

S3E3 The sound worlds of Agapi

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SPEAKERS

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ZoÃ« Humberstone 00:04

Music Zettel



finley humberstone 00:07

with James Humberstone.



James Humberstone 00:33

Welcome to Music Zettel, a podcast about engaging students in creative pluralist music making, drawing on my own work as an academic, a teacher, and a composer and producer. And you've just been listening to some of my music. So that part of the soundtrack from agape and other kinds of love, is the opening track, chaos and Cosmos. And if you have been following this season, in the first episode, I explained what the story of agape and other kinds of love is. So if you need to know the full story, not just have me summarize the sound worlds, which is what we're getting into today, then, please go back and listen to that first episode. So chaos and cosmos are supernatural beings, who create everything from nothing, and they live outside time in a in a kind of multiverse that they are able to switch metaphorical channels between ancient Greece and modern Greece, modern Athens, in fact, so they they are sort of watching the story, but also making and interacting with the story through this new show, agape and other kinds of love. In the last podcast number two, in this season, I shared with you a unit of work, which was aimed at younger students, although it could be used with any age students, I would say, from late primary or elementary school upwards, but definitely aimed at students who don't have much experience creating music, and even listening to music and listening to hear it practicing hearing it broken down into its constitutional layers. So that go back and listen to that if you're teaching younger students, the ideas in today's resource, the second resource, which is called the sound worlds of agape, check out the the podcast notes for a link to where you can get these resources for free, lots of musical excerpts, lots of resources that you can download and open. Yeah, so the second one is really aimed at older students in the resources. As I was saying in week one, the terminology I've used at the moment is a little bit

skewed towards New South Wales here in Australia, just because we are doing two matinee performances of the show later this month in the Riverside Theatre in Parramatta. And so I wanted to have it set up so that if there are any students in New South Wales, sorry, teachers in New South Wales who want to study the work with their students before or after those shows, they would be able to, to do that with the resources and have them map nicely to some of the outcomes that are in the syllabi in this particular state. But as I mentioned, in episode one, I'll be returning to these resources over the year. And in fact, I developed these resources, teaching myself in high school. About a year ago, I was lucky enough to have long service leave, which is this peculiar thing that we have in Australia, which is that after you've done the same job for 10 years, you are entitled to three months paid leave, or you can even have six months, paid leave at half pay. So I put together a load of a load of sort of normal holiday leave, and my long service leave and had six months off. during that six months off. People kept saying to me, Well, you're an academic, are you going to write a book, you're a composer? Are you going to write a new work of musical work? And I said, No, I'm going to be a good husband and a good dad, because one of the things about, as you would know, dear teachers, dear artists, is that it can be very difficult being present, not only with the kind of administrative pressures that teaching has, but all of the energy that teaching sucks out of you being with young people and, you know, keeping track of what's going on with all of them, getting your preparation done, and as I say, all the administrivia as well, marking and all that kind of thing. So we tend to work long hours. Some days, it's all very intense. But one of the things that I did do while I was on my long service leave was heading to my son and daughter's High School, just down the road, and try out some of these learning resources that I'm now sharing with you. I then further extended those resources late last year when I was lucky enough to collaborate with a University in Athens. And they had hosted Luca, who is the person who wrote all of the text and is the main performer in the show. And they had hosted him, and he had taught them about the show, but also the story but also about some of his creative process. And so then I gave some classes over zoom and the resource in the current format that you can see it in sort of two thirds this, this, this, this episodes material and the next one, we're taken from what I had done in high school and then filled out because obviously, students in university have got lots more experience. And so now I've cut that back again and introduced some other ideas for these sound worlds. So yes, sound world number one is the outside time time multiverse. And if you listened to that and said, Well, that sounds very science fiction a very well if you said it sounds like Van Gillis than you you would be my best friend because that was my inspiration. Why van Gallus number one, I'm an Uber geek and grew up watching on repeat. Blade Runner, based on Philip K. Dick novel Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? One of my favorite short story writers Philip K. Dick. And I loved the soundtrack to that film. And of course, second reason. fangirl is another Greek. Another Greek composer, evangelists, Odysseus Pappa thunnus see you I think that I got close to the surname bear that Vangelis is definitely easier to say. So I drew on instruments and you'll see in the resource I've got photos of this wonderful big old 1970s synthesizer, the Yamaha c s 80. And I was lucky enough to go down to the Melbourne electric sound studio and and actually record on the real synthesizer as well as using a vert virtual one in my own studio. And I made a recording so let's go back to that recording now comparing the the virtual synthesizer which anyone with enough money to buy from Arturia can get and comparing it to the real the real CSAT when I traveled down to Melbourne and recorded it so in the album we're going to have the real sounds of the synthesizer in the live show we use the virtual one here's a little bit of CSAT magic.



James Humberstone 09:07

Have a second idea that I introduced when I'm teaching about this first sound world as well as

the idea of this funny old synthesizer playing a pad a synth pad that is a sound with a slower attack and then sustained tumbul interest which in other words, changes in tambor as the toner held won't go into the complex cynthy stuff, but just the simple idea of a sustained synthesizer sound that then gets thrown through a big reverb sound and of course whatever door you and your students use will come with some built in reverb. I got very addicted in the in the lockdowns with a free. A huge reverb delay from a company called Valhalla called supermassive came out is free. I used it in a couple of compositions over that year, and that's what I did in agape for this sound world I threw the sound under that synthesizer through the, through this big reverb delay unit. So it sort of sounds really spacey, and like, like some of the Vangelis. And another thing you'll notice, I mean, jump on Spotify or or you know, your, your favorite streaming service, look for the soundtrack of Blade Runner. And if you go and listen to some of the music, you'll notice that there's actually a lot of use of acoustic instruments in there as well. And so, you know, we always knew that we were going to have acoustic instruments in, in agape. And so we do have this a mix of synthesized sounds sampled sounds so still played from an electronic keyboard, but actual real recordings of instruments being triggered here, some of those later on. And also, the live sounds of various acoustic instruments that I'll again, I'll also talk about later on, when I'm talking about one of the other worlds. So in a way there, that combination also gives you a little bit of a comparison, if you want to do some further listening on this or send your students off to go and do some listening with other ideas. They're in, in the Vangelis in the original soundtrack. So the two other things that I think are just worth mentioning that you'll find here in the resource when you go and have a look at the the website and download the things. The first thing is that obviously I've gone on about this CS 80 synthesizer. But there is there is another one that you can download free if your students don't have examples of you know, nice synth pads on their instruments. I mean, I've I've talked with Soundtrap a lot and I know that it's got some nice synth pad sounds. So if your students want to experiment with those, they may find good ones in whatever door you use in your school, but I've also linked to another one called towel noisemaker here's and this is free T al noisemaker it here's an example going from again the virtual CSAT into the virtual noisemaker just to give you an idea of what fantastic sounds you can get out of free Software.



13:41

And then the last thing to tell you about the particular sound design for further chaos and Cosmos material is that I do also include and you might have noticed at the start a bunch of different bleeps and bloops as I call it in my resource, bleeps and bloops. Basically, I just went and looked for samples of you know, that sounded like how can I say vintage ideas I wrote here in the resource of spaceships alien technology. So if you think back to something like you know, 2001, A Space Odyssey, or maybe some Star Trek and Star Wars from the 70s and 80s. Lots of you know, imagining what spaceships will sound like in the future, that now actually sound a bit dated. So I pulled in lots of those different kinds of sounds. I also used white noise as a kind of the idea of the sound of space. And of course, before anybody gets pedantic at me, I know space is a vacuum. Therefore, there isn't any sound because there is no pressure to to allow to transfer sound through the vibrations of sound. But anyway, I had white noise because again, that just makes people think of either the sea or space and I had specific sounds for the changes channel which you know, I said, metaphorically changing channels between the different time periods, but Luca does actually use that word in the text. And then last but not least, a Theramin. And if you are lucky enough to have a theremin in your school, I can promise you that that's a great fun lesson, especially with yours 910 11 If they haven't experienced something like that, because you know, it's super, super sciency it's a magical instrument that

you play without touching it. And it's very hard to tune, we cheat a little bit Greta who plays it in the performing the live performances. And myself i It's me who you can hear on the on some of the recordings, demo recordings, I should say, playing the MO, the Moke Thera mini that's why we cheat because it's the Moke Thera Mini and that has actually got some pitch adjustment so that if you don't put your hand in the exact right point in space, you can make it adjust almost like auto tune for theremin. And here's a little bit of those bleeps and bloops and different sounds or working together in the sound design.



16:27

So in this particular resource, the second part of the resource on the sound worlds, I provide a challenge for a couple of the different sound worlds, which is where you get to go and make something based on what you've learned about agape or your students do. You should do it too, though. And so what I've got for the chaos and Cosmos challenge is I found a link to the view of the Earth rising behind the moon, from our tameness, one, which is a satellite, you can get it on the NASA website, and it's linked to from the resort. So yeah, if you, I did this with the students in Athens, and they did, they made fantastic music. And my two ideas for this to create music to go with that imagery is to use synthesizer pads. So whatever, DAW whatever door you've got, get into the settings and find some synthesizer pad sounds, and layer some notes in there, have a listen to, to the opening of agape and see whether it's got some ideas that you can steal. But the other idea that I had, you know, this is the pluralist James coming out here is that and I don't know whether I explained it very well to the students in in Greece because I think maybe it caused a little bit of confusion, but it was the idea of an acoustic pad. So what I mean by that is we know what a synth pad sounds like it's got a slow attack. It's a sustained sound, but the timbre changes as it's sustained. So, taking that and finding sustained acoustic instruments that you can make that with, and I'm not going to play them here for copyright reasons, but in the unit I've embedded some video of different music by composers Benjamin Britten, John Luther Adams, Cornelius Cardew, some of my favorite composers who create textures like that now, they are not the sound of a synth pad but they are music that is made out of long sustained sounds made by acoustic sustaining instruments. So my idea was that you could actually draw on some of the some of the ideas in chaos and cosmos but create something quite different, quite different for that and of course, you could do what Van what Van Gogh listed and actually combine some of those synth sounds and acoustic sounds. So that is the first world let's go on to the second sound world and this is the sound world for ancient Greece.



19:55

One of the things that I found really difficult about teaching all of this to the university, in Athens to the students there is that I am not an expert on Ancient Greek music. Yes, when I was writing agape, I did download a lot of papers, I did talk to one of our performers, Greta Kelly, who plays the chakra man, which is a modern version of the common che, an ancient Persian instrument. I did lots and lots of research, got books, got recordings, and drew on ideas as ancient from ancient Greek music or music that would have informed ancient Greek music. However, as you can imagine, going to teach in a university, even virtually, in Athens, I was very worried about, you know, that they might perceive that I was telling them about their own musical heritage. So I put that up front here as well. Let's remember that the the second biggest Greek population outside of Athens in any city in the world is in Melbourne. So any of

my friends down there doing doing agape in Melbourne? Well, number one we should sell out there. I imagine that the Greek diaspora will be keen to come and have a listen to this fantastic show. Am I allowed to say that about my own show? Well, I just did. But but also though, there are some expertise down there. In fact, after we worked a Luca and I worked on Odysseus together, the big work that we worked on from 2016, that's still going will premiere next year. After we worked on that we did, we went down to the Hellenic Museum in Melbourne and worked with experts there, as well. So I'm just making it clear that I'm not an expert, but I have done lots of study and I really enjoyed learning about this. In the resource. You'll see that I've provided links to information about the chakra man, as well as photo of Greta playing it. Another sound that we use from the area, the Centuri, which is you know, other similar instruments or names for that instrument are the santur the ZIVA the dulcimer silver silver urn. When Luca very first workshopped agape and other kinds of love at libre art, he actually did it with a Centuri player. And they composed slash improvised, beautiful, beautiful sounds. Together with that, and there's a video of that, which includes music that is absolutely not in the final show. But nonetheless, the sound seemed to be a really good, timeless sound and a fantastic instrument that's still played today, we haven't been able to do any live performance with the sentry simply because of the limitation we gave ourselves on numbers of players. If you happen to be listening to this, and you've got nothing to do with education, or composition or production, and you happen to run a venue and you're listening to because you like hiring shows, please do ask us whether we could organize a version of the show with a live zipper player. That's easy. It'll just cost a little bit more money. So anyway, what I did when I was working on the show is that I found a really good sample library from a company called East West and I use that and then we sampled that for the actual live performance. So for the synth player, when we're in ancient Greece, the aggressor Kelly is playing the Shaka man and the synth player can play the Santos sounds as well as some other samples. So that's the so that's what you can hear there in their music have a listen to some of the fun music that I did in a second part of Dr. Tima at the symposium where I change into five eight.



24:31

So for the challenge for the ancient Greek sound world. What I did was that I provided the scores which are for the you know, relatively simple music that you've been listening to for the yatimer at the symposium which is also related to earlier themes for the US Marine Corps infantry, so it's got the D automa melody in it basically is what I'm saying. I've provided that there as a Darko file I I wrote the whole of this in Darko, which is the music notation software. But I've also provided that music is PDF, music, XML and MIDI, so that students can actually take it if they want to rearrange the notation. But the challenge really is well to read what I wrote here using your instruments, voices or samples, if you're a computer musician and working in small groups try to recreate a sound or sound sounds of an ancient world. And that the idea that they might want to consider other traditional or historical instruments that they can recreate or imitate them I want to go searching around, you know, YouTube or library recordings. Naxos library, if your school has access to it. I've got you know, hip music historically informed performance music all the way back maybe to troubadours trouvez, from Europe, that kind of things. Also, maybe considering modes and tuning systems, my way of dealing with modes and tuning systems was to listen and read, but then not assume that I was going to get it right and ask the performers to work with me to improvise and put that in. And of course, singing as well, you know, the oldest of the instruments, the voice, so asking students to take some of those ingredients and use that as a place to start improvising and exploring and making sound. And as I say, I've included little excerpts of the scores from my piece of students want to actually have something as a starting point that they could do

something a little bit different with. And so that brings us to the the third world the final third world which I don't set a challenge for this one I just explained a little bit about where it is, but basically, that's the modern Athens sound world. So, in modern Athens as in the Athens of today, our come on che Shaka man player Grettir swaps that instrument for the modern violin our synth since since synthesizer player, swapped that instrument for a a bunch of more modern instruments we have the in between worlds sound of the Mellotron which you'll hear in a bunch of different tracks, we've got the synth, some of the synthesizer sounds, from the chaos and Kosmos world get pulled in as layers into some of the hip hop production. But essentially, most of the hip hop production is very bare, because it's drawing on a contemporary Athens kind of hip hop genre sub genre of hip hop called Low bap. And Luca worked with the collective, the group active member, which first established this style many years ago in Athens and Luca had me listening to this music. And so there's information there in the resource. As I say, I didn't actually set a challenge for this, but I just showed what the sort of the ideas were that I took, if you like production tropes, I call them from that kind of production, also some different ways that I did some of the beats the sampling for the beats in there. And then finally, I've got a few extra sections in there just to lead into the third section, which I'm going to talk about in the next part podcast, which is talking about talking about the way that I used samples of a heartbeat, so that and then sort of slowed the heartbeat down and re pitched it to turn into another theme from the story, which is rumbling in the dust something that Luca talks about, and a theme that goes through the story each time, the modern Athens characters visit the Areopagus and so some of the sound design that comes back there, and that also doubles up and doubles over with the, with the sound. That is the sound design for the particular world that that we're in at any one time. So there you go, modern Athens, ancient Athens and ancient Greece, and the timeless space of chaos and Cosmos, three distinct sound worlds, and the story moves between the worlds that they represent and the music moves with them. And as I said, there are some in between moments where we might have some of those sounds working together. In fact, that's what happens at the end of the story when the world actually Do collide and come together. And that's what I'll be talking about in in the next podcast. But I'm going to leave you with some of that low back production and a little excerpt from our first released single from the upcoming album. So here are just a short little burst of the track because



Luka Lesson 30:24

zero eyes and let the train begin. And now inside the sides come to the department screaming in the gutters, whining in the darkness an explosion is three blocks away, and it hums like a reverb over rating. The city wakes up of course of five



ZoÃ« Humberstone 30:41


Music Zettel was written presented and produced by James Humberstone



30:46

Byrne as they turn in their feelings.



 finley humberstone 30:48

Music in this episode was composed by James Humberstone

 30:52

Ketchum foundations the waterpipes getting out of bed your movie Blaze for for now. The eyes a lot