

Synchronicity: by Niall O’Riordan is there a larger plan?

I have a very simple view to living an artistic life. Perhaps for some people too simplistic, but over the years my experience has continued to affirm my creed.

As young musicians, many of us are fed ideas about living a musical life that we begin to hold true. These ideas eventually solidify into unshakeable beliefs that can keep us stuck: ideas such as ‘it’s not what you know, it’s who you know’ or ‘it’s all down to luck at the end of the day’, or ‘you’ve got to be in right place at the right time’. If we hold these beliefs they can exert significant influence over our daily actions and interactions. Although we may have a desire to fulfil our soul’s calling, we begin to rely more and more on the external, thinking that our success, whatever that may be, lies beyond our ability alone. In other words, we believe that there must be something else that we need to do. It is here, I believe, that the essence of the problem lies: that ‘something else’ can seem nebulous and out of reach, and can lead to a feeling of helplessness.

Networking

One way we act out these beliefs is in our approach to networking. We start trying: trying to be in the right place or trying to meet the right people. We begin to search out and connect with people who we think can make it happen for us. Perhaps it makes us feel that we are fulfilling our need to do that elusive something else. But being calculating and having ulterior motives can be sensed by others, even if it is unconscious. In fact, only seven percent of communication involves actual words; 55 percent is visual (body language, eye contact) and 38 percent is vocal (pitch, speed, volume, tone of voice). Your deeper motivations give the game away. A lot of energy and effort can be consumed in our endeavour to search out, impress and be liked by the ‘right’ people. This type of networking holds a very particular type of energy. If that energy could speak it would say something like ‘I don’t believe I am talented enough to do this on my own and I need you’. It comes from a position of disempowerment.

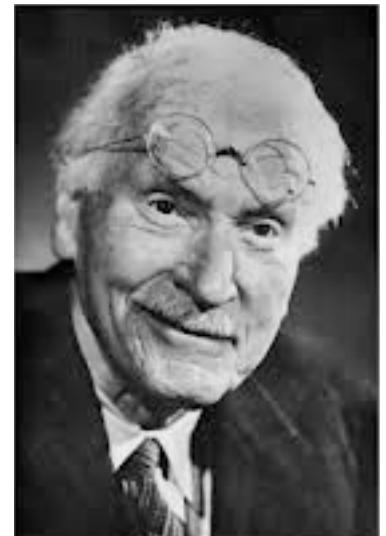
Synchronicity

You don’t need to look outside yourself for the success you seek: *you* hold the power. At the beginning of this article I

stated that my approach is simple and indeed it is: you need to commit to your soul’s calling; for you, that may be playing the flute. So what does it mean, to commit to your soul’s calling? It simply means taking care of the small day-to-day things, and, of course, this includes turning up every day to practice. Yes, practice! Do your best and allow a power greater than you to do the rest. If you work hard and are committed, the right people, opportunities, and everything else you need on the journey, will come precisely at right time. This idea is called synchronicity, and the mind-set required to accept it involves a certain level of trust.

“Synchronicity reveals the meaningful connections between the subjective and objective world”

Carl Jung



The concept of synchronicity was first described by Carl Jung. Jung was transfixed by the idea that life was not a series of random events but, rather, an expression of a deeper order. This concept ties in with the beliefs I described at the beginning: you can ‘be in the right place at the right time’, ‘meet the right person at the right moment’ or experience a lucky ‘coincidence’. Don’t be fooled, these things happen as a result of your commitment and most definitely are not something which can be consciously orchestrated. Many

people trick themselves into thinking that they are committed when, in fact, they haven't practised for weeks and, instead, think that going to the pub with Mr X will help their career. Unfortunately, such a person is in denial about their level of commitment. American flautist, Tammy Evans Yonce, however, recognises that synchronicity can play a role in bringing the appropriate person to you at the appropriate time. She says, "I have experienced synchronicity in the form of people I have met. They later figured in my career, although when I met them, I didn't know just how influential they would later become."

The good news is you don't just have to take my word for it. Perhaps you want to make a change? From my experience, when we make such a commitment, life seems to give us very clear signs that we are on the right path. I call them the green lights. Give yourself one month of committed practice, keep a journal and make notes of all the little synchronicities that you experience. These could be small opportunities, chance encounters, finding a course that interests you, pleasing compliments, or a piece of good 'luck'. This process can be greatly helped by finding something that centres you; perhaps this could be walking, meditation, or something else that brings you peace and clarity. For further reading, I highly recommend the book *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron, a 12-week programme for creative recovery.

"The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the objects it loves."

Carl Jung

Synchronicity in action

Asking around the flute playing community, I was privileged to hear numerous stories of synchronicity in action. Atarah Ben Tovim told me of a couple of occasions where she felt her musical future had been transformed by a perfect opportunity or a watershed moment. "When I auditioned for Principal with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic at the age of 22, I was given Hindemith's *Metamorphosis* to sight-read," she said. "I had just been studying it, and when it was put in front of me, I had a feeling of divine intervention. I got the job, which led on to a fabulous musical life."

A little later in her career came another life-changing moment. Atarah tells the story: "I was in the RLPO and we were asked to go to a school for handicapped children and give them a mini-concert. They were children who were disabled because their mothers had taken thalidomide...mentally full of life and joy, despite having no arms or legs. My hair stood on end as I introduced the concert and I got the shakes; it was a calling

to do children's concerts. I gave my notice in to the Phil a few weeks later. I had found what I had to do for the next stage of my life, to put the shine in kids' faces - and I have tried to do that for the last 30 years."

Native American flute player Nathan Tsoosie from Phoenix, Arizona tells of his experience of synchronicity: "Hawk Littlejohn is considered to be the greatest contemporary maker of native American flutes but his flutes are well out of my budget and not easily available since he passed in 2000. One day, I got an email from a friend who wanted to car pool with me for lessons with shakuhachi master Kaoru Kakizakai. I agreed and came over. She had a wall full of native flutes, mostly hand-carved ones, and in that collection I saw one of Hawk's flute. My friend picked that flute up and said, 'This flute was passed to me and I feel it should go to you now.' Normally, I wouldn't accept a gift like this, but at that particular time it felt right, and my friend also said she felt good gifting me the flute."

Throughout my flute playing career, I have been prone to violent ups and downs in my moods and confidence. The next beckoning concert has always been my wake-up call; something that I have come to rely on over the years. What is also true, is that there ALWAYS comes a day in my build-up (a specific moment on a specific practicing day), when I suddenly find my energy and my playing form and I finally feel I own myself again - and invariably, I will suddenly receive a phone-call or email with positive news....quite uncanny...it is as if, suddenly, all channels are open between myself and life and I achieve the flow and joy I have been looking for - and it is all definitely connected to the energy behind my practice. I have no doubt that these moments are NOT a coincidence and I also have no doubt that when I meet people when I am in this zone, these meetings are powerful and productive, because this confidence emits a radiance to people, beyond what is said in conversation. This has happened time and time again, over many years.

Wissam Boustany

Authentic Networking

Finally, returning to how we network, I agree, of course, that networking is an important part of building a musical career - but I believe it is something that we can allow to happen, going with the flow rather than premeditating it. Go into networking opportunities without expectation. Consider the whole person, rather than treating them as a commodity to meet your own needs. Above all, remain genuine and authentic. If you do, life will present you with wonderful opportunities, all you need to do is be receptive and trust them. In the words of Carl Jung: 'synchronicity is an ever present reality for those who have eyes to see'.