

# AUROVILLE TODAY

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**W**hen it comes to presenting Auroville to others, there is no "party line": everybody is free to communicate anything they wish about this place to whomever they wish. In many respects, this is healthy. This place is far too vast, too multifaceted, to be grasped by any one group or individual, and diversity of viewpoints is one of the richest sources of our creativity. But Auroville is thirty years old now, and its ambitious development programmes require more and more good-willed and qualified people, as well as major funding from outside agencies which have their own guidelines, their own sensitivities. How should we present Auroville to them? Should we take into account Western concerns about cults and non-rational behaviour and play down (or delete altogether) references to the spiritual underpinnings? Should we present ourselves as basically an environmental or developmental project? Or should we emphasize our spiritual aims, and should we share our shortcomings as well as our achievements?

### The experience of the AVI centres

It's not only Aurovilians who are wrestling with these questions. The Auroville International (AVI) Centres abroad, whose main aim is to inform about Auroville, are also very concerned. For example, George from AVI Canada notes how difficult it is to give information about a place which sends out so

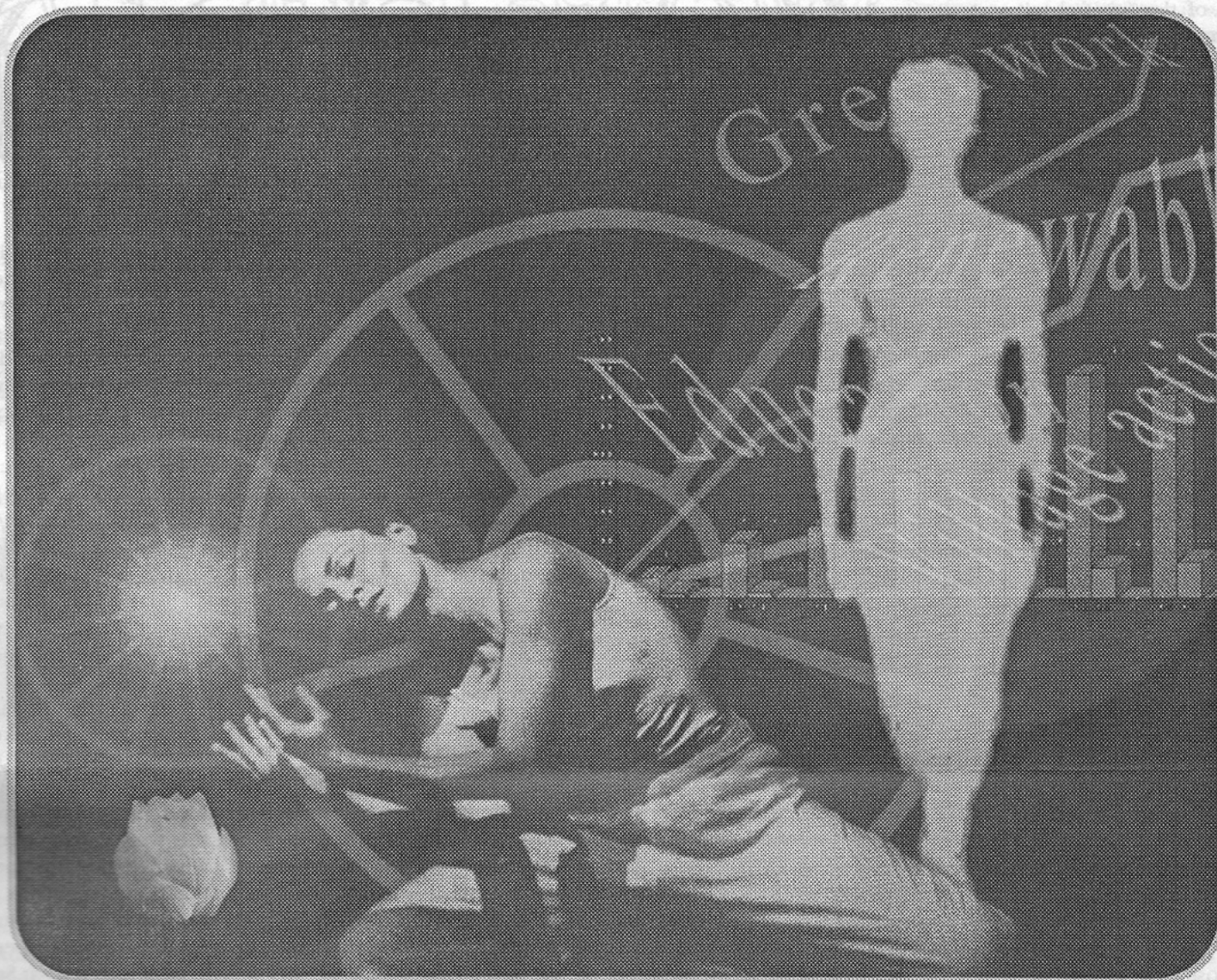
many mixed messages. 'We in the AVI Centres are like an orchestra playing the music, but the music has to be composed in Auroville. And the music we are asked to play at present is sometimes a cacophony rather than harmony'. Dominique Darr, from AVI France, sees the communication challenge in a different way. 'In France there's something people—even so-called New Age people—don't understand about Auroville. It's so difficult to communicate the true message of Auroville, the "real note". For this you need a poet: everything else has failed.' One problem is that Auroville doesn't fit into any of the available boxes, it doesn't fulfil any of the usual expectations. Mia of AVI Netherlands puts it like this. 'I think the reason that Auroville does not interest many people in my country who are otherwise attracted by the New Age, is

that Auroville does not offer what all those New Age centres offer—courses in meditation etc. which offer quick results. Our yoga is very difficult, long-term, which is not attractive for the modern approach.'

What Mia underlines is that communicating Auroville well depends not only on a coherent communication strategy in Auroville, skilled communicators and an energetic AVI centre (it's ironic that many AVI centres have to constantly rebuild themselves because their most committed members end up living in Auroville). It is also dependent upon the receptivity of one's culture. And here there are significant differences. In India, for example, most people have no problem in relating to Auroville's spiritual base: in fact, it is often their main interest in the community. In Germany, however, there is at

present a sustained assault by the press, the churches and political parties upon all aspects of alternative culture, which include spiritual groups (see accompanying article). While there is no such attack in France, the French are also very concerned about what they perceive to be sects. Dominique identifies other factors which make it difficult to communicate Auroville in her country. 'The French temperament is still very intellectualised, the legacy of Voltaire and Cartesian analysis, which makes it deeply suspicious of the non-rational. Also, France is in such a crisis—with three million unemployed at present—that most people are only concerned with their immediate needs. The spirit has gone out of the nation and been replaced by something very dull. So it's not surprising that Auroville is per-

(continued on page 2)



ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPH OF JOY BY SVEN; GRAPHICS BY MANOU

## Presenting Auroville

*Whether we like it or not, Auroville has acquired many different images—environmental experiment, a sect, a rural utopia, city of the future, neo-colonial hangout... But how do we feel it should be presented?*

*Alan talked with various people who in some way or other (re)present Auroville to the outside.*



(continued from page 1)

ceived as something very remote, abstract, a kind of game far removed from the real business of life.'

'French Canadians', says George, 'are far less intellectualised than the French—we come more from the heart—which makes us more open to things like Auroville', while the Swedish, by contrast, are more pragmatic, cautious. 'Not too much, not too little is very typical of the Swedish character,' says Stefan of AVI Sweden. 'We are less interested in ideals than in the hard reality, which is why the recent Auroville introduction video didn't work here: to us, it looked like a fairy-tale.' Ulf adds, however, that in the last ten years the Swedish people have become much more interested in spiritual matters and that, with the exception of the churches, there is no concerted opposition to New Age and spiritual movements: 'But Auroville would still be a big step for many people.'

Kathy, from AVI Spain, notes that while large parts of her country are still intensely conservative, in the bigger cities 'there is a full range of spiritual offerings. Once can participate in hundreds of courses, astral trips, group therapy sessions etc.' Spain is a country of diverse peoples united by 'many centuries of catholic tradition, or better domination, culminating with forty years of Franco's dictatorship'. Some of those brought up in such a society regret the present loss of certitude and structure. 'They are the ones who still need a strong guide and norms they can hold on to. They are not attracted by the Integral Yoga as it has no laws, and our discipline is shaped "only" by a sincere aspiration and love of the Divine on the way to achieving perfection.'

'I've never had any problem putting across Matrimandir in the U.K.', says Martin, 'and people are much more open these days to the idea of a spiritual quest and life.' While the Dutch have a similar reputation for tolerance, Mia notes that Dutch society is made up of different 'streams'. The mainstream press, for example, is not open to Auroville or the New Age (they did not even mention Georges Van Vreckhem's recent book on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother): in fact, it is giving a lot of space at present to a group of so-called "sceptics" who "prove", by a rational approach to everything paranormal, that it's all humbug. While there is another, underlying stream which is more open and tolerant, Mia admits that New Age movements—with which some people associate Auroville—don't have such a good name among the pragmatic Dutch. 'These movements are perceived as amateuristic, lacking in professionalism, as having failed to fulfil all their big promises.'

## Responses

What then is the best way to communicate Auroville? 'There are no general rules about how to present Auroville,' says Robert Aarsse, former Chairman of AVI. 'It depends entirely on which culture you are in and who you are presenting it to.' Martin, from AVI UK, confirms this. 'I always tailor my talk to my audience. It's largely intuitive, based upon

their feedback and what I think they can understand.'

Guy, who coordinates the project-writing unit in Auroville, points out that the way you introduce Auroville in a grant proposal is quite different from how you would frame it for a general presentation. But are there certain elements which should always be there, without which any presentation about Auroville would be incomplete? Dominique from AVI France believes there are. 'Sometimes Auroville is presented in France as simply a kind of sociological experiment, without any reference to its spiritual base. This, for me, is lying by omission. I don't think we are allowed to distort the truth.'

Guy remembers showing the recent fund-raising video for land, which he describes as a "secular" presentation of Auroville, during a visit to the Findhorn community. 'Afterwards a journalist came up and asked me, "Why doesn't the video refer to what lies behind, to Auroville's spiritual vision?" I told him that we were somewhat afraid to present ourselves as a spiritual community because of the danger of being mistaken for a sect. "But why not meet this head-on?" he replied, "by clearly describing what you are and are not. For by not talking about certain things, you create the suspicion that you have something to hide".'

Martin notes, however, that it is essential to find ways of communicating the deeper dimension in ways which are understandable to your audience. For example, he finds that Mother's Dream is a very powerful way to start a presentation: 'Everybody can relate to that as well as to the concept of an experiment in human unity'. Guy adds, 'It is important to present Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's work as a planetary work, not as one confined to a particular place called Auroville. We should be able to convey the message of Sri Aurobindo and Mother in a non-sectarian way, which means describing them not so much in terms of personalities but as a force which is acting everywhere. The key point to bring across is you do not have to be a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and Mother to do their work.'

Robert Aarsse makes it explicit. 'Don't expect the average bureaucrat to understand you—or to want to continue the conversation!—if you begin by telling him, "Auroville is a spiritual idea." But you can communicate this in other ways by, for example, using the language of the United Nations. So you could say,

"Auroville is a universal city which is looking for ways of bringing peace and harmony into the world". Am I lying by putting it like this? No. I'm bringing somebody from a point where he stands to a point where I stand so that he can understand me: I'm simply building a bridge.'

But can one always "translate" Auroville into other terms without losing contact with something essential? Can one outwardly "secularise" Auroville without losing the flame within? Martin remembers giving a talk to a group who were very interested in village development. 'I was presenting Auroville through Village Action programmes, but I felt that the talk was very dry, that I was cutting some contact by presenting it like this. But then they brought me back to something truer by asking me questions like, "What lies behind all this? Why are Aurovilians doing this work?" I was very grateful to them! "What we shouldn't forget," adds Guy, 'is that humanity needs a new vision. And that many people, including the top people, are very open and perfectly able to understand what Sri Aurobindo and Mother are saying. So we should never be tempted to dilute it.'

However, what Martin and many others also emphasise is that you don't need to paint a rosy picture or to quote Sri Aurobindo and Mother every other sentence: Auroville speaks for itself in a very practical way. 'If you simply describe everything that Auroville is doing it's already very impressive... and this, for me, is what spirituality is about', explains Robert. Mia adds that one of the most effective ways of presenting Auroville is to introduce it through one of its quality products—like a video of an Auroville dance performance—which then draws people on to ask about what lies behind it.

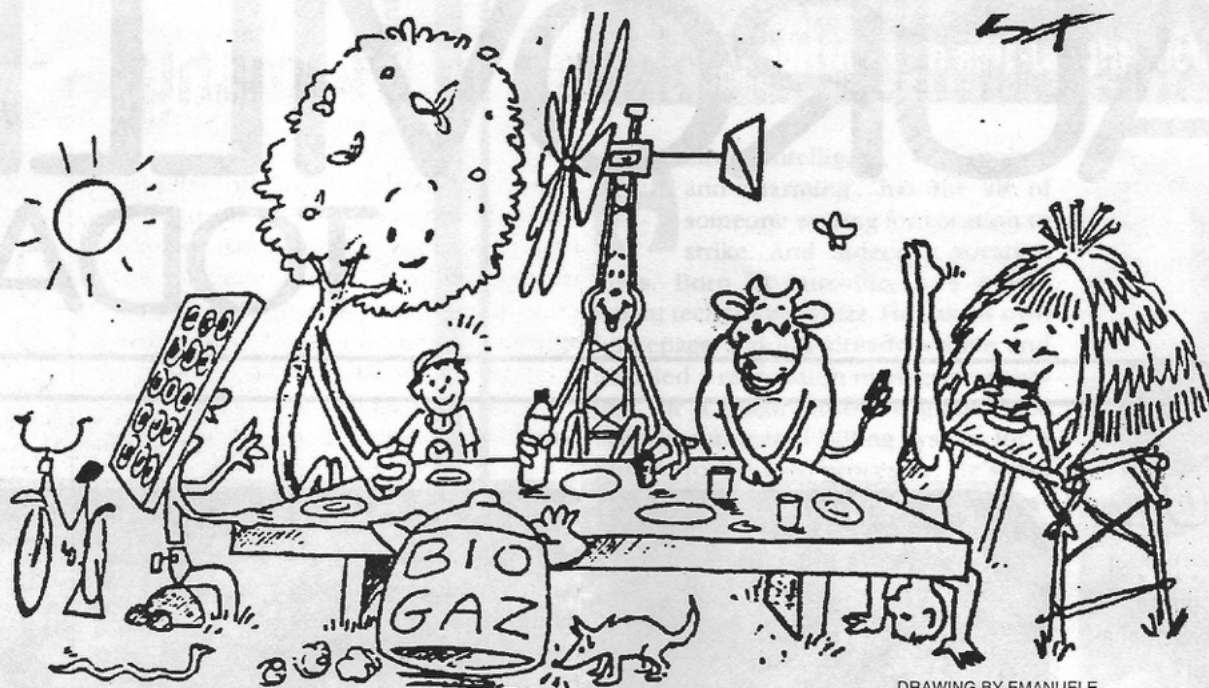
One question remains: what about the difficulties, the internal tensions within the community itself? Should these be referred to in any comprehensive presentation about Auroville? Mia admits that she feels protective of the community when presenting it to somebody else. 'You don't introduce your favourite child by describing its faults!' In giving a talk, Martin does not speak about the difficulties unless directly asked; although, as he says, the term "experiment in human unity" clearly implies failures as well as successes. But he will definitely talk openly about them with anybody planning to join the community: 'It would be

irresponsible not to'. 'You have to be honest!' says Stefan, noting that the Swedish are not interested in just being given a rosy picture. 'They like to start off with the problems and get to the good things later!' Georges agrees about the need for honesty about current problems. 'But you must also try to describe the other, higher dimensions of the experiment so that you provide others with a larger context for understanding what is going on.'

Finally, as all of them point out in one way or another, the crucial thing when presenting Auroville is to be true to oneself: 'If you're not, everybody will know immediately.' 'What's most im-

portant in giving a presentation about Auroville,' concludes Martin, 'is bringing across something of the spirit of the place. I'm providing an opening for maybe only one or two people in my audience, but numbers are not important. What's important is to be a good channel for something to come through me... the rest is up to something else.'

Alan



DRAWING BY EMANUELE

## INFORMATION ON AUROVILLE

To get a sense of the Information scene in Auroville today, how about a stroll into the Visitors Centre to see what is actually available on the shelves? Here is what you can buy:

### Pamphlets:

- Introduction to Auroville (in eight languages)
- Matrimandir
- New Creation School
- Auroville Education
- Greenwork
- Farms
- Joining Auroville
- Map of Auroville

### News Journals:

- Auroville Today (current and past issues)
- Regards sur Auroville (in French, only May '97 issue)

### Brochures (magazine size):

- Auroville (in five languages)
- The Dalai Lama in Auroville
- The City the Earth Needs
- Healing the Earth
- The City which cares for its Bioregion
- The Mother on Auroville (French and English)

### Directories:

- Auroville Telephone Directory
- Auroville Information Directory

### Books:

- Auroville Development Perspectives '93-'98 (spiral bound photocopy)
- The Dawning of Auroville (333 pages, illustrated paperback)



# News from the Centres: Backlash in Germany

On a recent visit to Auroville, Wolfgang of AVI Germany gave an update on AVI Germany's struggle to have their tax-exempt status restored. He also spoke about what lies behind it, and its relevance to Auroville.

**W**olfgang reported that in November, 1996, the tax authorities in Germany revoked AVI Germany's tax-exempt status. This not only had financial implications (last year donations were down by DM 100,000 in comparison with the previous year) but it seriously damaged the reputation of the organization: in Germany, tax-exempt status is generally only revoked in cases of gross mismanagement. When the tax authorities finally gave their reasons, it emerged that they believed that Auroville is not truly working for the cause of international understanding and human unity; but rather that Auroville is using this as an excuse, either to cover up the fact that it is a sect with its own aims, or a haven for drop-outs.

Wolfgang observed that it is not so easy to present counter-arguments, both because evidence can be found to apparently support such statements (the tax department are using some of the early AVI Germany information leaflets on Auroville as evidence of sectism!), but also because it is impossible to explain Auroville in purely rational terms (moreover, it's difficult to identify programmes in Auroville which specifically focus upon human unity). Fortunately, a former German Ambassador to India has written a strongly supportive testimonial for Auroville, and this may eventually result in AVI Germany's tax-exempt status being restored.

AVI Germany's difficulties, however, are not an isolated case. Wolfgang points out that the entire alternative culture in Germany is under attack from an alliance of the churches, the political parties, the medical and psychiatric establishment and mainstream intellectual culture. Specifically, the German Government has set up a commission to study how sects and alternative groups and therapies can adversely influence the minds of the population at large, and its interim report has already resulted in many of these groups losing their tax-exempt status.

While there are clearly many excesses and aberrations in the alternative culture (the German authorities often cite the

case of the Scientologists), one of the underlying motivations for this attack seems to be self-interest. It is estimated that 20 million Germans—one quarter of the population—are connected in some way with the alternative culture. And those who stand to lose most from philosophies and therapies which stress individual responsibility and self-reliance include the churches, the major political parties with which they are so closely associated in Germany, and the medical and therapeutic establishment.

However, this doesn't explain why mainstream newspapers like *Die Zeit* have also joined in the attack. The clue, for Wolfgang and other members of AVI Germany, lay in the newspapers labelling certain alternative groups as "spiritual fascists", and in their warning to their readers to avoid all forms of "irrationalism" as dangerous and foreign to the German soul.

**C**oincidentally, a group from AVI Germany which had been meeting for a number of years had been focussing specifically upon exploring the German soul as a first step towards realizing the German Pavilion in Auroville. When they encountered a great deal of opposition to this from Germans—both within Auroville and in Germany—they began to examine why so many Germans had difficulty with their "Germanness". After many group therapeutic exercises, deep personal sharings and inspired discussions, all of which involved dealing with a deep German trauma, they began to understand what Sri Aurobindo had written so many years before. Sri Aurobindo describes the German people as being a deeply spiritual as well as rational race, and that, early in this century, they had made immense strides towards integrating the inner spirit and perfection in matter: "Germany was for the time the most remarkable present instance of a nation preparing for the subjective stage," he wrote in *The Human Cycle*. However, at a certain point they followed "a wrong light to (their) spiritual ruin".

As the Pavilion Group of AVI Germany

now understood it, Hitler, through playing upon and perverting the deeply spiritual aspirations of the German people, through utilising occult devices for evil ends, had succeeded in amputating the spiritual aspiration in the German character through making anything non-rational deeply suspect for post-war Germans. They, in reaction, began strenuously to assert their "rationality". And, at the deepest level, it is the equation of this "non-rationality" with Nazism that lies behind the latest attempt to discredit and control contemporary alternative movements, some of which are at last reasserting the buried spiritual impulse in the German soul.

**W**hat is the relevance of all this to Auroville? In a direct, very material sense, because the German AVI Centre is one of our most successful fund-raisers, the loss of their tax-exempt status seriously affects some of the projects here which they have been supporting. It is also, as mentioned before, extremely bad for Auroville's image in Germany and, possibly, elsewhere. Another fall-out of the present climate in Germany may jeopardise Auroville's participation in Hannover 2000. It is now likely, for example, that Auroville and other alternative movements will find it extremely difficult to get financial assistance from the organizing group to participate in this Expo, which effectively will prevent us from exhibiting.

On the larger scale, however, the present problems of AVI Germany and the backlash against alternative groups, communities and therapies are both an opportunity and a confirmation. An opportunity because, just as the action of the tax authorities forced AVI Germany to dig deeper and understand the underlying significance of what is happening, so it forces us in Auroville to examine how far there may be truth in the accusation that we have "sectish" aspects, and how far we are consciously working to achieve a genuine human unity. A confirmation because such an attack from a mainstream society shows that it is seriously worried by the growing influence of new ways of perceiving the world and the future of Mankind. After all, Sri Aurobindo never pretended that the Hour of God would be a comfortable sixty minutes!

Report by Alan

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INFORMATION AND PUBLICITY

**O**nly a few of us have to make a video, a slide-show, give a talk or write a brochure, an article or a paper on Auroville; but we all have to speak of Auroville to relatives, friends and other visitors. How can we do that without falling in the trap of publicity?

The first part of what follows is well known; but very few of us seem to have come across what distinction Mother makes between information and propaganda/publicity:

**O**n 30.01.71, while reading to Mother a chapter from his book *On the Way to Superhumanity*, Satprem quoted the following passage from one of Sri Aurobindo's letters:

"...I don't believe in advertisement except for books, etc., and in propaganda except for politics and patent medicines. But for serious work it is a poison. It means either a stunt or a boom—and stunts and booms exhaust the thing they carry on their crest and leave it lifeless and broken high and dry on the shores of nowhere—or it means a movement. A movement in the case of a work like mine means the founding of a school or a sect or some damned nonsense. It means that hundreds or thousands of useless people join in and corrupt the work or reduce it to a pompous farce from which the Truth that was coming down recedes into secrecy and silence. It is what has happened to the "religions" and it is the reason of their failure." (*On Himself*, XXVI.375)

Mother commented:

"That passage should be typed and put up in Auroville. It is indispensable. They all have a false idea about propaganda and publicity. It should be typed in big letters; at the top, "Sri Aurobindo said", then put the quotation and send it to Auroville.

Say I am the one who's sending it."

**T**his message was indeed printed and pinned on all notice boards in Auroville. As a result, someone asked Mother:

"Where does information end? Where does publicity begin?"

Mother answered:

"It is a question of mental attitude rather than of physical action. Publicity does not discriminate between the persons to whom one speaks. Publicity means addressing a public which cannot understand.

What we try to do is to carry the Light where it can be understood and received. It is a question of discernment and choice. It is a question of selection: not to spread the thing without discernment. It is to choose which milieu, which people, which conditions can understand and to act there only.

In publicity, to make the ideas comprehensible, one lowers them, while we keep our teachings at the height where they are to be understood by all. We keep it at its height so that those who can understand may do so. The teaching should be kept at its maximum height. The selection then takes place of itself. It is the comprehension which makes the selection."

From: *Gazette Aurovillienne*

## A WORD OF WARNING: the response of a German Aurovilian to Wolfgang's talk.

I would not expect a German Christian or Socialist government to support a project like Auroville as a whole, and I am also not surprised to hear that the Christian churches in Germany are trying to find out where all the ex-church members are going. It comes as no surprise to find out that so many are landing in sects, cults and new age groups, partly because of the arrogance of the traditional churches. I was educated in Catholic German

schools where you are taught that the Catholic Church is the only true church in the universe. The arrogance of Western culture is also typically expressed in the recent article by Philip Weiss in the *New York Observer*. Weiss gives his tourist impressions of South India, visits the Ashram in Pondicherry and calls the founders, in his absolute ignorance, "crackpots".

Again, I would say it is fine if we can get back the tax-exemption for AVI Germany. But if it is taken away, we should not lament too much or start compromising on our ideals to please the German tax officers.

Franz

**I** think it is not right, in order to receive tax-exemption or to be a sponsored exhibitor in EXPO 2000, to present Auroville only as an environmental or alternative living experiment. There is material research, but there is also spiritual research. To leave out the spiritual research in Auroville, or to present Auroville without naming the founder, is simply hiding the truth. Typical of this attitude is the suggestion, from Wolfgang and others, that in order to get wider support for the Sri Aurobindo World Centre for Human Unity we should delete Sri Aurobindo's name from the title.





Laika

**LAIKA (from the Czech Republic):**

I heard about Auroville from a friend and saw a video. When my friend went, I went with him but I had never heard about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. I just wanted to travel and have an adventure. I imagined Auroville as an ideal place with an alternative lifestyle, high ecology, a no-money system and lots of spirituality. Now that I'm here, I see that in many things I was very naïve, but also in some of them, I was right.

Even though I came without any intentions, I felt some stress because I thought I had to start some project so as not to waste my time. Then I relaxed and everything came by itself. Some people needed help, there were things that I could do. I'm happy and very satisfied to be here. I can use my time the way I want and enjoy the power which is here. When I say power, I mean the strong energy of this place. I have the feeling here that everything has its certain direction and a purpose. It is a place of complete freedom, a place of many opportunities. If I had the energy inside that I feel around me, everything would be possible."

**SATOE (from Japan):**

I didn't know about this place at all. I was travelling in South India on a spiritual journey kind of thing. I stayed in Pondicherry for a month and people told me about Auroville so I came for a week last year. Here I met Dennis who was also staying for a week. We really liked this place so we came back now to check out this place because we really loved it here. Now after two months we love this place still. It has so much that we don't have in Japan. Here we can live with nature, get up when the sun rises and sleep when it goes down. There is not the pressure and stress of work and things. Here the pressure is that you have to really look at yourself because there is no distraction like watching TV or going to parties. You cannot ignore your problems, you have to face them in order to enjoy your life here in Auroville. You can't really run away.

This time I came with many plans, but I found many things coming up from the depths inside. I was practicing yoga in Japan and so I thought I was clear inside or whatever, and was surprised that I had so much more to process and process. This place speeds up those kind of things. It is a great opportunity. People are living according to what Sri Aurobindo and Mother said, and I feel I am gathering information from their experience. I am like a sponge, absorbing."

**MARU (from Mexico):**

I feel the way I was living and most of society is, is meaningless, absurd. I have experience of community and the Kibbutz which want to build up a new society on a different basis—get together and grow! Still, we try to change everything outside—the perfect system, the perfect rules, the perfect everything and oh, oh, we forgot something. We forgot to change ourselves and the same problems come up. Well, here you have a spiritual basis at least, a motivation and a focus. I am trying to resolve the old programming within me so I can really come up with new values. Last year I have been looking at sustainable communities and making contacts so I can set up something in Mexico. I wasn't expecting anything from Auroville but it was the biggest sustainable town I could find on the Internet. So I came for an exploration and inspiration. Here we have all these human beings from all over the world in this big experiment—such a mixture of projections and perceptions, wow! The first day it was: "This is paradise, they did it." Then slowly, slowly, you see it's still some of the same old story. You can do it but also anywhere else. The illusion is very tricky here because you may think you are doing it. That is why simplicity is so appealing. It is just that, what it is, so true and real. We just have to keep our minds and hearts open. Even if we are organic, sustainable, or whatever, if we don't surrender, if we're not open inside, well then? An open heart frees the "me" to move—that's the beauty of life. It is valuable that Auroville is here, and I don't want to make judgments or give my projections, but I don't want to move here or play a role in this microcosm. There's a lot of fear and attachments:

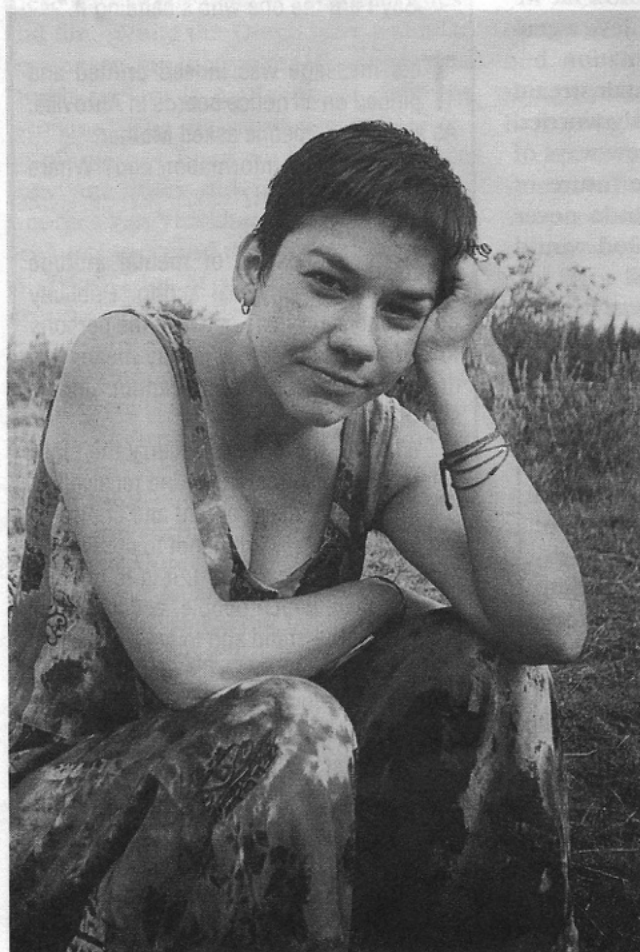


Satoe

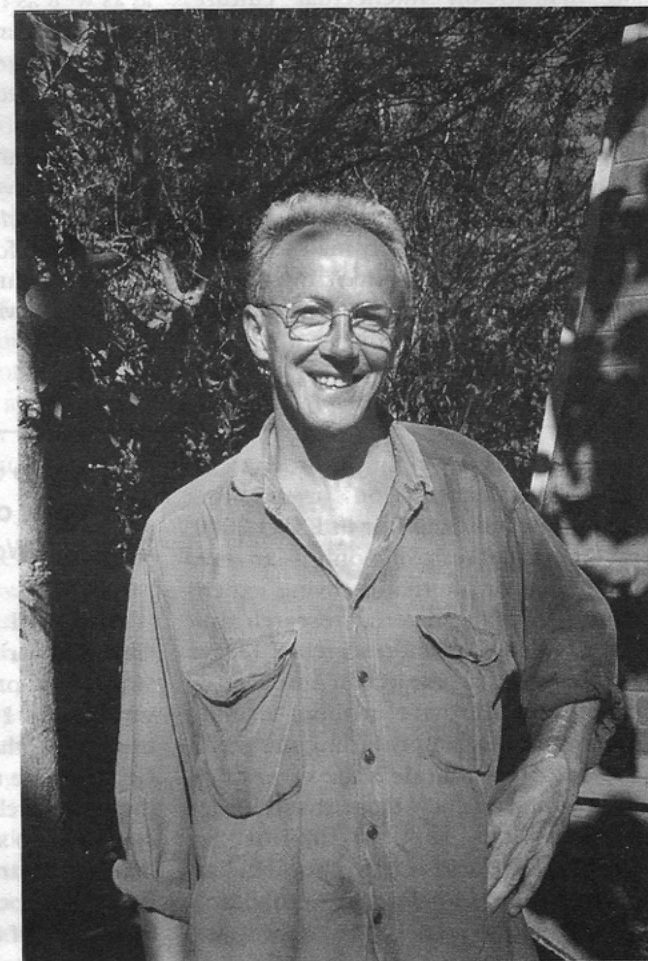
"We've been working for thirty years... for humanity." Well, excuse me, there's the rich and the poor and all the rest here!"

**CHRISTIAN (from Austria):**

I connected with the spiritual impulse of Auroville about twenty years ago from some written material that I got—more on an energetic level than intellectual. I was never drawn to India, but always this inner feeling from Auroville-related friends as I followed its development from outside. It is connected with my work as a networker. I don't like this word, but ever since I let go of "my" structured plan, I feel part of the current of global consciousness. Groups, like Auroville, that have developed over the last twenty to thirty years were at first very preoccupied with their own identity and survival and even were in opposition to other groups especially where spirituality was involved while paradoxically



Maru



Christian



# The Guest Introduction Week

**A**s a first-time visitor to Auroville, I had for the past three years pumped anyone, even those only remotely connected with Sri Aurobindo's vision, with the basic questions: What's going on with the experiment? Who lives there? How does the vision translate into reality? Answers from my Vermont (USA) friends painted an eclectic, often confusing, and altogether intriguing picture; exasperated, my friends usually terminated our dialogues with a defiant "Come see for yourself, Rick!"

Abbey met me at the Chennai airport Saturday morning at 12:30 am, and by 4:00 am the taxi deposited us at Ed and Mindy's Fore-comers house where PeterT and Maria completed my hosts' greeting. By 9 a.m. that morning, PeterT was biking me to many strategic locales; our tour ended with dinner at NCC. Sunday morning we did the Repos beach scene and by evening we were meditating in the Matrimandir. On Monday morning my hosts packed me off to Center Guest House for a week-long "orientation program." By then my mind was spinning in disorientation. Where am I—a third world country, a college campus, an ashram, a destination resort, a healing center, a workers' cooperative, a kibbutz, a pioneer outpost? Who's in charge—memories of gurus, lorry drivers, or a management group called PoorTooz?

Thankfully, five days of orientation calmed my mind, secured answers to a series of deeper and deeper questions, placed me in the presence of exceptional human beings, and allowed me to safely explore the Auroville experiment as my very own experience. Gradually I accepted the paradoxes generated by the manifestation in physical forms of a mystic's vi-

**From December to March, the main guest season, introduction weeks were organised for guests and newcomers. One of the participants, Rick, gives his impressions.**



DRAWING BY EMANUELE

sion. Our group of eight fellow travelers—ranging from casual visitors to long-standing Auroville supporters—absorbed the fascinating personal accounts from the ranks of the co-creators themselves: Bhaga on the spiritual foundations; Bhavana on collaborative development; Eleanor on building community—materially and emotionally; Aryad on cottage industry; Sundaram on Tamil village life, agriculture, education; Manob on the Ashram's incense production; Dodo on Quiet's approach to healing; Anandi on nutrition and noodles; Deepti on secondary education; Martin on Sri Aurobindo's work and *Mother's Agenda*; Priya and Derek on pioneering at Adventure; Rolf on alternative architecture and the arts at Kalabhum; Ambre on reforestation and farming in the Green Belt; Shivaya on city planning and administration; Auroculture on the path of simplicity.

Our program guides, Tineke, Ambre and Shivaya, "held the space" for each story-teller to give voice to their unique experience, for our group of travelers to appreciate the individual contributions and, most importantly, for each of us to assimilate our own version of the Auroville chorus. As Auroculture gently reminded us, it was no accident that of the 6 billion human beings on the planet, our small group was discovering Auroville. My own experiences during the orientation were revealing and humbling, a further surrendering to the divine mystery.

Thank you Auroville community for the window into your heart, and thank you guides and fellow travelers for helping me to explore this sacred space with openness and respect.

*Rick*

## MALAHAT (from Iran):

**A** courageous woman from Iran. Full of life. Warm, wondering, adventurous. She came knocking at my door one day, asking about the theatre group. She had arrived two days before, travelling by herself through India, and had read about Auroville in the Unesco Courier. Her curiosity aroused, she had got in touch via email with Martin Littlewood from AVI U.K. And here she was.

"The situation in Iran is changing now," she tells me. "The new Ayatollah is more progressive, and the young people are responding to his openness." Her English is very good; in fact, she teaches English in Teheran, where she lives with her family. I invite her to come to play with us; my intuition telling me she will be welcomed.

Dear Malahat. Her bright spirits lift the group. She invents an improvisation for us which involves sounds—just communicating with sounds. She speaks some words to us in Farsi—a new sound in Auroville, another language music to add to our collection.

She is full of questions about our lives here, her traditional Iranian upbringing creating startling contrasts of culture, especially regarding relationships between young men and women. She finds the freedom of travellers bewildering, fascinating and a little scary for her. She has to set her limits, and this often involves long conversations about chastity and purity. She seems so relaxed and at home in Auroville that I ask her if she is thinking of coming to stay. "Yes, maybe," she answers. "I have to make some decisions soon, because in my country a woman cannot remain unmarried past the age of 30. You would be an outcast. It is very difficult to live on your own. The economic situation now is more difficult, and that is influencing the society. It is more expensive to get married and maintain a family, so we are waiting longer and women are working even after marriage."

She abandons herself to the movement of a group improvisation. Closing her eyes, concentrating, giving herself freely, taking a risk. Afterwards, she tells me it was a breakthrough for her—the intimacy, the sharing, the physical contact with strangers stretched her.

"I need this kind of life," she admits, smiling. "It is like drinking after a long thirst."

*Interview by Jill*

## Christian (continued from p.4)

holding concepts like human unity and fraternity. But now they are coming into adulthood where more is possible. Now the subtle current of transcending boundaries and finding connections, the "net" at various levels very spiritual and very practical, becomes possible. I work with the young people because they force the community beyond its borders. I don't have a plan, but the net of meaning forms spontaneously and very practical projects grow out of that. I didn't want to come in and press my ideas on people. I spent most of my time in the Matrimandir to enter into the spirit in its purest form. Also, I've found in Verite an almost ideal environment both inner and outer. Now I will soon be leaving just as things are starting. Next winter, I will come back and the seeds that were planted in silence will flower. There is the delicate play of the coincidences and the unfolding. I appreciate the unique aspect of Auroville and generally, I'm very glad and lucky to be here."

PHOTOS AND INTERVIEWS BY BILL

## GUEST FIGURES

Apart from the hundreds of casual tourists visiting for the day, how many people actually stayed in one of the guest-houses or in Aurovilians' homes during the guest season? Judging by the number of guest passes issued at Pour Tous (which accounts for an estimated 80% of all guests) from August to the beginning of March, a total of 1,072 guests spent a short or longer time in Auroville. Peak months were December, January and February, with a total of 717 guests. By far the largest number of visitors came from Germany. (Data provided by Dirk at Pour Tous)

## MARGARITA (from Colombia):

**“**There is very little information about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and almost nothing about Auroville in Colombia. I first met Martha at a pranik healing conference in Colombia and then attended one of her presentations on Auroville. [For three years now Martha has been giving talks and showing photos and videos of Auroville during her visits to Colombia.] Later, we both toured the country giving pranik healing workshops. It was during this time that I heard a voice within telling me to go to India.

To me Auroville is very Europeanised. I find it to have the rational and somewhat narrow mindset of Europe. Aurovilians, barring a few exceptions, are not friendly or communicative. And it is not just because of the language barrier. One can always communicate if one wants to. Most Aurovilians don't want to communicate. I find them cold. People from Latin America are different. They are more warm and open. I wish I could add the elements of warmth, openness and friendliness to Auroville.

The spiritual movement in Colombia is more of a "New Age" movement. People there come to Puthuparthi to have *darshan* of Sai Baba for he is a living guru, or they are attracted to Osho. But they have very little awareness about the depths of India's spiritual knowledge. However Colombians, by and large, lead superficial lives—India is too far away, too exotic and of course too expensive for them to visit. But I believe Colombia would benefit greatly, evolve faster if they were exposed to the spiritual thrust that is present here. I feel that whatever I do in Auroville, whatever I learn or change will benefit Colombia indirectly.”

INTERVIEW: BINDU

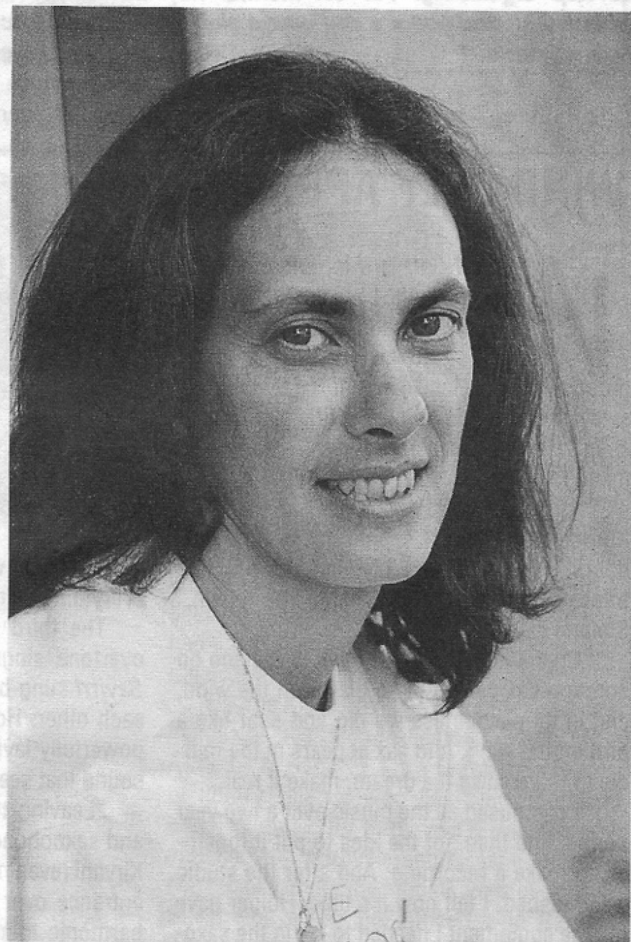


PHOTO JOHN MANDEEN

Margarita



Johannes Jansson is known in Auroville as a member of Auroville International Sweden; as the father of Aravinda and Maya who grew up in Auroville; and as the husband of Marta, the daughter of Piero and Gloria. But who knows Johannes as a composer of modern classical music? Who knows his music?

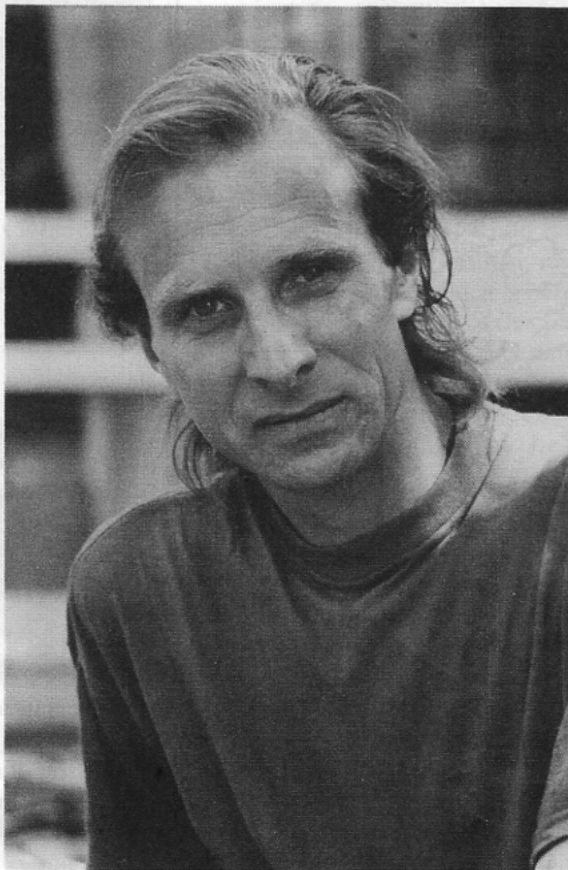
During a visit to Auroville in February, Johannes shared his latest CD, *The Silver Call*, with a small group of Aurovilians. Auroville Today spoke with him about his views on the process of composing—the calling down of inspiration and its purification—and about contemporary classical music.

"I would define purification," muses Johannes, "as the process of cleaning the inspiration. The composer has the responsibility to consciously express himself from the inner levels. That is a long path as one gradually starts realising how much one is bound to one's traditions, one's upbringing and above all, to one's own psychological nature. One becomes conscious of the layers between the inner inspiration and the outward expression. As one becomes conscious and is involved in the process of sadhana and yoga one has to find a concrete way to purify the material, how to get the precise tone, how to bring on the surface the vibration of the inner being. This is a continuous struggle. The creative moment demands the contact within, otherwise the expression becomes dumb, dead and not creative. In the early years I did not understand this."

He felt that he had to be able to justify every interval and that the music had to develop organically. For six months he laboured several hours a day over a single note of music. \*

Johannes' turning point came in

## The Silver Call



Johannes

1973, when he met the Indian musician Sunil Bhattacharya in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. "Sunil was deeply inspired at that time in all the music he composed and that had a decisive influence on my life. His music taught me to search for purity and simplicity, to find a musical expression with the touch of the fingertips. It changed my entire approach to composition."

"If you look around today, you will see that many brilliant young composers show how natural it is to be technically advanced, that they know all the elements of their trade. But mostly one is not impressed, the music doesn't touch one, though it may have been very well made. It seems that if there is not some

kind of expression from within, one simply is not impressed anymore, the music remains on the surface."

"The need to express from within oneself, regardless of any specific form, marks perhaps the beginning of a new phase in music. The baroque and classical periods were characterised by the purity of form of particular musical styles, and powerful individuals were able to express themselves through that form. The romantics were living in an atmosphere of rebirth, of freshness, and you see many expressions of the innovative spirit and even poetical delirium of that particular time in composers such as Berlioz, Wagner and Scriabin. The impressionists transcended the tradition they came from and expressed a new element of sensitivity in Western music."

"The modern epoch was led by brilliant intellectual young composers such as Schönberg and Stravinsky who, in their twenties and early thirties, created all the landmarks of their revolutionary music. Their contribution was to open the door to a new dimension of freedom and artistic beauty that later (after 1945) led to the total dissolution of all musical concepts related to tradition by composers such as Boulez, Xenakis, and Stockhausen. Contemporary Western music thus entered a very 'mechanical' period, in which the composer tried to find always a 'new absolute system'."

"Today that level of composing is no longer sufficient; more is required. There are many layers of discoveries... and many composers seem to feel the need for a deeper spiritual theme or inspiration, such as Pärt, Górecki, Tavener and others. They have helped a great deal to

break the spell of a long and generally unattractive period of contemporary music. When I listen to their music, I can feel the truth behind it, though often it is still coloured by patterns from the old world. The power of this music is not necessarily more spiritual, but it mirrors the creator's personal inner state. And that gives a new dimension of honesty to contemporary art, from which something very beautiful can emerge."

"Today's composer starts more or less from a zero point. The link with tradition has come back, but only to be perceived on an intuitive level. There are no more schools or -isms, you are what you are able to bring forth through your life experience and, of course, what you have assimilated as a musician."

"Another thing significant for our time, I think, is the need for the creator to be open to the qualities of the different cultures of the world; for example, to make a synthesis of the spontaneous joy of African music, the intensity of the Indian soul, and the clean artistic line of Japanese art. All this has to be a natural outlook for the future artist. I think it is the perfect mould (for the moment) for the spark of the soul to break through and glimmer on the surface."

In "The Mutation of Death" Johannes Jansson has tried to illuminate the process by which mystics of our time map out the body's cell awareness. The piece is characterised by light intensity and an almost ecstatic joy. \*

The compact disk *The Silver Call* shows the variety of Johannes' attempts to reach the purity of his ideals. Listen to the String Quartet no 3; to the Three Movements for Solo Flute; to "The Nightingale" for piano; or to "The Mutation of Death", a composition for wordless, vocalising soprano and orchestra. "I feel a spontaneous pull to express myself through the colours of an orchestra and its various dimensions of sound quality. Take the colour relation of two flutes in a low pitch and a viola con sordine...". And then there is "The Silver Call".

"The Silver Call" for baritone and piano actually consists of three songs on poems from Sri Aurobindo, taken from his *Last Poems* (1939). \*

Concludes Johannes: "Mother spoke about the psychic influence in the music of Bach and Beethoven and of Wagner's contact with the occult. But one must note that she refers to certain moments in certain pieces. Generally the inspiration is very mixed. To talk about 'psychic' or 'higher' inspiration one must first be able to sense these qualities within oneself, one has to have the contact with that inner vibration. That shows the very difficulty of the subject we are talking about."

"Today's contemporary music is not what can be taught at universities and music schools. It is music that expresses an inner sensitivity in front of which the intellectual traditions fall away. The next step is for the soul."

From a conversation with Carel

(\*) texts by Rolf Haglund  
The Silver Call. CD from Phono Suecia, no 7 391971 001046  
Swedish Music Information Centre, Box 27327, S102 54 Stockholm, Sweden.  
e-mail: swed-mic@stim.se

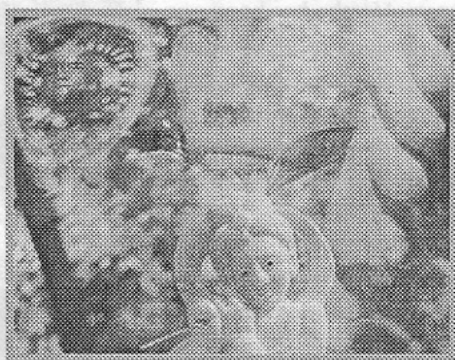
## WIND SELF APPEARS

Wind Self is a long-lost call, an awakening, a gathering of power, seductive, beckoning. It's the wind in its many moods—playful, insistent, a force of nature, a sweet friend. *Wind Self* is the title of the latest collection of music composed by Stefano, and it is delightful.

"As I was building my music studio in Aurodam last year, I spent a lot of time outdoors. The wind was blowing through the trees. Finally the wind became the music," Stefano says.

"Onefulness", the first tune, is Stefano on soprano sax calling us to play with the wind, and in its playfulness we dip and soar like a bird on the wing. Alto sax appears in the middle to materialise the dream, make it real.

"I composed all the music over a two year period, and then got the idea to put it together, to make a recording. And after the studio was finished, I felt now it's time. Holger gave me the equipment I needed to lay in the saxophone track over the other instruments—he gave me his reverb and since there was a time



limit of one week I worked non-stop and everything came together in that week."

The third song, "Great and Calm", has overtone singing by Mario and lines from *Savitri* sung by Holger: they seem made for each other. Holger plays electric violin here, powerfully laying down long leaping lines of sound that seem to defy gravity.

"Leaving the Harbour" takes us by flute and saxophone to India. It has elements of a Kirvani (evening) raga, with the sax making an entrance over flute and accordion—and the harmonic minor scale giving it that Eastern flavour.

My favourite song is "Space All Over". It's

a slow, troubled conversation where everything has weight and volume. It's also the most innovative piece, written with only 28 bars instead of the usual 32. This sad jazz ballad also has an incredible, achingly beautiful solo by Holger on violin.

The last piece, "Venus in Scorpio", mixes a traditional Indian chant of salutation to the gods with voices of children playing at the Certitude playground. The sax solo is full of joy and laughter, speaking to us about the sweetness of being alive in this incredible world.

"This song is a call to wake up. It's like a mix of my life," Stefano says. "Because I don't want to separate the inspiration for the music and my other work here in Auroville. Everything I do is a part of the whole: the music, my sculpting, sports, the eco-service—I use everything."

WIND SELF. Music composed by Stefano. Arrangement: Holger and Stefano. With voices of Mario, Joy and Fabrice on percussion. Recorded at Desert Studio, Auroville. Co-Producer: Radiance. Mixed by Holger. Contact: stefano@auroville.org.in

Review by Jill



## ON STAGE: DIALOGUE WITH DEATH

One of the most profound passages of Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Savitri* is Savitri's dialogue with Death, when she demands from the dire God that he brings Satyavan, her husband, back to life. Can one dramatise these passages for stage performance? The risk that the actors enter a deadening dialogue without much action is immanent. But the presentation on February 27 and 28, with Srimoyi as Savitri and Otto as Death, showed an unexpected intensity of dramatic performance, in particular when Savitri, with clenched fists and a furious expression in her eyes, told Death what she thought of him and his insulting offer of gifts. Equally fascinating was Death's reply, who, with a single twitch of his dark and somber cloak, haughtily expressed his disdain for humankind. The mantric quality of Sri Aurobindo's lines and the solid acting resulted in an intensely moving evening.

Carel

## STILL COMING SOON!

The release of *Auroville: An Infinite Adventure*, our compilation of ten years of *Auroville Today*, is now planned for June!

## ART EXHIBITION

During the last week of February, the Pyramids Arts Centre organized an exhibition of art by Auroville youth. Approaching the buildings called the Pyramids—unfinished and un-painted buildings in a lost corner of the Last school complex—one would not expect a full-fledged art workshop. Once you pass the lonely sphinx at the entrance, you enter a light and spacious split-level area. Through the efforts of Shanta and Lola, two of the main art teachers, the space is now very conducive to creative expression. The exhibition clearly showed the results. Beautiful watercolours, sculptures, drawings and collages were put up in between flower arrangements and playful room dividers. They bore witness to a flowering development in the art education of the Auroville youth. The exhibition was a joy to see.



Art by Auroville youth: at the exhibition

## MUSIC IS HAPPENING...

It's happening. There's been music happening at the Visitors Centre every Sunday night for the past month. The Visitors Centre has hosted these evenings of jazz, rock and blues which have delighted guests and Aurovilians alike. There's food to eat, company to share, it's comfortable and lively, familiar and fun. You can listen to the music, play Go or chess, drink tea, eat dosai and meet your friends.

Tatiana, who manages the Visitors Centre's cafeteria, had wanted to offer this kind of event for a long time.

"Aurovilians need somewhere to go, to hear music under the stars, to be happy, to come together like this. And the musicians, there are so many wonderful musicians in Auroville now, they want to play. We can open our hearts with music. It's so simple. Because we are not here to suffer. We are here for love and happiness. Only love can unite us. So I asked Paul and Johnny, please can you help me to organise something. And they came and it's incredible". Paul and Anita keep the coffee and tea coming, Johnny makes dosai, others help to clear the tables, wash dirty dishes, light the candles, hold

the atmosphere.

The members of the band vary slightly from week to week. It's fluid and funky, sometimes fantastic. Usually, there's Rolf (Dana), Krishna, Hervé, Erisa, Sergio, and Pierrot on guitar, Stefano and Pascal (Sharanga) on saxophone, Fabrice and Jurgen on drums, Marti on chimes, bells and tambourine. They are old timers, newcomers and guests and the labels fall away because it doesn't matter. They laugh and listen to each other. They concentrate on the music, while the crowd sits at tables with

candles, or on the stone steps, coming for a little while or all night, dancing, feeling good, being happy. So simple.

Jill



Jam session at the Visitors Centre

## HOW MANY ARE WE?

Here are statistics of Auroville's population (including newcomers, children and Aurovilians temporarily residing outside Auroville), as recently received from the Visa Service.

Nationality	total on 21.1.97	total on 3.2.98
INDIAN	401	444
FRENCH	241	242
GERMAN	183	196
ITALIAN	59	58
DUTCH	48	55
AMERICAN	48	53
SWISS	27	39
BRITISH	35	36
SPANISH	30	31
RUSSIAN	23	26
AUSTRALIAN	16	21
BELGIAN	19	19
SWEDISH	17	18
CANADIAN	16	16
UKRAINIAN	13	16
ARGENTINIAN	7	11
BRAZILIAN	6	10
AUSTRIAN	9	9
TIBETAN	5	5
SRI LANKAN	3	2
SLOVENE	2	2
NEW ZEALANDER	2	2
ESTONIA	0	2
COLOMBIAN	1	1
MOROCCAN	1	1
IRISH	1	1
JAPANESE	1	1
CZECH	1	0
ARMENIAN	2	0
FR.-SPAN.	3	3
FR.-GERMAN	2	2
FR.-SWISS	2	2
IND.-GERM.	2	2
FR.-IRISH	1	1
GERM.-AUSTR.	0	1
IND.-BRIT.	1	1
SPAN.-ITAL.	1	1
AUSTRAL.-FR.	1	1
FR.-BRIT.	2	0
IT.-FRENCH	0	1

## TOTALS

ADULT AUROVILIANS	889
AUROVILIAN CHILDREN	296
ADULT NEWCOMERS	114
NEWCOMER CHILDREN	33
TEMPORARILY OUT OF AV	142
GRAND TOTAL	1474

## "Surbahar"—"that charming sound"

The King wanted to order the musician to bring back that newly designed instrument which had pleased him the previous night, but he couldn't remember its actual name. Then, the legend has it, he exclaimed that he would like to hear "that charming sound" again, which is what Surbahar means, and so this larger variant of the Sitar with a deep resonance received this name. It has had a place among lovers of Indian classical music ever since.

George Kissel told this story to the participants of his lecture-demonstration "The Alchemy of Raga". He is a German professor of library science who has studied Indian classical music for thirty years. He definitely enriched the Auroville soundscape with his two recitals under the moonlit trees of College Guest House and his concert with Rashmi Bhatt (a tabla player from Rome and the Ashram) at Pitanga Hall.

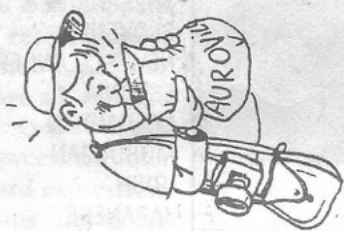
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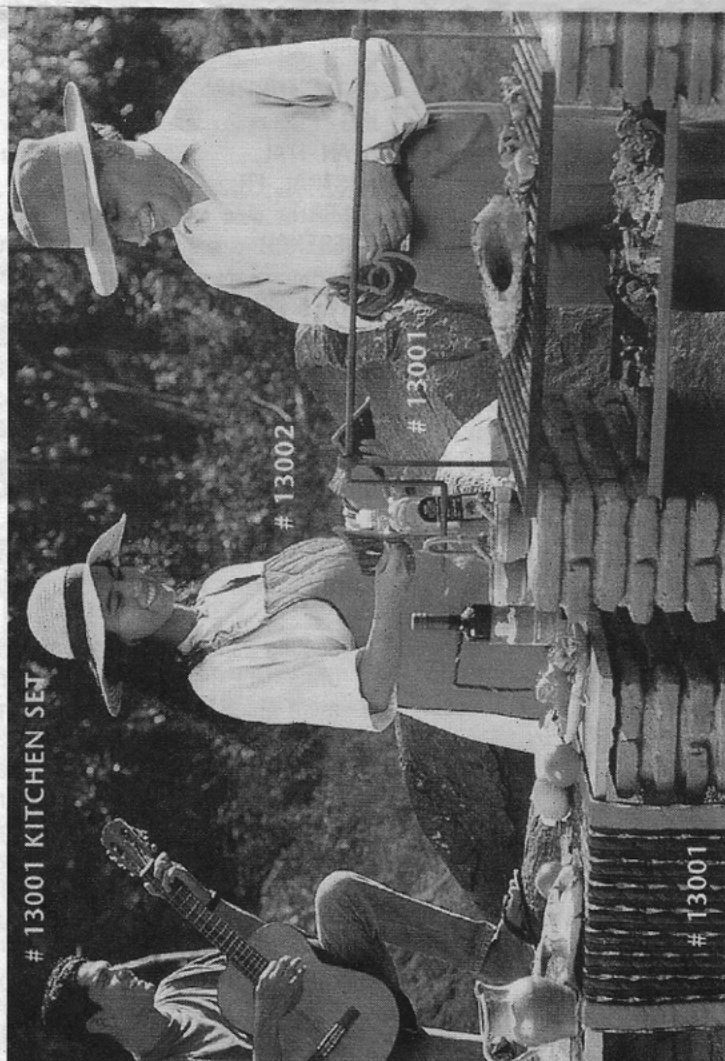
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- PRESENTING AUROVILLE
- GUESTS GALORE
- INTERVIEW WITH A COMPOSER

Exp. # 121

KRISHNA TEWARI  
AUROMODELE  
AUROVILLE

April 1998  
Number 111



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Same as # 13001. Available in Red and Blue. Price: Rs. 1,010 per set.

Page from the "Naturally Auroville" catalogue

## "Naturally Auroville"

An Auroville mail-order catalogue is born

Not many visitors to Auroville will miss out on a visit to one of Auroville's boutiques, to have a look at the varied display of up-market items produced in Auroville workshops, ranging from lampshades to lazy chairs, from essential oils to colourful quilts, from crockery to children's toys. Business is brisk, especially in the cool season when Indian as well as Western tourists shop and spend lavishly to bring back home gifts and souvenirs from Auroville.

Bernard Delambre was working in the Kalki Boutique in Pondicherry when he discovered the taste of European and Indian customers for the Auroville products, and decided to produce a mail-order catalogue to reach a larger Indian public. He felt that it would also enable the smaller handicrafts units of Auroville to find an outlet for their products. These are usually run by very creative people who, because they lack the time to do their own marketing, normally reach only the local markets of Auroville and Pondicherry.

It is now twenty months ago since Bernard started making this catalogue, and he was later joined by Ila, Vani, Marianne, and Moorty. Last November it finally came out, a multi-coloured catalogue with high-quality photos bearing the name "Naturally Auroville", which comes from the French "Naturellement Auroville" (meaning "Of course! Auroville!") but which also plays on the fact that Auroville is known for its ecological work, even though most of its products cannot be called "natural".

The next step is to penetrate the Indian market. "In France, via the

Chamber of Commerce, you can obtain information to run a survey to identify your potential customers. And then you get a mailing list via a private organisation," says Vani, who has a degree in international trade. "But here, something like that does not seem to exist as yet." At the moment they are still looking for mailing lists.

"Our catalogue is aimed at individuals from the upper middle class. We therefore chose the best products of Auroville," says Bernard who has a background of commerce in France. "In India the idea of a mail-order catalogue is still rather new. In France, because of its geography, many people who live in the countryside and who cannot go to town for everything, use a mail-order catalogue to do their shopping. Also many people living in big cities who work full time cannot easily get to the shops. Here in India the social system is different. Most women still have time to shop and many stores are open in the evening for late-night shoppers. So we actually don't know who our future customers will be. But we believe that there are many people who appreciate the quality of Auroville products and will be happy to acquire them by mail order."

In future, Naturally Auroville could become a service for customers outside India, such as the Auroville International Centres, which could order Auroville products from one source instead of having to contact each unit individually.

The same evening I receive an e-mail from a lady in Bombay asking for small candles in terra-cotta containers. I scratch my head trying to help her. Then it flashes through me: "Naturally, the catalogue!" I open it, and yes, there they are: the small candles! I quickly e-mail her back and give her the address: [naturally\\_av@auroville.org.in](mailto:naturally_av@auroville.org.in).

Tineke



The catalogue team

### Subscription Information

Subscription rates for 12 issues of **AUROVILLE TODAY** are the following: for India Rs 250; for other countries Rs 1250, Can \$ 51, FF 195, DM 60, Lt. Lira 61,000, D.Gl. 65, US \$ 38, UK £25. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send your contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) either to the Auroville International centre in your country (add 10% for admin. and bank charges) or directly to Auroville Today, CSR Office, Auroville 605101. Cheques should be made payable to **Auroville Fund**, specifying: 'Contribution for Auroville Today'. You will receive the issues directly from Auroville. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders or cash. Subscribers will receive a reminder when their subscription is about to expire.

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Auroville Today provides information about Auroville, an international township in South-India, on a monthly basis and is distributed to Aurovillians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.

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