's the nature of life. That's the nature of our body. The problem with electronic, synthesized music is that it's based on a small sampled little chunk of music that has been looped to trick your mind, to trick your brain that it's the real thing. It's an excerpt of the real thing that is being looped again and again and again and again and again and again and again. When we listen to synthesized sound, we are experiencing impoverished sound on two levels. One, it's a small segment that loops and it's not ever changing dynamics. And the other thing is that the amount of vibration within the sound, even within the little segment, the amount of vibration is less rich than the live instrument sound. I wanted to feature live musicians and live instruments and just the background, the layered background involves electronic sounds and live sounds. The electronic sounds are the background layers, which create richness, but they are in the background. They are not the main solo musical theme that vibrates the listener and really leads the listener. I chose instruments according to the advice of the ancient Chinese who preferred certain instruments for

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certain elements, to invoke the particular elements.

OM: Please describe the layering that you put into the Six Healing Sounds?

YR: One important layer of the music of the six healing sounds is the voice of Dr. Richard Gold actually performing in my studio the six healing breathing sounds. Each element has a breathing routine, a breathing meditation that has a specific sound. I layered them as the initial layer throughout the whole piece, and then I layered sounds that created the backdrop that are holding the tonic, the tonal center that associates with that instrument. Then I layered sound effects of the elements. For example, for the element of Water, I recorded six different kinds of sounds of water from bubbling brook to river sounds and I embedded those sounds in order to invoke the quality of water.

And I did the same thing with each element. So we have the actual vibrations of these elements in real life, the sounds of wood, the sound of fire, the sounds of water, etc. This is all embedded in the background layers of the music. And then, on top of that, I composed themes for each solo instrument to invoke the elements. And that is in the forefront, the solo acoustic instrument playing the theme. There's one other layer, a bottom layer of affirmations. Dr. Rick Gold also recorded affirmations that are associated with each element.

I recorded his voice saying those affirmations and we embedded it throughout the whole piece. It's subliminal, meaning the computer screen shows me that it is there but my ear doesn't hear it. It vibrates on my body, on my bones. It's being perceived subliminally. It's there, but it's not registered by the conscious mind. Unconsciously, we perceive it and on vibration level, we observe it, but we are not hearing the words.

OM: You kept that simple, correct?

YR: Yes, there are only three affirmations for each element. So it's not a whole lot of information, just repeating a few words.

OM: Finally, you've created something that's musically beautiful that even a discerning listener in a treatment will like the music. It's not repetitive like synthesized music. It's not your typical ambient music. What were your biggest challenges in accomplishing this?

YR: That was another important goal and another challenge, to create an aesthetic experience that people would enjoy putting it on in the background when they work and when they have friends over or when they write poetry or when they just relax or sleep while receiving treatment would not get bored and irritated by when receiving a treatment. It would be a pleasant experience to promote the relaxation while invoking the elements. And that was very challenging, especially with the

element of Fire. Because how do you invoke fire and at the same time relax the listener? That was very challenging. So, some of those challenges I really looked at them for a while and researched various approaches and I did find a way to do it. I can say gladly that I know that I managed to create the aspect of relaxation in all the six healing sounds in order to promote healing. So the composition works as a healing enforcement and it also works as music

OM: Yuval, we know that you've won many awards, you're recognized very highly in your field as a composer and lecturer and you also perform. Please share with us a few of the highlights of your performance career.

YR: Well, one of the highlights was playing the Gala concert as the featured artist for the Dalai Lama's Seeds of Compassion conference, which he held in 2008 in Seattle. I was invited to play that concert with my ensemble and we played in the Seattle opera hall: Fabulous sound, fabulous setting, esteemed audience. Another memorable experience was playing at the International Sacred Music Festival in Fez with an invitation from the King of Morocco. To be there in the botanical gardens of the King of Morocco, which is part of the royal palace, and to be invited there to play a concert and to speak to the audience in Hebrew and Arabic and in English, it was very special for me, especially having being born in Israel. That was a very special highlight.

OM: Yuval, thank you so much for this interview and we look forward to your participation at our Pacific Symposium.

YR: My pleasure. I am excited to be in the company of hundreds of TCM practitioners and to share my music and the Six Healing Sounds. **OM**