



Museums in Music

Walter Maioli's Sonorous Journey: The Nature of Music

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Walter Maioli –musician, composer, musicologist and paleorganologist– has for over thirty years experimented with the prehistoric and ancient music, art, theater, and ritual of indigenous peoples in the East and West, bringing the creation, re-creation, re-presentation, and preservation of these aspects of culture to a new level.

> Fascinated by the human ear's need to seek and produce the resonant sounds found in the natural world, Maioli has undertaken a lifelong exploration of the relationship between nature, sound, and music, through his early experimentation recording the sounds of different environments and their inhabitants as a sensorial experience, and culminating in his current repertoire of performances presented amidst woods, waterfalls, and in natural and manmade contexts.

> The phenomenon of using nature itself as the simultaneous source and site of a sound and music performance is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in Maioli's astonishing concerts in the prehistoric grottos and caves of Toirano and Bergio Verezzi, Italy, where he generates acute sounds from stalactites and stalagmites.

> Maioli's investigations of the impact of tonal frequencies of ancient instruments and elements of nature on the listener were prescient and insightful contributions to the approaches now being developed for sound and music therapy to stimulate and even restore the human brain and auditory pathways, and of sonorous tones and sounds in nature to calm and regulate the human sensory system.

> As the founder of Il Centro del Suono, Maioli is also preserving a collection of thousands of prototypical and recreated musical and sound-making instruments from prehistoric and ancient times. With its teaching laboratory, recording library and interdisciplinary approach across the fields of experimental archaeology, science, philosophy, acoustics, music, psychobiology, ethnomusicology, the performing arts, and computer sciences, the Center's work focuses on the origins and development of sonorous communication and acoustic ecology. It applies the study of sound to cultural and humanitarian ends through exhibits and educational programs, and, with the formation of Maioli's group **SYNAULIA** in 1995, through recordings and performances of ancient music, dance, theater, and ritual recreated from prehistoric iconographic sources and ancient texts.



Tracing of a wind instrument (flute) player, Pahi, Kondo (Tanzania). Reproduced Courtesy of the Leakey Family. Based on the original tracing by © Mary Leakey, 1983 (Archive WARA W00337).

> The ways in which Maioli works in museums reflect the variety of his interests and expand our understanding and experience—as listeners, spectators, and participants—of the natural world, music, sound, and performance across time and place. The seminal 1991 exhibition organized with director Giovanni Pinna at the Civic Museum of Natural History of Milan, “The

Origins of Music”, brought Maioli's collection into a new realm of sound design. In addition to the vast collection of the Center's artifacts traveling to museums as a tangible history of the origins of music, Maioli performs music composed for recreated Etruscan and other Classical instruments *in situ* at numerous archaeological sites parks and museums (including the Aquincum, Budapest and the National Etruscan Museum, Villa Giulia, Rome). He has developed educational books and concerts to teach music history to children used in France and Italy. His more experimental installations include fusing prehistoric and ancient instruments with buildings, modern technology and electronic media (Fort Asperen, Holland; Tweed Museum of Art, Duluth, Minnesota); conducting music workshops in archaeological parks (Alphen aan de Rijn, Holland); and creating a soundtrack for the cosmos (Civic Planetarium Ulrico Hoepli, Milano).

Walter Maioli is inspiring:

“Since the dawn of humanity, the cavern has meant the primordial abyss, the place of the unknown...the enchantment...the supernatural emanation, in the magnificence of its forms, shades, transparencies, colors, and sounds. You are swallowed by the subsoil through the great vagina of mother earth to find yourself in her womb, this way, to be given birth again. This is the archetype of all the pilgrimages of the labyrinths and of the rites of spiritual rebirth. The cavern is the principal sonorous symbol...it's also the place where the most environmental acoustic effects can be found; therefore the cavern is the source from which the universe springs, wide open mouth of the chorister's gods, center of the dead and of sounds able to enchant. The temples and churches, in their sonorous structure, are an imitation of it.”

> A longtime collaborator with Emanuel Anati's Camunian Center of Prehistoric Studies, at the **22nd Valcamonica Symposium on Rock Art (18-24 May 2007)** Walter Maioli performed with Luce Maioli, Natalie van Ravenstein, and Ivan Gibellini enthraling the international community at the UNESCO World Heritage site with his compositions for stone percussion, bone horns, shell whistles, reed flutes, and a finale proving the centripetal and centrifugal forces behind the howl of a whirling rhomb.

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