

The musicians:

Phil Conyngham (Australia): Didgeridoo/ Yidaki and Bronze Age Irish Horns

For well over a decade, musician Phil Conyngham has been an intriguing part of the rise to worldwide prominence of the Australian Indigenous musical instrument, the didgeridoo (yidaki). Brought up in a country town in the eastern Australian state of New South Wales, Phil pursued his study of the ancient wind instrument whilst living and travelling in the Northern Territory and far north Queensland during the 80's/ 90's. Along the way he got to know a number of outstanding Aboriginal musicians, all of who were very generous with imparting the rudiments of Yidaki playing as Conyngham struggled to learn accompaniment to traditional songs and dances. Influences from other musical styles and Phil's love of experimentation and improvisation were gradually combined to develop a playing technique to suit the 'western ear', and to transpose the instrument from its traditional context into, and across, the full spectrum of contemporary music. Now known to didgeridoo enthusiasts as a dynamic and original virtuoso, Conyngham's reputation has grown internationally due to a combination of his live performance, sound tracks for film/ TV /theatre /modern ballet, recorded works and academic presentations.

Alongside various projects in jazz, folk, rock and some more obscure musical genres, a major part of Phil's performance career has been with the acclaimed Irish/ Australian ensemble 'Reconciliation'. Following an introduction to the Irish horns in 1991, from fellow band members Simon O'Dwyer and Maria Cullen, he has become one of the few exponents of these Bronze Age instruments, and together with the group has composed the first new music for the horns in nearly 3000 years. Conyngham has had several horn types recast by O'Dwyer (Prehistoric Music Ireland) and developed methods to play them based upon didgeridoo technique. As a representative of Prehistoric Music Ireland, Phil also gives lectures and workshops in 'didge' and Bronze Age horns at universities and conservatories internationally. Those under his tuition include brass players from several symphony orchestras and contemporary ensembles, eager to extend their embouchure, tone production and breathing technique on their own instruments by learning the wide variety of techniques applied to the Bronze Age horns and didgeridoo.

Conyngham's meeting with Joachim Schween at the 'International Study Group on Music Archaeology' (ISGMA) conference, held several years ago at Kloster Michaelstein, situated in the Harz Mountains in Germany, has led to further collaboration, with both musicians combining their collection of 'ancient instrument replicas' for composition, concert performance, and recording.

Conyngham turns up in the most unlikely venues scattered about all corners of the globe. They include museums, castles and ancient archaeological sites throughout Europe as well as appearances at festivals such as Sound Symposium, Sphinx, Glastonbury and Womad; these grander locations offset by numerous 'trad sessions' in pubs around Ireland. His concerts back home in Australia have also been held at locations as diverse as the Sydney Opera House, Martin Place, outback rodeos and Aboriginal communities. His current duo project with Bronze Age lute player and archaeologist Joachim Schween will no doubt generate a few more musical surprises...

Joachim Schween (Germany): Bronze Age Lure / Lur and Horns

Joachim Schween is a graduate in Archaeology and Art History from the University of Hamburg. Since the beginning of the 90's he has worked as a project officer for various museums and also as a site project officer at archaeological digs in northern Germany. His research during this time specialised in the colonisation history of the Weser Mountain area of southern Lower Saxony.

Schween's experience as a musician in both classical and jazz idioms has allowed him to expand his studies of ancient musical instruments. In recent years his extensive work with the Bronze Age lure (sometimes spelt 'lur') has focused on both the musical potential and the cultural importance of the instrument. The playing technique of the Bronze Age Irish Horns, pioneered by fellow researcher Simon O'Dwyer, inspired him to transfer the technique of circular breathing to the lure.

As concert performer, lecturer, and researcher in music-archaeology, Schween has travelled to Denmark, Scotland, Sweden and Poland. He has played the lure at several interesting locations including prehistoric tombs, stone circles and towers. These include 'Brochs' on the Orkney and Shetland Islands, and the rock carvings of Kalleby (Sweden), where ancient illustrations depicting lure players are to be found.

Joachim's musical improvisation on the lure continues to be a highlight at many exhibitions. These have included 'The temple in the Moor', at the Museum of Lower Saxony, Hannover; 'Gold and Cult in the Bronze Age' at the Germanic National Museum, Nuremberg; and the current 'Myth and Magic: the first gold in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern', at the Schwerin Archaeological Museum.