Haiku in Australia 2010 by Beverley George

Now seems like a good time to report briefly on the state of haiku in Australia. There is much to say that is positive.

The Australian Haiku Society (*HaikuOz*) is web-based and made up of many components. Its leadership comprises a patron, president, secretary, web manager and a small committee. Most input to the site comes from the leaders of the various small Australian haiku groups and from outside sources who send news of publication and competition opportunities.

**Haiku groups**
As in Japan, small groups are at the heart and soul of Australian haiku writing. These are poems of observation, so it is fitting the groups are regionally based, allowing members to share urban or rural landscape.

These groups include Cloudcatchers (Northern NSW, led by Quendryth Young); Bindii Haiku Group (Adelaide, led by Lynette Arden); Mari Warabiny (Perth, led by Maureeen Sexton) Red Dragonflies (Sydney, led by Vanessa Proctor); Watersmeet (Hobart, led by Lyn Reeves) and Ozku (Sydney, led by Dawn Bruce.) The ‘paper wasp’ group (Brisbane led by Katherine Samuelowicz) is currently not meeting regularly but it is hoped that this will resume soon. It is not unusual for groups to go a little quiet and then reinvent themselves.

In Melbourne, Myron Lysenko conducts haiku walks ‘Ginko with Lysenko’ four times a year.

Activity and reporting on the Australian Haiku web-site is usually local rather than state led. However in South Australia Lynette reports for Friendly Street Poets, and for the Salisbury Festival and other events conducted by Martina Taeker, as well as for the Bindii Haiku Group. Western Australia is remarkable for its breadth of poetic activities which include public readings and displays of haiku, regularly reported by Maureen Sexton, and in Tasmania Lyn Reeves is an ambassador for haiku on many levels of involvement, while Ron Moss’s artwork takes Australian images to the world.

Recognising this, we have expanded our State headings under Regional on the web-site so that any general news can appear under a State’s initials but the reports for groups can appear under specific subheadings for the name of that group.

In this vast country of ours it would be wonderful to see more haiku groups spring up in Benalla or Alice Springs, Oodnadatta or Cairns. Groups do not need to be big to be successful.
Writing on Australian themes
Several years ago, it was seen to be a problem that many Australians felt reluctant, because of the Japanese tradition and the preponderance of haiku writers in the northern hemisphere, to write on Australian themes.

John Bird’s work with Haiku Dreaming Australia has done much to dispel this reluctance and to encourage the richness of Australian idiom and imagery in haiku.

The work of individual poets has also made a major contribution. Haiku that is true to Australian culture and themes finds ready publishing outlets overseas. Quendryth Young’s collection of haiku ‘The Whole Body Singing’ came second in 2008 in the Mildred Kanterman Award in the USA. In 2009, Lorin Ford’s ‘A Wattle Seedpod’ earned first place in the same award. Lorin now edits haiku for ‘Notes from the Gean’. While it is good to see the work of many Australian poets published overseas, it is hoped they will also support those Australian outlets that exist.

One might reflect, too, that if we expect our bilbies and eucalypts and the Melbourne Cup to be accepted overseas, perhaps we should be ready to accept squirrels, Savannah and the Grand Canyon in our Australian-based international publications.

Between 1997-2006 Yellow Moon published haiku, haibun, tanka and related genres as well as western poetry genres. During my time as publisher and editor for issues 9-20, 2000-2006, Janice Bostok was the senior adviser for haiku and related genres, and judges for haiku included John Bird, Janice Bostok, Ron Moss, Vanessa Proctor and Jacqui Murray, all of whom encouraged writing on Australian themes.

A recent major contribution to international awareness and understanding of Australian haiku was the 4th Haiku Pacific Rim Conference, Terrigal, September 2009, which I convened and which was attended by 57 full-time delegates from 7 countries, a high proportion of whom are haiku or tanka editors. A substantial number of day delegates also attended on each of the three days.

Delegate, Greg Piko, who also co-edited the anthology, wrote of the conference.

*I think that the haiku/tanka historians will come to see 4th Haiku Pacific Rim Conference as a landmark event.*

*If you think of our writing as a "niche" activity, then you can see why Janice Bostok had difficulty running an Aussie journal in the early days and why it*
would have been difficult to draw together a critical mass of haiku writers in the 1970s and 1980s.

Arguably, it was really only with the advent of the Internet that this dispersed collection of people was able to communicate, organise themselves, interact with others overseas and function in a sustained way. But we were still dispersed. Gathering together on that first evening at 4th Haiku Pacific Rim Conference, most of us were familiar with the names of others in the room but not the faces that went with them.

Which is why I think 4th Haiku Pacific Rim Conference was so important. 4HPR was the event that finally brought all these people together to create a community. Now, for the first time, we have a group of writers who actually know each other. I think this is a great thing and will make us stronger in the future.

... I am sure the Aussie haiku historians will come to count 4th Haiku Pacific Rim Conference as the event at which the Australasian haiku/tanka community came of age!

**Australian Publishing**

Un fortunately there are not currently many dedicated Australian publications for haiku.

‘paper wasp’ continues its long contribution to the haiku scene, and ‘Famous Reporter’ offers its stable haiku section and ‘Stylus’ at the time of writing, is experiencing some production problems but we hope will continue to offer opportunities for writers of Japanese poetic genres. Of note are the haiku pages in the general poetry magazine FreeXpresSion, edited first by Quendryth Young and currently by Cynthia Rowe because, in the main, these haiku articles and poems reach a different audience than do those in other haiku publications.

Haiku Dreaming Australia is a web-based collection, stringently peer reviewed. Its editor, John Bird, writes, “My contribution is to provide a perpetual showcase where the best of Australian haiku can be sympathetically displayed and honoured: The Dreaming Collection.

**Walking with Haiku**

A number of people believe one of the best ways of writing haiku to go for a walk (ginko) in the company of friends, observing the detail of what lies around you.
The Cloudcatchers group has a ginko-based structure for members who walk, write, feast and workshop in northern NSW, and the Red Dragonflies group in Sydney enjoys an occasional ginko at a park or beach. In Adelaide the Bindii Haiku Group enjoy the diversity and beauty of the Botanical Gardens as have Watersmeet in Hobart. No doubt other groups have done much the same elsewhere.

Ginko With Lysenko is a series of about four haiku walks per year in various places around Melbourne. The ginko, led by Myron Lysenko, have taken place in locations such as cemeteries, the beach, botanical gardens, The Shrine of Remembrance and the Yarra River. Poets pay to attend and the aim of these events is to encourage the writing of haiku and then to work on them so that they become suitable for publication. Anybody is welcome to attend. Poets who have participated include Kevin Brophy, Emily Zoe Baker, Matt Hetherington, Di Cousens, Maria Leopoldo and Rob Scott.

At the 4th Haiku Pacific Rim Conference two of the events were ginko-based, one at Edogawa Gardens, Gosford, and one in the arboretum at Pearl Beach. The poems were pasted up and peer-judged in a kukai, and we also included a people’s choice for the additional day delegates who came to listen rather than write. An unheralded red dust storm provoked a further batch of haiku written in real time in response to natural phenomena!

In 2009, I was walking with two friends on the 5 Lands Walk which traverses five beaches and some rocky coastline, when these friends spontaneously wrote their first several haiku. I think brief haiku writing interludes are to be encouraged as well as more regular group meetings or events. I remember that John Bird often wrote haiku with his mother, haiku poet Alma E Bird in a local park and I think it is also possible to ginko around your own garden. The possibilities are endless.

**Haiku and OtherArts**

I think many of us have experienced the reading of haiku in galleries in response to work of arts. A wonderful idea. And one that has been explored in northern NSW using some of Janice Bostok’s sumi-e.

For something slightly different I was invited by a local art society to explore the idea that if writing a haiku is a moment captured, perhaps a quick painting or sketch in response to hearing a haiku read was possible. The artists could use whichever media they preferred and many found conte crayon easiest for their first attempt.
In 2008 I was invited at short notice by the Gosford City Council Sister Cities Association to conduct a haiku reading for about 100 people in Edogawa Gardens. I quickly gathered half a dozen helpful haiku friends and two family members and we read a selection of traditional and modern outdoors in this beautiful setting. This reminds me that for three years Ynes Sanz conducted haiku readings in a series called Words and Water Dragons in Brisbane. This always sounded like a very enjoyable event.

Music and haiku reading has a natural synergy too as those if you who listened to the haiku readings on Poetica in 2008, repeated in 2010, will testify. The professional sound engineering enhanced the poems which were read by talented actors.

At live readings, shakuhachi or bansuri and a range of percussion instruments, including bells, can be subtly interwoven with readings to provide appropriate pauses. I have been privileged to read bilingually with visiting poet Mariko Kitakubo on two occasions in Australia and will again in Tokyo in November 2010. Mariko often uses a gentle percussion instrument called a hamon. Its maker, Teppei Saito from Fujisawa, writes of it, ‘I named it “hamon” because this sound carries endlessly like that of a ripple in water’. It is interesting to conjecture the range of accompanying sounds that might be extended and particularly appropriate for Australian themed haiku.

I think the art of reading haiku well in English is a skill many of us could further develop and no doubt a number of you have ideas of how this might be achieved. This would make a good topic for haiku musings.

**Keeping the hai in haiku**

In our search for excellence, and meeting publication and competition deadlines, we can sometimes forget to simply enjoy writing haiku. This is why beginners or children sometimes write the most beguiling haiku.

If we have forgotten to enjoy our haiku writing it is time to slow down, stroll, and smell the eucalypt ... er roses.

**A Personal Perspective**

I have enjoyed my time as president of the Australian Haiku Society but time has slipped by and it is now more than 4 years since I was appointed. It’s time to step down.

Highlights have included the conferences I have attended during this period: as a speaker at the 3rd Haiku Pacific Rim Conference, Matsuyama, Japan April 2007 and at the 6th International Tanka Festival, Tokyo, Japan, October 2009; as a delegate to Haiku Aotearoa, Christchurch 2008 and as convenor of the 4th
Haiku Pacific Rim Conference, Terrigal, Australia September 2009. The conferences have allowed the privilege of meeting many Australian and overseas haiku poets.

Also significant has been the coming together of poets to mark significant national events such as the Victorian bushfires. The poems published on the web-site triggered an interview on ABC Hobart and the further publication of some of the poems in a medical newsletter.

In November 2010 I will travel with friends in The Footsteps of Bashō: following his trail on the Narrow Road to the Deep North.

Appointment of a new president and of a new secretary. September 2010
With the agreement of the patron and committee I have great pleasure in announcing the appointment of Jo McInerney as President and of Greg Piko as secretary. They are from Victoria and ACT respectively.

Both are established haiku poets whose work has won recognition in Australia and overseas and for the last two years Jo has been the haiku moderator of the online Japanese form poetry forum AHA.

Graham Nunn has chosen to stand down after a noteworthy contribution as secretary for the past several years. Grateful thanks to Graham for his good cheer, efficiency and support.

My gratitude always to Janice Bostok and John Bird who guided my haiku path, to the vice-presidents during my term, Lyn Reeves and Dawn Bruce and to all those who have contributed information to the web-site. Particular thanks in this regard to Quendryth Young, Lynette Arden, Maureen Sexton, and also to Lorin Ford and Vanessa Proctor. My thanks to web manager, Robyn Smith, not only for maintaining the Australian Haiku Society web-site but also for providing a web base for 4th Haiku Pacific Rim Conference information and updating it over the extended period leading up to the event.

Beverley George
President: The Australian Haiku Society May 2006 – September 2010