



Panart Hang - Michael Colley

Jon So Michael, we're here, I'd like to pretend this is a concert venue, but it's not, it's a shed on the outskirts of the industrial estate.

Michael Unfortunately the acoustics are not very good in here for the kind of music that I make.

Jon So what exactly is it you do here?

Michael I hammer steel all day long and I turn a flat piece of steel into a musical instrument.

Jon Right and how long does it usually take from start to finish?

Michael If you could make it from start to finish perhaps, perhaps I could make two a week.

Jon Right.

Michael The original, made in Switzerland since the year 2000 is called a hung, or hang. It's written hang but pronounced hung. It means hand in the Bernese dialect of German. I think it was given its name because, unlike other musical instruments, the players like to attach other feelings and emotions to this kind of instrument. It's not really a musical instrument; they class them as 'sound sculptures'. So you, you'd start with your piece of steel and you remove almost all trace of the steel sound by various techniques and heat treatments and tuning methods and you're left with an extension of your mood really. You can play them in a percussive style using your mind and your techniques that you've learned as a drummer.

Jon Right.

Michael Or you can play them with no experience whatsoever in anything musical and you just literally slap left, right, left, right and you get a beautiful melody, or anything in between!

Jon Yeah! That's interesting actually because I did hear you at Bon Repos if you remember

Michael Yes...

Jona couple of weeks back and what struck me was that it wasn't just a percussive instrument it was actually a melody-bearing instrument as well.....

Michael Yeah....

Jon which I wouldn't have expected.

Michael No. A lot of people are quite astounded if they hear it before they see it.....

Jon Right.

Michael Because they almost never expect to see what they've just heard.

Jon ...and it has got a scale built into it hasn't it?

Michael There are different musical scales you can build into them. Generally consisting of seven or eight notes, I've gone up to eleven because I'm crazy! Erm but it's ...

Jon So how would that scale relate to the conventional western scale in modern...?

Michael Most of these types of instruments are tuned to a standard called, it's called 'even temperament' and it's based on the A3 note, the third octave of the piano, the A note at 440 hertz. Which is standard concert pitch that's been adopted by most countries and that way the instruments that I make can be played alongside a piano or any other instrument that you like, any other fixed-pitch instrument.

Jon Is it an easy instrument for people to pick up and just play?

Michael Invariably, yes. Some people have a little difficulty to illicit the sound straightaway but most people after just a few minutes' practise can get it to sing. The original maker said something very profound and that was that 'unlike most other instruments the virtuosity is in the instrument and not the player'.

Jon Right. OK

Michael As long as you've given yourself enough technique to be able to get some sounds out of it it's gonna sound great.

Jon Can we demonstrate that now?...

Michael ... yeah, well, I haven't got many left, I've just come back from a festival in England where I sold my best one....? But I have a couple almost finished. I was just working on one before you came over. I have a very low-pitched one here in C sharp (plays instrument)

Jon I think our listeners would be interested to know how much would that cost when it's finished.

Michael This particular one with nine notes on top, two extra notes underneath, is about €1000. And that's one of the cheapest in the world for this quality.

Jon That's a lot cheaper than a Stradivarius.....

Michael Indeed!

Jon What might that be worth in ten, twenty years' time do you think?

Michael Because they're made by hand most makers only make one, two, three a week, so when you get one it, invariably, if it's a good one, it will probably double in value the moment you get it in your hands. Some of the super great ones can multiply up to ten times the very second you buy

Jon Right, we've heard lots of good notes this afternoon, but I think that's the best note to leave it on. Michael, thank you.

Michael No problem!

