

Black Swans, an opera poem / Invitation to an International Collaboration

Four Directions Opening Dance with Jürgen Paul playing didgeridoo.

A'HO! I thank the Ancestors who have supported my journey here,—those who, from each direction, watch my every move as a daughter of bloodlines.

I thank Liz Lea for her organization of the 2019 BOLD II Festival and for her gracious invitation to participate with this community. And I thank Jürgen Paul, whose generosity has brought each of us into the other's orb. A'ho!

In this talk I briefly address the process I undertook in developing my new performance work, **BLACK SWANS, AN OPERA POEM**,—a work envisioned, first and foremost, as an international collaboration, community-focused cross-cultural conversation, and invitation.

I'll also touch on a few elements informing my theory on poetic perception, beginning with the most primary of elements,—a sentient, integrated, deeply knowing and wide feeling responsive body. I refer to a supra-sensual somatology.

a little HISTORY of the Black Swans Project

Following the 4th performance installation of my investigative life project on the swan at the 2015 International Exhibit of Contemporary Art in Italy, an Australian bloke in the audience brought my attention to the fact that Australia is home and habitat to the black swan. My investigations of the swan image in myth, music, dance, alchemy, psychology, philosophy, film, and poetry, pose this question: what insights might swan lore offer that might impact on our human ways of living? Our behaviors toward one another, for example; our approaches to self-and-communal care? Our ways of healing and wellness? And, our relations to the physical world in which we live, as well as the psychical and interior worlds by which decisions are made in order to abide in both.

In 2015 I turned toward Australia, seeding the ground for ***BLACK SWANS, an opera poem***. By 2018 I had organized meet-ups in Perth; in 2019 I returned to Canberra. A cross-cultural conversation began. Along the way, all things

black swan aligned, including the moment I found myself paused behind a car with U.S. plates that read: **BLKSWN**. **BLACK SWAN**. The universe indeed is a poetic universe!

my PROCESS

All poetic images come with a history: local and regional, folk and mythic. As a mythopoetic image, the black swan comes with a complex tapestry teeming with socio-historical texts and culture-specific stories. Some tell of the swan in elaboration while others contrast its roles and meanings. Its breadth of meaning, however, is instructive,—from the Dreamtime story as told by Nyoongar Elder Dr. Noel Nannup, to 2nd C. Roman poet Juvenal who wrote, "*A rare bird in the lands, very much like the black swan.*" The black swan of course is not rare at all; perhaps, however, its qualities are.

By October 2018 I had gathered a Creative Team of American artists who addressed the afore-mentioned

questions. We delved into our personal and cultural stories. We debated what needed redress, and *how*; what needed telling, and *how*; what needed to be heard and, what needed liberation from denial.

Each artist's response established the content of the performance. Story, poetry, music, dance, and the art installation of the CYGNUS Constellation lit above our heads all congealed as we reclaimed parts of ourselves and discovered new ground from which to live, breathe, and act. ***Black Swans, an opera poem*** became a generative place where concerns of survival, belonging, and the ironies of protection—human & species alike—found voice. The meaning of the word 'swan' after all is to sing or to sound.

Thus we tracked and sung how each of us knows loss; how grief finds courage; and how joy paves paths to reconciliation. We celebrated being witness and our ways of remembering. We shared a renewed vision of *humanitas* in a language that imagines a Future.

CONCLUSION

The *Black Swans* work, however, is not finished; it has only begun. As an international collaboration, conversation, and invitation, ***Black Swans*** is poised to be re-imagined by Australian artists,—indigenous and non-indigenous, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike. Only then will the scope of its values yield and its vision be fulfilled. The black swan has found its belonging to and among us. The question is: *how do we belong to the black swan?*

I conclude with this text from the ***Black Swans*** libretto:

**We are all black swans,
black swans / who rise in the dark
and howling times,
when Future is threatened
yours,—and mine
swallowed whole
by hatred**

despair

disremembering Its name.

We are all carriers / of Her name

before we were born / writ

in red

white

black

and yellow ink / on each of our souls

and only

with Hope's greening

will Future's dreaming

Light Earth's Skies.

Thank you.