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The Ancient Art of Orpheus

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Music washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life. (Berthold Auerbach) Without music, life would be an error. (Nietzsche) Music and rhythm find their way into the secret places of the soul. (Plato) Music is an outburst of the soul. (Frederick Delius)

I'm sure there are many more quotes and comments that sum up what music means to each of us. The story of music begins with the story of the human family, I suppose. Where I grew up, there was music everywhere. It seemed like everybody played an instrument or sang or at least knew a few songs.

Some of the oldest stories we have tell of the power of music over human emotions. It is said that the ancient Greek mythological figure (c.530 BC), Orpheus, charmed birds, fishes and wild beasts and coaxed the trees and rocks and every living thing into dance with the music of his lyre and his singing.

Also in Greek mythology we have the story of the wood nymph Syrinx who when fleeing from the lusty Pan, called on the water nymphs to

protect her. They assisted by transforming her into hollow water reeds, which whispered when the wind blew over them/her. Poor old Pan was quite upset until he heard her voice in the reeds, and fell in love with them/her. Pan collected the reeds and fashioned them into a set of pipes, according to the Greeks, the origin of the 'Syrinx' or 'pipes of Pan'.

But without a doubt, the forerunner in the field of musical expression has been the human voice and this is probably most evident in the Songlines of the aboriginal peoples of what is now Australia. Indigenous Australia's oral tradition and religious values are based upon reverence for the land and a belief in the 'Dreamtime', the ancient time of creation which runs through the Aboriginals' present day reality.

The songlines represent what may be the oldest continuous oral culture on Earth (c 50,000 years) and conceive of all things beginning with The Dreaming, a sacred 'once upon a time' when all things began. The Songlines are an ancient cultural concept, perpetuated by oral storytelling through singing, dance and painting, passed down from generation to generation.

Songlines are an intricate series of songs that identify landmarks and lengthy paths for navigating the land. These songs describe how the features of the land were created and named during The Dreaming by the spirits who travelled across the Earth, creating and naming trees, rocks, waterholes, animals and other natural phenomena.

Unfortunately, modern life has done away with so much of this and music, for many, has become just another consumer-friendly entertainment option.

Sing, sing a song, sing out loud, sing out strong!.

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