

Spring Renewal Report 2017
for the
Sydney Dances of Universal Peace
Connecting to Country in Anthropocene
by Arjuna



a photo of me by Jennyma

Once again we returned to Jamanee Gunya, which is Uncle Noel and Trish's land, south of Ulladulla. This was our 4th year of holding our Spring Renewal retreat there on Aboriginal Land as an act of peace making and reconciliation with the indigenous people of this land and with the Country itself. For me each year it seems to get better. This year we had some 15 dancers from our group and another group of people from the Balagawan Ran Festival, who came with Dr Shaun Matthews or were related to Uncle Noel and Trish.

This year we were invited by Uncle Noel to participate in a healing of a cave that had been desecrated by archaeologists, who some 30 years ago came and stole Aboriginal artefacts from there. The cave had been a traditional dwelling place on the land of the Budawang people. They would gather there as part of their traditional lifestyle and gather oysters and clams (bibblers) and barbeque them on open fires. It was decided collectively on the Queens' Birthday weekend camp in June to do a healing of this cave at our Spring Renewal (see pre-reading sent out to participants).

As in years gone by, we planned 1½ days of dancing on the land and 1 day of receiving Aboriginal teachings. The Sunday cave healing then became the teaching day and we danced on the Saturday and the Monday morning. However unexpectedly on Monday we received some beautiful teachings from Uncle Noel, Uncle Peter and Owen, a local indigenous man who had gone to school with one of our Bondi dancers, Zoe in Sylvania and now lives down the road from Jamanee Gunya. Owen had started the Koori Times and later the National Indigenous Times, so he proved to be very influential in the Aboriginal community. He shared some great stories.

The theme of the Saturday dances was dancing the alchemical elements and invoking the ancestors. We started with the Earth element - we did the Earth breath, the Earth walk and then Earth dances like 'We Circle Around', 'I Walk a Path of Beauty', 'Ancestors Sky People', 'Ko Papatuanuku' and the 'Shamanic Alhamdulillah'. Then followed the same pattern with Water, with dances – 'The Ocean Refuses No River', 'Wishita', 'E Malama' etc. Each time we began with the Sufi element breath and the element walk and then the dances for this element. We also moved around the land so the water dance was near the dam and the fire dances like 'Kuwake Leno Leno Mahote' and 'The White Horse Sun' were danced near the fireplace, to help us attune more deeply to each element.

Of course like all plans things got rearranged due to time constraints, breaks for tea and food and other unexpected moments like late arrivals and visits from Uncle Noel and Trish etc. There was also the delights of children present with Hamida, a grandparent, and Christa, a parent, Zaden, her son, and Reef, her baby as well as Christa's young friend Ella, who was a delightful young angelic energy.

The Sunday was then devoted to the healing and has been beautifully documented by Jenny Templin in her photo story see 'HEALING CEREMONY 1.10pdf'. The 3 healing dances we chose from our repertoire were the Sufi healing dance to Ya Shafee and Ya Kafee, which I led, then the Navaho inspired dance of the Beauty Way, which Karen led and I played the click sticks for. During this dance I kept getting messages from the Old Folks, as Uncle Noel calls the spirit ancestors. I felt they were telling me not to lead the 3rd healing dance. This was the Jewish inspired healing dance An Na El Na. I intuited that we needed to lead that dance to complete the process.

When I led that dance, the whole energy of the cave transformed. Evidence of the transformation of the energy in the cave came from several sources. One was the delight that was now visible on Uncle Noel's face when he said that this kind of family gathering had not happened there for some 230 years. The second evidence came from Jai, who was our wonderful drummer for the weekend and who had spent some 6 years in India with Baba (otherwise known as Kulavaduta Satpurananda). Jai said that when we arrived the energy of the cave was a murky grey, when we left it had a beautiful blue glow to it.

In the evenings at Jamanee Gunya we sat around the big fire and shared stories and songs, and on the Sunday evening Jai continued to cook oysters and bibblers collected from Burril Lake during the day:



On the Monday we caught up on dances that had been planned for our Saturday element inspired session but missed - 'The Earth is our Mother' and the Maori inspired dance for the lord of the trees, 'Tane Mahuta'. Then we decided to present the Aboriginal dance we had been given by Uncle Noel and his family, to him and Uncle Peter and Owen, who was there too at the time. This was a rather scary thing to do for us, as we weren't sure how Uncle Noel would react.

When we presented this dance to Aunty Eli Golding in preparation for her doing the Welcome to Country in October or Pir Zia, we got a very mixed response. At first she wasn't sure about these Gubbas doing a Koori dance. In the end she came around and was quite approving of us in that we were at least taking an interest in Koori culture. Uncle Noel and Peter's reaction was quite different, they laughed at our rather different approach to the dance that his nephew Philip and family had gifted us. It was funny for them to see us Gubbas doing what we thought of as one of their dances. However when I rather hesitatingly asked for feedback, he said he couldn't give us any feedback, it was now our dance and so he couldn't comment on the way we did it. What a beautiful response! What an affirmation of what we were doing there.

After the dance we all sat down and stories were shared by the 3 Aboriginal elders present there. In particular there were the stories of the tribes that used to come down from the mountains to steal the women from the coastal tribes. When I asked when that was, Owen said "Oh, about 30,000 years ago!" There was a collective sigh by us Gubbas, for whom this was an incredible example of the depth of memory and culture of the Budawang people. Until recently, with the advent of DNA testing, and more recent archaeological finds and anthropological theories - our stories only go back some 5000 years, as based on a literal interpretation by Christians of the mythical part of the Torah (the Jewish Bible). This may have been further reinforced by the fact that both the Jewish and the Chinese calendars go back some 5000 years. Suddenly we were struck by the ancientness of this remarkable culture that so few Australians have bothered to inquire into, even though us Gubbas had now been here for some 230 years.

After lunch on the Monday, many people left the retreat, but some of us stayed another night or two. Uncle Noel and Trish made us feel so at home in their Country, we were welcome to return again the following year, which we decided to do. Each year we seem to go deeper into this experience of the most ancient continuous culture on the planet. So much to learn; so much to understand; so much to experience; so much to celebrate; in this ecology of culture that we are all co-creating.

This co-creation process of contemporary Australia includes Aboriginal people, Uncle Noel and his family, as well as some of our group being migrants from other lands for up to 9 generations, like Karen on her father's side and Nicola's family of British descent, and the multicultural Australia that I represent, being born elsewhere and choosing to make this land my dwelling place. In this ecology of culture, that the Dances of Universal Peace are also a part of, we have essentially 3 cultural projects interacting with each other as an ecology of culture – the Aboriginal one that goes back some 65,000 years according to recent finds; the British Colonial project, that goes back to the invasion and subsequent colonisation, some 240 years ago; and the Multicultural project that goes back to the Whitlam government of the 70s and is thus little more than 50 years old. What a privilege for me to feel part of this peacemaking process.



Our final gathering after our presentation of the Aboriginal dance, led to some great stories and discussion and to Uncle Noel reading from Dark Emu, Uncle Bruce Pascoe's book on Aboriginal agriculture.



Zoe, Owen and Shaun with the kitchen and dining area in the background.