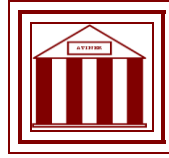


**Athens Institute for Education and Research
ATINER**



**ATINER's Conference Paper Series
ART2015-1480**

**Creativity: The Myth and the Role of
Research in Creative Work**

**Hank Hehmsoth
Professor
School of Music
Texas State University - San Marcos
USA**

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Dr. Gregory T. Papanikos
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**Creativity:
The Myth and the Role of Research in Creative Work**

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Abstract

In this paper, I present a personal exploration of where creativity comes from, and especially where ideas come from, and how they are developed through research into creative musical works.

Keywords: Creativity, Research, Hehmsoth, Robb.

Introduction

There's a common myth about artists, that creative people wait for an inspired eureka moment, a transcendent vision of a completed work of art. But in truth, artists, especially productive artists, pursue their inspiration through research, either consciously or subconsciously. The creative process is different for every artist, every scientist, every academic and every entrepreneur.

Each has a personalized way of gathering, developing and defining the ideas that become their work. In science, it's easy to recognize: Look at Edison, who spent years researching and trying everything as a filament for his light bulb until he discovered carbonized tungsten. But creative people, on the other hand, are rarely seen doing their research.

A lot of people see a creative person as a free-spirit nonconformist who gets worked into a fever naturally or unnaturally, or on the other hand, a tortured soul working in cave-like solitude. It's not like this, good creative artists rely on the day-to-day practice of research.

In 2012 several of my colleagues contributed and were featured in an article in the national *Hillview's*¹ magazine by feature writer Billi London-Gray on "*The Creation Myth*". In the complete article one reads how different art disciplines share the same common principles in the creativity, but also how different their approaches can be. A sculptor and a dancer produce art in very different ways, but share a freedom of expression, and a common creative impulse. Both the shared commonality and the vital differences are fascinating.

I would like to describe my musical process in more detail with one piece of music I worked on for a composition grant from the Donald Robb Foundation at UNM.

What follows is a step by step explanation of how my personal interest in something, something I have lived and experienced, becomes something I research, spawning more and more interest, detail, and development of ideas, from a springboard of backstory. How connections are made, and how it all becomes inevitable and unique, because of the singular personality in each of us. I know that I can sustain the effort to create, if I have a personal stake in it.

So I try my best to find essential things I have lived through, and use them to become the start of ideas. I use what is most familiar, what I consider my own. So here's a journey of how and why I ended up with a creative work.

Backstory Creates Connections

I love New Mexico. I've traveled hiked skied walked visited everywhere in New Mexico. The Georgia O'Keeffe art gallery, Indian reservations at Taos, the grand Plaza in Santa Fe, the new Tent Rocks National Park that President Clinton authorized in 1998, played jazz with Austin expatriates, gone to the Santa Fe Opera, and eaten great Southwestern food. It has its own architecture,

¹<http://www.ua.txstate.edu/campus-connections/hillviews.html>

2 lane 1930's highways in the Cimarrons. I've been surprised by black bears at 6 AM at the top of Sierra Madre and gone skiing with my family at Red River and WildFire. I've hiked and walked in the desert in the middle of the night by myself. You know there is a dryness in the desert that saps the water right out of you. Sometimes at four or 5 AM there's a mist that settles down on top of the desert and it's moisture for cactuses and for hummingbirds. And for an hour or two before sunrise it's cool and refreshing. There is a blue cast to this mist that I've always found fascinating. And there are these steep narrow dry riverbeds there called arroyos. When there is a thunderstorm in the mountains within one minute you have walls of water racing down these dry arroyo riverbeds. So there's a backstory, what I just talked about is backstory, its personal experiences that I draw on, and a connection I have.

Restoring the Past

So I'm on the Internet about New Mexico and I find a grant for composers from the University of New Mexico. It's called the **JD Robb Foundation**¹. A fascinating man who belongs to a small list of individuals I really admire (first fighting street-wise intellectuals) like John Huston the director (Treasure of Sierra Madre), or Kris Kristopherson, who was a Rhodes scholar, but gave it up to be an actor singer songwriter. And of course Georgia O'Keefe, a fierce warrior independent woman who chose New Mexico as her home. Well, JD Robb had a PhD in composition from Yale, a law degree and successful law practice in NYC. And he was an accomplished cellist. He gave it all up, and became a gaucho cowboy in Argentina in the late 40's. He ended up in New Mexico and taught music at the University of New Mexico, became the director of the music department, and then Dean of the fine arts college. This is in the early 1950s. There is a Swiss company called *Nagra* which made the first battery operated portable high quality reel to reel tape recorder. JD Robb got one of the first ones of these, and set out for the next 16 years recording indigenous music of the Southwest. He recorded cowboy songs, Mexican weddings, mariachi music, outdoor festivals, and especially lots of native American Indian dance chants and secret ceremonies at the Indian reservations in New Mexico and Arizona.

So the J D Robb composer grant funds original compositions based on his 6000 recordings. The entire library is online, so I could sit at my computer and research the library. I listened to Mexican wedding songs, cowboy love ballads, secret Indian snake ritual dances, and a song of the wolf. I settled on two short recordings. I want to play for you 2 excerpts.

²*Ramon Herrera*, male vocalist/performing artist, and Native American Jemez Indian Recorded 1957 in Cochiti Pueblo, NM

¹<http://www.robtrust.org/>

²Ramon Herrera, male vocalist/performing artist, and Native American Jemez Indian Recorded 1957 in

Upon transcription, I realized it's in 5/8 meter, this rhythm is found all over the world in many cultures, because it represents a heartbeat. And the melody he sings is a pentatonic, used all over the world, but his vocal inflections also add up to a diminished scale, which is used in jazz and many movie scores. The combination of a fast asymmetrical meter in 5/8, pentatonics plus the diminished scale set me off with a passion to further research this and invited many creative ideas to work with. Because the rhythm was that 5/8 heartbeat, I then researched 5/4 and 5/8 drum patterns in *Killer Grooves*¹, finding a pattern by the drummer John Riley, drummer with Bob Mintzer and a friend of mine. Here again, lots of personal connections here helped to keep me on track. My colleague percussionist Bobby Lopez told me the pattern is a variation on a Salsa "Cascara"

So the main theme is superimposed over the drum pattern.

I decided to have a piano solo high point, which was initially inspired by flash flood Arroyos in New Mexico. Again, this is jazz, and using diminished structures, but with a lot of rhythmic interest, especially in 5/4.

This piece is *Two Desert Dances*², the 2nd dance uses another recording I researched.

³*Pito melody*; Performing Artist - Vicente Padilla; Recorded 1952 in Santa Fe, NM

The limited four pitch melodies are played on a Pito, a Southwest native ocarina instrument show a remarkable variety of phrasing. The more I listened to his melodic ideas, the more I wanted to explore the hidden contemporary harmonic possibilities, and to reconsider what can be done with these four pitches. His themes are treated with a contemporary jazz harmonization and an open section of improvisation over the chords I constructed.

This was my creative interest and fascination with taking something minimal, 4 pitches, and harmonizing it with fresh contemporary jazz harmony.

The last idea was that I could play live with these 65 year old recordings. I remembered the virtual duets that Natalie Cole did with videos of her father, Nat King Cole, from 50 years earlier.

So I decided I could do this with a click track, so the drummer could hear and keep the band in sync with the recordings.

I used *Digital Performer* sequencer software to make a CD with Left Channel just a click for the percussionist or drummer to stay in sync with the 2 recordings during a live performance.

And I used *Finale* manuscript software to generate parts for the live musicians.

There is an option to use a sax and real flute without the recordings, but I wanted to incorporate this technology feature.

¹<http://www.amazon.com/Killer-Grooves/dp/0825845920>

²<http://txstateschoolofmusic.bandcamp.com/track/two-desert-dances-hank-hehmsoth>

³Padilla, Vicente. Pito Melody. John Donald Robb Archive of Southwestern Music, Field Recordings (MU 7, CD 37, index numbers 1074-1075a, Tracks 17-19). Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico. Recorded in Santa Fe, NM, 1952.

The score of *Two Desert Dances*¹ and the recording are on my websites, if you want to hear the complete work, and you can download the score, too.

It's fascinating to me that some people and cultures arrive at sophisticated and very colorful melody and rhythm through wholly natural means, culturally, while others (myself included) must derive similar points using theory and study. As I spent time working with these dances, the more I felt a connection with the past, and these musicians. There is a spirituality and pleasure here, which comes through in my writing.

I hope the simultaneous live performance with the actual field recordings from 60 years ago is a way to connect today's audience across different times and cultures, in the way that only music does, and breaks these two Native Americans' long silence. And unearthing these 60 year old lost recordings, places them in a new context to new generations of ears. *Two Desert Dances* became a springboard for my future work, and everything I've been concerned with for the last five years. I received a MacDowell in 2011 and the next year chosen the MacDowell Norton Stevens Fellow in Composition, selected for this honor based on the spirit of my work and importance to the world community of artists. I think I found a way to take my personal creative art and use it as a tool for social change. I created a mission statement:

"I am out to create a new, signature American sound, from a synthesis of contemporary art music, jazz, and world music, with a global approach and unique blend of influences, that gives my music a brand, its own distinctive place in the international scene. I wish to push my music in new directions, and continue focusing on socially engaged programming."

My broad freewheeling ideas jumbled into something very personal... I just kind of go with it and see what happens there's a freedom there. I think later on you can go back and see broad themes. The interest in other cultures, particularly North and South American native Indian cultures, has become a way to infuse my American compositional skills into something with a world global value.

I received a Fulbright Specialist Fellowship in 2013, spending the summer in Santiago, Chile at the Institut ProJazz. I have an Andean culture orchestral piece near completion.

My goal is to elevate global creativity, and my mission is to promote the well-being of humanity. Here at ATINER, I am forming a network of music Performing Artists from all over the world who can meet in Athens, Greece at the ATINER Annual International Conference on Visual and Performing Arts and celebrate and strengthen the arts connection between cultures through the medium of jazz and world music. This is a great opportunity to meet and share with artists on a global level at the very birthplace of freedom and democracy.

¹http://issuu.com/hehmsoth/docs/two_desert_dances

Last year I enlisted a drummer from Canada, and will plan a performance for next year in Athens.

What started as a presentation about creativity with the question '*Creativity - where does it come from?*'_ends up with the question '*Creativity - where can it go?*', because Creativity is a tool to bring the world together.