

Remembering Hiroshima and Nagasaki
Performers and Artists for Nuclear Disarmament [PAND]
Talk by Greg Coleridge
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Cleveland

I would like to thank PAND for organizing this concert, the proceeds of which in part benefit the American Friends Service Committee, and for your attendance.

Amplifying what is stated in the program, part of AFSC's work here in Northeast Ohio has been to promote democratic self-governance through exploring ways of removing private and corporate money from public elections; by protecting local public access television from being shifted to federal and corporate control; and by offering workshops statewide on democracy and corporations. We have also toured a statewide version of Eyes Wide Open, which examines the US and Iraqi impact of the Iraq war. In addition, we support NOAC, a coalition focused on opposing the unjust, illegal and unconstitutional war and occupation in Iraq. NOAC opposed the war both when it was and wasn't fashionable, when it was and wasn't on the front page, when it was and wasn't supported by politicians and the majority of the public. NOAC organizes mass actions – marches, rallies, vigils, conferences, spy-ins, and bus trips to national anti-war events – believing that to bring change of public policy, if you don't possess money power, you better work at building and displaying people power.

The concert program tonight mentions that Bach visited the court of Frederick the Great in 1747 in Potsdam who gave him a musical theme on which to improvise. To improvise is to look at an old thing in a new way and create something without a set text to follow.

In 1985 I visited Potsdam, then still a city in East Germany. I'm no musician (far from it) and I didn't meet with any ancestors of Fredrich the Great. I did meet some pretty great people, however, young people in fact, who too were creating change without a set text to follow and were looking at something in a new way. It was the Wall, the Berlin Wall, the Iron Curtain. While many people in East and West Germany that I met on an AFSC-sponsored trip (religious, political, media) felt the wall would be up for decades if not longer, most young people, including those in Potsdam, saw it as something that would soon crumble. Actually, in their minds, the wall was already rubble, evidenced by their listening to news from the west, communicating with peace activists from all over the world, singing around a bonfire every Friday night 1960's US folk songs in English, and asking me about Native American history and spirituality.

Yes, ICBM nuclear missiles from the US were still pointed at them, forward-based cruise missiles were only minutes away, and talk from President RayGun (their name for him) was all about nuclear warning shots, the war beginning in 5 minutes, and the neutron bomb. But in their minds, the wall was already gone – with division replaced by unity, fears of hair-triggered mutual alerts and nuclear attacks by recognition of mutual similarities and challenges, violence by nonviolence, and belief that fundamental change will come from so-called “leaders” by realization that real change will only come from themselves and others of all nationalities, religions, races, ages, and languages dedicated to living together in peace. Nuclear weapons were simply seen as one part of the ultimate problem – domination of the many by the few. Eliminating them was seen as one part of the solution. People in Potsdam and elsewhere were resisting domination. Nonviolently. They eventually tore down the physical wall with hammers,

It took seemingly forever before it began but once it started in November, 1989, it was gone literally overnight. But the mental walls were long gone before then.

Today, empire and domination are all around. In *The Great Turning, From Empire to Earth Community*, David Korten says, "Empire organizes by domination at all levels, from relations among nations to relations among family members. Empire brings fortune to the few, condemns the majority to misery and servitude, suppresses the creative potential of all and appropriates much of the wealth of human societies to maintain the institutions of domination." He says Empire has reached the limits of the exploitation that people and Earth will sustain with a convergence of peak oil, climate change and imbalanced US economy dependents on debts it can never repay.

Those promoting empire need nuclear weapons to maintain their power and control and have used them repeatedly – not just in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but also as threats in China, Vietnam, Korea and elsewhere to get what they want.

We are privileged, however, to live during the most exciting moment in all of the human experience for we have an opportunity to be a part of the transformation from empire and domination toward human community and ecological sustainability. This might require, however, a bit of improvising.

Over the last few decades, we have seen social movements -- building on previous social movements for US independence, abolition of slavery and women's right to vote in this country and social movements for freedom from colonialism around the world -- flourish and succeed. In the US, there have been movements to end above and below ground nuclear weapons testing and end many US wars and in support of labor rights, environmental protections, civil rights, migrant workers, and most recently immigrant rights. Abroad, nonviolent resistance has brought down dictators, authoritarian leaders or foreign invaders in India, Norway, Guatemala, France, Argentina, Poland, South Africa, the Philippines, Czechoslovakia, Latvia, East Germany, Serbia, to name but a few over the last several decades alone. As we speak, tens of thousands of people are resisting fraudulent election results from the July 2 national presidential elections in Mexico. Nonviolent resistance to corporate globalization/domination, as expressed by the Zapatistas against NAFTA and other so-called Free Trade agreements, by students and working people in Seattle against the WTO and other trade organizations, by indigenous people against the IMF and World bank in DC and around the world, and by citizens of all stripes against elites who meet in secret in Davos Switzerland, or are members of the Trilateral Commission continues. Such resistance in many places is coupled with creation, expansion and nurturing of community-based and locally controlled cooperative groups, institutions, policies, programs, laws and rules.

Those who see through the walls of empire, violence and oppression are growing – thanks in part to many forms of decentralized technologies and the movement of people around the world.

Those who cling behind their walls and checkpoints of nations, airports, public buildings and elsewhere in search of safety and security possess neither.

Einstein said, "the spitting of the atom has changed everything except our mode of thinking and thus we drift toward unparalleled catastrophe."

Certainly weapons, policies, practices and institutions must change. But it starts with our mode of thinking. How we see those different than ourselves. How we believe conflict can be resolved. How we treat our fellow human creatures. How we perceive ourselves in relation to the earth.

Today, August 7, is the 217th anniversary of the creation of the US Department of War. The US had 58 Secretaries of War who directed war making and war fighting against Native people over lands on this continent and against dozens of sovereign nations on other continents. In 1947, the Department of War was replaced by the Department of “Defense” in an attempt to change our mode of thinking that war fighting and war making against nations all over the planet was launched for “defense” when many wars, if not most, were initiated to promote empire and the creation of markets and safe havens for US capital and corporations. Orwellian I call it.

Nuclear weapons and other walls of domination must and will fall like the Berlin Wall. It will happen. It’s only a matter of time. It may take longer than we think before it starts. But once it begins, it will happen swifter than we can imagine.

Our task in making this happen is to work on our own mode of thinking, help others with theirs and do what we can to pick up the mental and emotional picks, hammers, and bulldozers and nonviolently remove the walls of domination. There are many means toward this end – political, economic, and of course, musical. This event tonight is certainly one musical means toward that harmonious end. Peace.