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Times of the Tribes: Can We Sing this Song?

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How can we possibly approach the topic of the terrible disasters that occurred in the United States on September 11, 2001? The hijack bombings, the loss of lives, the possible consequences, all of the physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual wounds we came to inherit from these dreadful acts will haunt us for many years to come. Americans and citizens of many countries around the world are in a heightened state of alert. Many of us thought we were safe. Our sense of safety has been shaken.

As music therapists, many of us also are in a position to hear the stories of our patients and clients through their words and through their music. Many of these people, who already had serious fears and anxieties are feeling further traumatized by our global anxieties. And now Americans join the many others who have felt the daily terrors and horrors of unrest as a way of life. For Americans, it is a shattering of a well-guarded innocence that seemed eternal. How wrong we were.

Now we attempt to pick up the pieces and go back to work, all the while, asking ourselves the deeper questions. What does it all mean? How can we reflect on these inconceivable circumstances to help the quality of our lives as human beings around the world?

The work here at *Voices* is in the center of these dilemmas. Our vision for *Voices* is to encourage a discourse between the more isolated tribal societies and the more industrialized societies. If we imagine that solutions to our dilemmas will only be found in fields of engagement that focus on military, diplomatic and economic solutions, we are badly mistaken. Solutions are found in everyday life. And perhaps the solutions we can discover and create are available to us through collegial relationships and conversations about our work in music therapy. We consider the individual and collective questions. We think about how we can apply sound principles to our work. Often these principles have secure roots in cultural values, beliefs, norms, behaviors, feelings, customs, taboos, languages and other cultural practices.

Disparity between societies in which tribal norms are still practiced on a daily basis and the industrialized societies in which more individualistic norms take precedence has never been more apparent. Maffesoli, in this critical book, *The Time of the Tribes: The decline of individualism in mass society*, uses language such as "emotional communities" and "aesthetic nebula" to describe some of the core concepts present in tribal systems. Such concepts imply empathy, aesthetics, environments or fields of engagement, collaboration, a sense of connection. Often, consideration of such concepts tends to marginalize seemingly subtle aspects of our experience as human beings. However, the forms that represent these concepts are expressions in music, art, dance, story, poetry and a variety of art forms and social events that, in general, have a high context of arts expressions. As music therapists, we know so well how powerful they can be.

And how about myth? Isn't this a time to take the power of myth seriously? A military/industrial myth cannot protect us from the myth of clans and tribal affiliations. Scholars like Giambattista

Vico in the early eighteenth century, who predicted a cycle of return for tribal societies, expressed this common sense. The power of myth was articulated so clearly by Joseph Campbell, who, in the early 1980's, predicted the current crisis we are now living. Campbell told us that the great danger in our societies was arguing over who has the right myth. And then there is Jean Gebser, the great Swiss cultural philosopher, who offered us structures of consciousness that enfolded so-called archaic and mythical stages in the development of our consciousness through analytical stages into an "integrated consciousness", that refused to establish a hierarchical way of thinking that might allow an industrialized society to dominate a tribal one. And of course, art and music are core aspects of human life in Gebser's mythical stage. He did not believe that we could survive without embracing all of the stages, from the archaic to the integrated.

Recently I have been hearing interviews with a contemporary scholar who also predicted the devastating events of Sept. 11. His name is Robert Kaplan. And he wrote a very important book that many of us were using with our students at the university last summer. The name of the book is *The Coming Anarchy*. And he is writing another book entitled *Political Warriors*. Kaplan emphasizes the impact of popular culture such as style, music, film, video, food and popular literature in this on-going mythology.

Michael Kimmelman's column in the New York Times on September 17 was entitled "The Solace in Sharing the Beauty of Great Art and Music": "On Wednesday, when most were indoors, more than 300 people ventured to the Brooklyn Museum. The Metropolitan Museum of Art reopened on Thursday, and 8,200 visitors showed up, a busy day with no blockbuster to see." Later, he quotes a visitor to the museum, Charles de Champeaux from Paris. "When there was a bomb once a week in 1986, Americans didn't come," he said. "But life went on. Now Americans face this problem. And I can tell you from experience that it is good the museums reopened. If you cut culture out of life, then it's just about survival."(New York Times)

Whatever. We reach out to embrace the knowledge we have accumulated over the ages to help us now. We try to exercise of our intellects, to understand, to improve.

And the metaphors help us too. You may have noticed that Brynulf and I both love to turn a metaphor into a reflection or a conversation. One of our favorite metaphors is water. If you read our columns in *Voices* you'll see what I mean. We both live in coastal regions where water is so much a part of daily life. We see it at every turn. Many of the coastal societies, like my own adopted tribe, the Haida, have been blessed with abundance from the sea. It will help us to expand our metaphors.

We might ask now. What are the metaphors of the desert, rugged mountain terrain and harsh environments? What are the metaphors for people who have come to their knees with bombs and destruction? What is the metaphor of terror? How does it sound? What is its song? Many of our colleagues in New York heard explosions and saw the images of terror. Can we use these images, sounds and metaphors to mobilize us in constructing the bridges between our places and faces across this world? It's only another chance. Can we sing this song?

Suggested Readings

Campbell, Joseph (1972). *Myths to live by*. New York: Viking Press.

Campbell, Joseph (1988). *The power of myth*. New York: Doubleday.

Feustein, Georg (1987). *Structures of consciousness: The genius of Jean Gebser - an introduction and critique*. Lower Lake, CA: Integral Publ.

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New York Times, September 17, 2001.

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