

Connections: Deep Listening/Singing Masks/Ceremonial Dream Time

NORMAN LOWREY is a mask maker/composer and professor of music at Drew University, Madison, NJ. He holds a PhD in composition from the Eastman School of Music and a Deep Listening Certificate. He is the originator of Singing Masks, ceramic and carved wood incorporating flutes, reeds, rattles and other sounding devices, each with a unique voice, that have been exhibited in East Coast museums and galleries, including the New Jersey State Museum. Lowrey has presented Singing Mask ceremony/performances in such diverse locations as Plan B and Site Santa Fe in Santa Fe, NM; Roulette and Lincoln Center in New York City; Deep Listening Space in Kingston, NY; and at pictograph caves outside Billings, MT. Recent performances include *Into The Deep (Dreaming)* presented at Drew University with Pauline Oliveros and the Deep Listening Band and *In Whirled (Trance)Formations* presented with the Avatar Orchestra Metaverse online in Second Life. <http://users.drew.edu/nlowrey/>

Norman Lowrey

**This is the great mystery.
Music. Sound. Sounding.
Listen. Listening.
Connecting. Connection.
Dreaming. Dream.**

Music Deep Listening Vibrating
Connecting Linking Surrounding
Sounding Dreaming Opening
Revealing Interconnecting
Illuminating Listening Thinking
Feeling Probing Discovering

Words Sound

Word Sounds

ARE YOU LISTENING? What are you listening to? How are you listening? Can you hear subtle nuances of sound in the words you are reading: shifts in shape, contour, texture, timbre, pitch, rhythm, loudness?

Sound. Music. Listen. Connect. Integrate mind, body, spirit. Actively observe. Your thoughts are interweaving with what you

are reading. Spontaneously translate feelings into sounds both internal and external. Sense the connections of everything.

Shift perspective. Listen from a different angle.

Every word and arrangement of words here emerges from the core of my trying to put into practice, and to understand, Deep Listening. These are things I think about all the time. This is essentially a very personal account of how Deep Listening has affected my life and work. I invite you to participate with me in this process and to think of this as a ceremony celebrating the miracle of our being alive. We are reading this together. We are directing our thoughts together. It is the nature of our language to be on a path leading from one place to the next. This is a temporal path. This is our common experience of time. Time past flows into time future through time present. Time past resides in memory. Time future resides in imagination. Time present resides in our awareness. The present is all we have. Let's listen to the eternal present together.

I invite you on a meandering journey. I hope we might stray from the beaten path. I like to wander. Feel free to follow however you are inclined. Or not to follow at all. Strike off on your own. If we get lost, let's just be still and listen wherever we are. Join me if you will.¹

Spirit Talk, Conversations with the Singing Masks (1998)

In silent awareness, listen for an unknown, unspoken language, heard internally or externally. When you are ready, join in the mystery of conversation with your newly discovered language. You may wish to do so in silence or stillness, in whisper, quiet utterance, or gentle movement. Always maintain openness to the myriads of conversations that are occurring. Any conversation you have with anything else, including with the Singing Masks, need not be in its language; your own tongue,

¹ The reader is invited to participate in any way desired in the following Singing Mask Ceremonies, which appear in italics. For further information see <http://www.users.drew.edu/nlowrey>.

whatever it is, will be heard. Continue until the enveloping Spirit Talk becomes still.

This is a score for one of my Singing Mask ceremonies. My scores are simple invitations to listen from a particular perspective. Several will be a part of our journey now, perhaps creating a labyrinth.

Deep Listening is conducive to the production of alpha waves, a condition of mind known to be “alive” to creative ideas and in which we are open to information from the subconscious. We are relaxed yet alert.

I first met Pauline Oliveros in 1972 after a concert of Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Zyklus* at the University of California, San Diego. When I was introduced to her she remarked something like “Well that sure was a piece of male bombast!” This was a new thought for me. In subsequent meetings I learned that Pauline had a gift for making “simple” observations or raising provocative questions that would lead to altered awareness. Deep Listening is like that.

From that time in the early 1970s I followed her career with interest. I moved to Missouri, teaching in the Humanities Department at Stephens College. I invited Pauline visit my classes and to perform. She opened our ears. She later moved from California to New York State. Our paths then crossed rarely for several years. We reconnected in the late 1980s after she began offering Deep Listening workshops. Around that time I had discovered that building sounds into masks could lead to interesting experiences both musical and mythic. I called them Singing Masks. But after a spate of works done with them they ended up resting in my attic. I brought one to that Deep Listening workshop. Pauline recognized its potential and arranged for me to give a mask ceremony workshop. The masks came out of the attic and have been out ever since.

I also met Ione at that Deep Listening workshop. Dreams and dreaming had been important components of my thinking and work previously, but now ceremonial Dream Time entered with gusto.

The masks function as “vehicles of transformation.” Their voices and imagery speak to our ancient and primal “one-ness.” They may stimulate experiences of (real) alternate imaginal/dream realms.

In Parallel: Dreaming into Alternate Universes (2000)

Just as William Blake suggested that we could “See a World in a Grain of Sand,” so too is it possible to hear a universe in each instance of sound. With this in mind, listen to all sounds and select any one in any given instant to follow into its parallel universe. Sound and/or move with your own sense of that universe. Stay within that universe as long as you wish, via memory, imagination, or any other body/dream/cognitive modality. Remain open to simultaneously occurring universes. Transporting yourself into sounds in this way, go to as many universes as you wish. Or none at all. “Just” listening is ok. The Singing Mask Spirits are guides along your journey. Have fun and bon voyage!

Deep Listening directs our attention toward inter-action. It heightens our sensitivity to our self/world relationship. It raises our awareness of community.

Here we are now. We are listening. We are dreaming. Together. A community of listeners. Dream Listening. What are we doing here? Where are we going? Age-old questions that stimulate our wonderment.

I attended five successive annual Deep Listening Retreats in New Mexico from 1995–2000. I continued to make Singing Masks. After a collaborative project with the Delaware Riverkeeper called “River Sounding” in which Pauline and Ione participated, my Singing Mask work became further involved with ritual, ceremony, myth and dream, remaining always grounded in listening and in connection to all of nature.

Deep Listening results in communal music-making and spontaneous organization of sound. It is rich in sonic textures interspersed with quietude. It is emotionally fecund.

Private Prayers, Public Rituals: for Peace (2005)

Every location, however small or seemingly insignificant, may be thought of as a holographic image containing the whole, a kind of portal into infinity. With this in mind, all present are invited to select a small territory anywhere within the gathering space, to listen intently, and to offer a prayer for peace to/through this portal. This localized, particular place may be thought of as an altar, making connection with everything. Your prayer may consist of simply lis-

tening, being silent, or vocalizing in any way you wish. Movement is also welcome. As you pray, Singing Masks will function as resonators, amplifying all prayers into DreamTime.

Deep Listening offers a direct exploration of sound allowing us to discover unique sounds and combinations of sounds. In this exploration we may also make discoveries about our own self, our abilities, limitations and potentials. Our curiosities are stimulated.

Music Deep Listening Vibrating Connecting
Linking Surrounding Sounding Dreaming Opening
Revealing Interconnecting Illuminating Listening
Thinking Feeling Probing Discovering

Courage. Change. Courage to change. Facing our fears. Who is there to help us? What can help? I’ll tell you this: the Deep Listening community helped save my life. During one of my darkest periods of ill health, members of this community provided unconditional love and support and listened to my needs and responded with accepting wise counsel. Deep Listening offers healing.

Into the Deep (Dreaming) (2006)

take a dive into the deep (dreaming)

take a dive into the (dreaming) deep

take a dive into (dreaming) the deep

take a dive (dreaming) into the deep

take a (dreaming) dive into the deep

take (dreaming) a dive into the deep

(dreaming) take a dive into the deep

sound from these depths whatever emerges

singing masks will be guides into this dreamtime realm

Deep Listening stimulates imagination, opens and heightens awareness, connects with the subconscious and questions pre-conceptions and assumptions.

Most recently I have extended Singing Masks into the virtual realm with the Avatar Orchestra Metaverse, an international community that performs together in real time online in the virtual world of Second Life. We listen to one another over great gulfs of space. We are many becoming one.

OneMany (OM) (2010)

We are One. We are Many. Following the implications of the title *OneMany (OM)*, you are invited to listen and participate in any way you wish to explore that ancient notion of the One and the Many. How does One become Many? How does Many arise from One? Singing Masks will join in exploring the delight of our making spontaneous art together in sound and movement, in silence and stillness, in the One and the Many. OM.

Deep Listening has provided me with a foundation and framework for living, working, and being in the world. More than any other single influence in my life, Deep Listening has contributed to helping me understand why I am alive and what I believe in. The following summary remarks are a direct outgrowth of being introduced to Deep Listening. While specifically related to the Singing Masks, what is suggested as an approach to them is also applicable to listening itself. This is not an ending. Deep Listening is indeed a life practice.

I am an unabashed animist. I believe that everything is infused with spirit. There is intelligence at the heart of all matter. Human intelligence is just one peculiar manifestation of this larger ground of being. Other manifestations are radically different, incomprehensible to conventional human sensibilities. Yet all things give voice to the underlying cohering essence, the spirit swirling through cells, molecules, atoms, quarks and superstrings. If we listen carefully we can resonate along with these primary vibrations and receive information, knowledge, altered understanding.

This has been the thrust of the teaching by the Singing Masks that I have been making and employing in ceremonial/performances over the past twenty-five years. Their voices and iconographic presences have been continual reminders of connection with that animistic sense of spirit essence in rivers, rocks, sky, trees, as well as among all things animate. They have become guides in all my work into shifting perspectives, into experiencing everything as holy (William Blake), into mythic and oneiric reality.

The ceremonial/performance pieces inspired by the Singing Masks are not entertainments in a traditional sense. They are not music, theater or dance meant to tell a story or lead one along a precon-

ceived path. They are more often invitations to dive into ineffable richness and chaos even, to discover and explore.

I incorporate state-of-the-art computer technology to loop and pitch-shift the voices of the masks in real-time. I do not hide the technology. Neither do I make much effort to gloss over the sometimes awkward gestures needed to control the devices in my near-blind masked condition. I have an interest in the convergence of the primal and the present, the sacred and the mundane. In the Dream Time presence of the masks, even the most trivial occurrence may be recognized as having its own kind of perfection and beauty.

So how might you approach experiencing the Singing Masks? First of all, you are free to discover your own unique and individual way. I suggest some possibilities here just to nudge us away from habits induced by traditional concert and media formats:

1) Look at a mask for a moment then close your eyes and listen with the image of the mask retained by your inner eye. 2) Squint to defocus your vision while you are listening. What is the aural equivalent of squinting to defocus your listening? 3) Drift off into dreamland. Sleep, though attempt to be aware that you are sleeping and dreaming. 4) Apply no labels. Make no judgments. Or apply labels and judgments, then drop them immediately. 5) Be aware of the passage of time, yet also perceive timelessness. 6) Listen as if you're tuning in to multiple foreign language radio stations. Listen for nuances of timbre, pitch inflection, and rhythm. Go for the sensuousness of the sound rather than the sense of the words. 7) Dream some more.

So it is that we are all interdependently interconnected within the intricate interwoven depths and delights of Deep Listening Dream Time.

**Dream. Dreaming.
Connection. Connecting.
Listening. Listen.
Sounding. Sound. Music.
This is the great mystery.²**

² http://www.users.drew.edu/nlowrey/music/mysterium_magnum.html

