

# David Robinson Interview

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## SPEAKERS

Marilyn Hamilton (MH), David Robinson (David)

### MH

Hello, I'm Marilyn Hamilton, and I'm the founder of Integral City Meshworks and the author of the Integral City book series. I live in the Park Ecovillage in Findhorn in Scotland. And we've had a really interesting period of time, from the beginning of the COVID and lockdown and with a lot of other turbulence and world turbulent events, that includes things like climate change -and more recently, the war in Ukraine and Russia, where we've seen refugees coming here.

But during this period of time, we've actually been able to create some conditions in Findhorn and the Findhorn community that I think, are really deeply embedded in our culture. And I wanted to share them a little bit with the world.

One of the people who really has inspired me is David Robinson. David is part of the Taizé community and while, we could sing in person, I always enjoyed the way that he led Taizé. Very shortly after our lockdown period in Findhorn, David had an inspiration. And it was to take Taizé online, and he has been delivering it through Zoom for the last two and a half years.

So we're now going back into the world into more of the ways that we tried to engage with one another directly before all of the lockdown experience. Before we pass too quickly into that I wanted to have a conversation with David, and just invite him to reflect on what inspired him to do that. So David, welcome to this conversation. I'm so glad that you've agreed to have a little exchange with me.

### David

Thank you, Marilyn. And thank you for asking me.

### MH

I think we'd like to start, David, if you could just give us a little bit of your background of what makes your heart sing. And how did you get connected with Findhorn in the first place?

### David

Well, yes, I did experience week in 2004. And then I came here for many years after that doing one or two programs a year. I must have done 20 programs altogether. And I was approaching retirement I retired at 61 in 2011. And I was living in Caithness and working in Caithness and the Far Northeast of Scotland, for the environment at the Scottish Environment Agency. So it seemed a natural thing to come to live in Findhorn you know. I was very connected to the place and had friends here in particular, I love singing. And I really enjoyed the singing. There was a big opening when I first started singing here - I'm not sure when that was, but maybe 2007, 2008, something like that. And so I was very drawn to come here. And I must say I've never regretted it. And I bought a house here 10 years ago. And yes, [life] continues here, really.

And it's a beautiful area to you know, there's lots of opportunities for walking, and especially cycling. I love cycling. And we're lifelong cyclists from the age of about three. I've been on my bike almost every day since then. Not quite every day, but an awful lot anyway. So yes, everything I did ... it made good sense to come here. It was an easy decision. So I did. ...

## **MH**

I didn't know that you are working with the Scottish environment. So tell us a little bit about what that life was like living in far north in Caithness and then moving down to Forres and the Findhorn community

## **David**

... It's quite a long story. But, but basically, I could say that, you know, [I had] two careers. In the first one I was an engineer and instrumentation engineer, industrial instrumentation. And I worked three years in Africa and all over the place. I was away from family an awful lot. And I had a catharsis one day - it was in 1981. And I was working in South Africa and I'd been working 18-hour shifts at this place. And I was just totally burnt out. And I was working on the top floor of this kind of a petrochemical refinery - I was working on the top floor in a huge walk up to the top and I just sat on the steps on the way up and [had this insight] - this has to change and I completely turned my back on engineering.

... But within a few months, I was back home and planning a new career. That's the next thing but what really came across to me. And the reason that I moved towards environmental things is this place I worked, which was Sasol(sp?) in South Africa, a huge petrochemical plant. And I realized there was nothing growing there at all - you know, no birds, not a blade of grass growing anywhere. I felt totally kind of devoid of nature, you know. And something kind of switched in me and I thought I want to, I really want to be with nature in some way... I want to work with nature.

And so soon after that, we moved to the Orkney Islands - we sold out where we lived in Derbyshire. And there wasn't much in the way of work outside of engineering at that time. In the early 80s, there was very high unemployment. And so we decided to move out lock stock and barrel to the Orkney Islands. So bought a small croft and small island, in Orkney, and kept sheep and chickens and goats for a few years, which was a complete contrast to engineering. It was great. You know, it was really lovely. And I felt very, very good about it.

But unfortunately, I couldn't make a living there. There wasn't enough work, you know, the sheep weren't making enough money. ... I only had 14 ... so we moved back to the Orkney mainland and

Caithness and during this whole period, I was ... I was doing open university work and eventually got my degree in environmental science - particularly environmental pollution was my kind of interest. And I also did a two-year environmental monitoring course at Farnborough in Hampshire, a two-year full-time course during that period. So it's a very transformative period and I moved over to environmental things - but finally... I got a job ... later on the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. I worked [there] for 15 years until I retired.

So that was probably the biggest shift in my life, you know, from the engineer to the environmentalist. And I think ... just as I speak, now, it feels like with that change to environmental work and environmental thinking, it was also a spiritual thinking [that] came in more strongly as well. And I think for me, it's very much linked to nature. You know, being in nature and a love for nature really stimulates my spiritual side as well. And ... coming to live in Findhorn is such a fantastic place, you know, for nature and spirituality. And so that was key to my reasons to come here I think. I've been able to get on my bicycle you know, and go lovely rides around here...

### **MH**

That's really all fascinating, beautiful story and, and one unexpected, because I didn't know your background. So to think about the difference between engineering and then environmental sciences, and then opening to spirit and nature. Can you build a bridge from those two? How you got connected with Taizé in the first place?

### **David**

Well, yes, of course, you know, I came across singing again, here. I did enjoy singing at school. You know, we used to sing these very lovely English hymns in school, you know, and I used to feel quite moved by them, actually, but it wasn't very cool to enjoy hymns, you know, when you were 13 or 14 or something - but I secretly enjoyed them. But so when I came here, I particularly remember going into some detail at what was then Shambala, which was a Buddhist center, more or less opposite the gates of the Park and Findhorn. It's now a private house, but we did ... the usual Taizé format for Sunday. There was a couple of dances first and which often involved looking into each other's eyes.

You know, this was a bit mysterious to do this, you know, quite scary and challenging. You know, that's also very nerve wracking. So we did a dance where we looked deeply into each other's eyes. And I felt just a big kind of softening, you know, and I felt quite emotional. And then we moved through to the main room where the singing happened and sat on the floor and started singing. I think we sang, maybe it was "Bleibet Hier"? And, and I just opened, you know, I just started crying, and then I can still connect with the feeling. There there was this deep sense of, "Wow, what's this about?" ...

I think I realized then that singing ... was one very positive way for me to connect with spirit, you know. And so every time I came, I would go to Taizé and I really enjoyed it. But there was always somebody else leading. And I remember at that time I wouldn't have been confident about leading - ... because I've always been trying to - I was an only child. And [our home was] a very quiet household, and maybe not socialized deeply? You know, my parents didn't have many friends and so forth. So I always found it a bit difficult to stand in front of people and do things, you know. So gradually [gained confidence]. ...

And then when I finally came to live here, I had been going to Taizé here for a few months. And John Abney, who used to lead Taizé on a Monday at Cluny had decided he was going to stop doing it. And he came to me and said, "Would you like to be a Taizé leader?" I said, I don't know, about that. But anyway, I said, "I'll give it a go."

So I did, and it was quite nerve wracking. If I'm honest, you know, it was it was very nerve wracking. And I sometimes didn't sleep well the night before that I was usually leading it on a Tuesday, you know. So it took quite a while to feel comfortable. And even now sometimes if I'm not in a great space, I don't feel 100% comfortable doing it - but mostly I really enjoy doing.

And we're back at Cluny, Taizé in person you know. I'm leading on a Monday and Wednesday at the moment. It is clearly because we're very short of leaders there. But I'm really enjoying it and hearing the other harmonies as well - it's a bit different to Zoom. But Zoom is wonderful. But it's a slightly different thing.

## **MH**

Let's pause here to hear your story about Taizé. Starting with Taizé (in person) and then singing - because I can identify with that. I when I came here, I had never participated in it. And so I started in the Nature Sanctuary. And I would go every morning live. And I've never been able to hold a tune. There are some reasons from my childhood that I think I ended up with what I call auditory dyslexia, like, I can't remember the melody or even the words.

But there was one day after about three months of going to Taizé and I was walking back over to the sanctuary as our scheduling calendar would allow then. And I realized, I was actually singing a tune in my head, I was remembering something, and I went, "oh, something's changed. My brain is changing." Probably because of the wonderful repetition of singing the sacred songs.

So I've been fascinated with not only the spiritual uplift of Taizé, but that it actually has a way of embodying itself. And I think that happens. You remarked that the in-person Taizé on Sundays had the universal dances in them as well. And, and also, that was not a familiar thing for me either. So it's another way of sort of embodying the Spirit and the Word.

So thank you for sharing your story, which, yes, I if somebody asked me to lead Taizé, I would feel quite apprehensive at it. But in fact, I've been fascinated with how you've adapted it for Zoom. But before we go into that you have remarked more than once on the call that you've gone to Taizé community in France – so tell us, how did you get there? And when did you go? It sounds like you've even been more than once?

## **David**

Yeah, I think I first went six years ago. It was Adam, you know, Adam Pover who they wanted to go. So we decided to go together. So we drove down to Taizé together and camped. And yes, I was quite blown away with it. It's such a really beautiful experience. There's something about you know, the way they do it, - it's Christian, but there's nothing dogmatic about it. You know, ... there's no there's no

pushing any [dogma] ... and yet you see 1000s, especially young people -1000's - you know, there's 5000 people that usually turn up for Easter. And I would say 90% are under 25.

And, you know, they, they're so engaged with it. And there's such lovely people, and it's just being in that atmosphere, .. you know, three services a day, and the singing is about maybe six times, during, say, 40 minutes, something like that. And it was just nice to go into the Taizé church, about 20 minutes before the start and just sit and meditate .

From the first time and every time I went in there, I just felt very connected to spirit and very peaceful. There's something very beautiful about the atmosphere. And so, I've been back maybe three times since that. I spent six weeks, one time in September and October, ... staying in a campsite, just down the road was a very nice campsite nearby. We can actually camp or stay out in the community itself. But yes, just a lovely experience.

And it was nice to having sung the songs, in Cluny here to go there and do it. It's a little bit different. The format and everything. Yes, it really consolidated my love of singing. You had this little thing sometimes that happens in the church that there will be very often everybody's singing the soprano. Even the monks sang the soprano. It's just how it happens ... but you sometimes hear somebody else singing another part, you know. A few times, I kind of drifted to people, myself and somebody else drifted together and kind of sang together, maybe an alto with a bass or tenor or something, you know. And so, sometimes there's little pockets of singers, you know, singing in harmony ... it's a very fascinating process, but very, very nice. I want to go at the moment, actually, but I'm a bit daunted it's 1000 miles from [here]. [Perhaps] this year? I'm sure I'll go again some time.

## **MH**

I hear it is a bit of a journey. So that's also really interesting. And maybe you can describe for our listeners, how we would sing Taizé - how I learned it in the Nature Sanctuary, and at Cluny in the four voices? Because is that something that was introduced here by Barbara Swetina? who started the Taizé here - maybe because she's such a musician - she introduced it as four voices - could you explain how that worked?

## **David**

My understanding is that originally, there were just one or two or three people singing Taizé, and they were Barbara and Ian and somebody else - and they just sang one or two of those parts. And gradually, it took a long time, I think, over the years for enough people to come to hold all the voice parts. And yes, Barbara would presumably do a bit of teaching, you know, and then slowly the current way of doing it built up, which is to start the bass first and alto then soprano then tenor. So we kind of come in in that way. And yes, we usually get through about six songs in half an hour or something like that. And yes, it's a very beautiful process.

## **MH**

What I remember in the Nature Sanctuary - I think we did the same thing, including, we would actually sit in a circle, and we would have the bass, the tenor, the altos and the sopranos (in that order). And of course, in the Nature Sanctuary, where Ian Turnbull had created such a beautiful mandala on the floor,

it was really beautiful to just have the voice locations - we had little cards that mark the locations for the voice - and I know that we've also transferred that practice over to the Singing Chamber, which is more an outdoor opportunity ...

**David**

[In the Taizé community] you don't sit in your voice parts and at Taizé church, the cantor you know, one of the brothers is on a keyboard and he also sings - it kind of introduces [the song] and he always starts in the soprano. So most people hear that and then just follow it. And many people don't sing, but they're just sitting and just enjoying the atmosphere, you know. But you've got to be a strong singer, if you're a non-soprano, that sings. Are you maybe a soprano?

**MH**

Oh, no, I'm an alto girl. You know, as I said, when I started, I really felt like I couldn't carry a tune. And I couldn't remember, you know, so it was challenging in both ways. I couldn't remember to be able to repeat it or learn from it. So the practice of discerning to hold a particular voice also was quite a challenge for me. And I have had some experience where some very wonderful acapella teachers have shown me how to sort of sing from the center of the Earth, from, the roots of my soul, and so I have had that sort of State experience. But to do it on a regular basis with the other three voices was something that required incredible concentration for me. I loved sitting with my alto group because I got to know them. And some of them were very good singers.

And so I also am fascinated with your story. They because I've heard you singing both in person and on Zoom, and the recordings that you've made with Chloe. I think you have a beautiful voice. So yes, so and I think you can sing more than one voice?

**David**

I sing bass. I can sing any of them really.

**MH**

I don't have I don't have a high voice for the Sopranos. So I always as a child, you know, I always got stuck in the Alto. But it's very interesting to realize you're part of a community of voices.

**David**

Yes, absolutely. I'm a baritone really. But I can sing the lower tenor, but not so high. But yes, I mean, ... there's something very special about it, especially if you get a group of, of good singers. You know, it's always lovely, and I always enjoy it.

But ... I once was in a group of four singers, and this was after hours at Taizé - the brothers leave after the service - it's around nine o'clock, they leave. But often, the singing continues late - sometimes after midnight. Maybe you also have experienced this? But I was late in the evening with a group of four. And we're all fairly precise with our notes and singing the way we're singing and, and it was incredible, you know, we just sang and something else came out, you know. And ... some special quality when the harmony is kind of total somehow.

And another occasion, I was singing with a woman who was an alto, and we were both singing the alto. And we were absolutely precisely together. It was incredible. It probably sounds you know, it's hard to imagine, but there was no difference between, you know, for several repeats were absolutely together. And so there's something very powerful. Deep, powerful. I can't even describe it, but a sense of deep connection. Connection to spirit or something like that.

**MH**

Almost my experience. It's like you are sung.

**David**

Yes. Like, I'm not doing anything. Really.

And sometimes leading can be like that as well. Sometimes I can guess sometimes I'm a little bit nervous. It's usually okay. But, sometimes really deeply involved in the scene and the leading, you know, and it just flows. And I remember leading one, Sunday Taizé. And I had this feeling of, I'm not doing anything. It's just happening. And it was and I felt completely relaxed, like 100% relaxed, you know, and that's a lovely feeling. So, I think there are many opportunities to connect with spirit through singing,

**MH**

And so now that we've been trying to share with others the sort of pleasure and inspiration of doing Taizé live in person. When we go back two and a half years ago - it seems amazing that all that time has passed already. What made you think of adapting Taizé to Zoom? What How did How'd that happen?

**David**

Well, it was originally Karin Werner's idea that just a couple of weeks, or maybe the week after the last time we sang at Taizé, and then clean, it was closed due to COVID. And so three of us kind of got together on Zoom and played around with it, you know, and the muting ourselves and singing and, and we had the sense that, wow, I think this works, actually, you know, there was a feeling that, because, you know, in Zoom, everyone's muted. And so you're singing to a backing track, you know, playing back, and we did that we played some tracks on Zoom, the three of us and this, this seems to work, it felt quite nice, there's been a pleasant feeling, it didn't feel artificial, you know. So, so we decided to give it a go. So I just started emailing, you know, as many singers as I knew, and I think the first time we had about maybe 15 or 20 people, something like that the first time we did it, which was the first week in April 2020. And everybody said, "Wow! this is so good." And it's not, it's not like singing in the nature sanctuary, or Cluny sanctuary, it's this, there's a very strong feeling of connection, you know, and especially because some of these people on the other side of the world, you know, read people from Japan, and South Africa and Turkey, all over Europe, occasionally, some from the States, although it's not a good time in the States, you know, the time we do it in the morning, but so there's this deep sense of connection and community. And I think, especially during COVID, you know, and people felt isolated not. And I mean, at one point, after a few months, you know, we got up to 100, and 134 people we had in one session, I had to extend the Zoom account and pay an extra 40 pounds or something to accommodate over 100 people, you know, but after a few months, it dipped down below



100. And it's been going down a little bit since because of, you know, the return. But yes, it's a different experience, but it's a lovely experience, and I really enjoy it. And I mean, you wouldn't believe the number of emails I've had, from people saying, how wonderful this is, and how it's so important for me, you know, how it's just such a key time of my week, you know, and it wouldn't be the same without test apps quite surprised, you know, people really enjoying it. But you know, because it doesn't go sometimes when you describe it to somebody that, you know, in the spur of the moment, they might say, sounds a bit boring, doesn't sound very. But I think, you know, once, it's not for everybody, but many people who've tried it really like and, and it's how it's built, you know, quite a strong community now, you know, because we've got a WhatsApp group with 50 or 60 members in, that's what photographs and things like that. And we've got a little kind of mini website that we put poems on.

**MH**

Just for a pause here, David. So again, people who haven't necessarily experienced that, let's describe for people how the Zoom works, because I also sometimes tell people who used to go to even the regular Taizé, and they kind of raise their eyebrows or grimace or ask - "what's it like singing on your own?" But I reply, "it's not quite singing on your own. You're singing, but you have the soundtrack. And we have the visual of all the people who are there with you. And I never feel like I'm on my own."

What I'm curious about - because I remember at the beginning, I use a lot of Zoom like this kind of interview or teaching online - But I wasn't aware at the beginning, that actually aligning and thinking music on Zoom is quite a challenge. So how did you discover that? Not everyone should sing with their mics open, but should actually mute themselves? How did you work that out at the beginning?

**David**

Do you mean related to the latency or something?

**MH**

Yes, that's right. Because there's a delay period in Zoom so not everybody can sing in different voice parts, right? Because of that, ...I'm curious how you discovered how to make it work the way it does that well.

**David**

...So everybody's singing to the music track, you know, and everybody has a different latency - it depends mostly on the speed of your computer and can be up to half a second or something like that - a delay between you saying it - but it doesn't matter, because you don't notice it [when we are all on mute]. You know, you're just singing to the track, and everybody's singing into that track. I can't explain how that works, really. But you know, you certainly can't sing unmuted, because I mean, it's quite funny when you do that - because sometimes it's someone's birthday, and we all sing Happy Birthday. unmuted. And it sounds chaotic. But very funny, you know. I believe there is software in development ... to cancel most of that latency out so that you can sing live online.

**MH**



But you play sometimes videos from say Taizé community or others where they're showing a screenshot then everybody's singing a particular song. And do you think that that's all been engineered, and synced in the background? They weren't all doing it live?

**David**

Yeah, I think so. Yeah, I don't think that was done with software, you know - there's a way of doing that with a marker, and people start singing and then somebody has to adjust the start points of all these.

**MH**

I really enjoy when you put those little videos on, because it gives us again, a different experience of both the sound and the visual focus.

**David**

There's not very many that are used, you know. I don't do it every time. But yes, sometimes it feels appropriate. And I think you're right, it's an extra dimension. You know, too. I wonder if it's sometimes, people kind of forget the singing of it and just get a little bit interested in the in the video? But I guess that's okay, as well. You know, it's still a way of kind of spreading the word in a way, isn't it? You know, people singing.

**MH**

You've chosen some lovely, lovely tracks like that young child who sings the Hebrew song (Have Nagina?). So, I'm now curious, also, because you have done some recording in this time period. Like, you and Chloe have recorded several songs. Were you in the same room when you recorded them?

**David**

Well, she recorded herself using a decent microphone with her guitar singing, say, the alto parts? And then she would email that to me. And I would play that and record on my microphone. And at the same time, that does still bring a latency in but it's possible. I learned how to use Audacity (software). Audacity is an open-source music development program. And there's a very simple command in that, that shows you how to measure the latency, you know, like 198 milliseconds, something like that. And you can go back and just enter that in the box. And you can eliminate the latency. And it just removes the latency. And so it sounds as if you're singing in the same room.

**MH**

So I'm curious, because now that I know you have a background as an engineer, is this background a little useful in that it makes you fearless to take this technical approach? ...

**David**

Yes, there's a bit of that. I think, you know ... I've always kind of tackled things engineering things. And I know there's always a solution, you just have to find it. But as I found it, very interesting to do that kind of stuff. You know, I wouldn't say I'm a kind of nerd in this respect. But that didn't take very long you know, Audacity is very powerful program. ...

**MH**

I've actually used it for recording voice and storytelling and that sort of thing. And also, it's very flexible. So that's interesting for me to know about that use.

**David**

Sometimes, you know, the engineer [in me] and this kind of technical stuff /knowledge is useful in clipping Videos. Sometimes a nice video or an audio that I want to use ... with Audacity, or with a video program, you can kind of edit it and remove bits and so forth... because I'm aiming for three or four minutes for a song to fit seven in a half hour.

**MH**

You do a very good job of time management. And I'm fascinated how you have developed the playlists because you have a lot of variety. When you first started to send them out by email, I'm a person who actually uses your email with the copies in the email, because I don't I actually don't have the song books. So I have a lot of ease with the computer itself. But I haven't been able to figure out how do you manage to get those playlists in such a well-organized way? What method that you use?

**David**

Do you mean, the music in the email? I mean, as far as that's concerned, I just scan, I've got permission to use the books. I just scan, for example, the page of music - it usually comes in PDF, and then I convert it to JPEG. And MailChimp will insert the JPEG into the email - it's as simple as that, you know, you just go to Gallery - you can store all kinds of images there. So when I'm doing the invitation, I just, now have all the scans of all the music in a folder in Windows Explorer. So I just go in there, pick the seven songs to download to MailChimp. And then insert them from there into the MailChimp, email. And then the next time I'm doing an invitation, I would just delete that playlist and then start again.

**MH**

And just copy more JPEGs.

**David**

And the same with Eileen's Guidance, you know, kind of copy that to send to people if they haven't got it. But mostly, they've got the book.

**MH**

Right? And how do you have timings on everything so that you know, when you're putting together the half hour for Tuesday's – how does that work?

**David**

In Windows Explorer, you can have a column which says length, and give them the length in minutes and seconds. So, you know, for example, *Ancestors Sky People* was about six and a half minutes long. That's one of the longest ones. So I'm always a little bit cautious. Maybe I won't have time for all the songs.

**MH**

Yes. Well, I am a great admirer of how you've managed to put the playlist together and that you enjoy it. And that shows. How far ahead of time are you putting the playlist together? Do you do it a day or so ahead?

**David**

No, I just do it the day before? When I send the invitation out for Tuesday, then I'll produce the session or do the invitation on a Monday morning.

**MH**

Impressive. And then what what's your inspiration for which songs you'll choose?

**David**

I read Eileen's guidance first. And I also have regard to seasons, the date or something like that, you know, whatever significance. I don't know - just a bit of intuition around that information. And I often start with the fourth song, which is the song right after, we read Eileen's Guidance after the third song on Eileen's Guidance. So the fourth song I try and relate to Eileen's Guidance, and often the session kind of blossoms around that. And actually, I always do three tests, eight songs before Eileen's Guidance, and then three songs from Barbara's songbook, *Songs of Heaven and Earth* after that. So actually, the tempo, the energy increases as we go through, and nearly always finishes up with something to dance to at the end. I lay that progression - it's kind of deeper at the start and then lighter and energetic and embodying it towards the end. Yeah, I love it too. I really appreciate [seeing everyone] moving quite a bit.

**MH**

It makes me feel good and energized. And so is that something that you want to discover at the beginning too? Did you imagine you would get people dancing to start with?

**David**

No, never. So I think probably someone like Susanna [Michaelis} would have just jumped up and started dancing, you know? Oh, and you can do that as well. So a lot of a lot of it comes from people's inspiration now people just doing what they want to do. I think it's a nice element - and not everybody dances, but most people can move around in their seats a bit. But I like this idea of embodying this song. It's sometimes difficult for me to sing and dance energetically at the same time. Exhausting, but it reminds me of some details and just how good that is to do. You know, where we used to do dances at the start [of in-person Taizé] - dancing with others, you know, and singing at the same time, it's very powerful. So that embodying the spirit of [the song].

**MH**

Well, you not only sing and dance, you're also controlling the whole hosting of the program. So you're multitasking to the max? I would say.

**David**

Well, it just runs itself - ... up and dancing.

**MH**

I'm curious how has this experience of doing the Zoom contributed to how you experience the world Since you're a world traveler, you had connections around the world before ever coming here and probably maintain them?

**David**

I realize ... this is a spiritual community now - off and on and the immediate area? For me and of course, I always knew there were many people from around the world that came to Findhorn, but, you know, they often flew here. And we're becoming more and more aware of the impact of flying and other activities on the climate on the planet.

For me, this this was, of course good to come together. As well, you know, it's nice to be physically with other people. Really it kind of came across [when we had to stop travelling] how connected we are globally. [But] here we are kind of singing together [even though physically apart]. In the same moment, you know, maybe there's two fifths of a second difference. But actually, it's like, we're all together singing, experiencing things... so in a way, it's made the world smaller.

And that's made me more aware of the world - that is how to express it really ... because I also am keen that I have this awareness to which [even though it's] sometimes difficult to deliver, but that you have to - we have to adapt to people around the world ....

I'm aware, for example, when we read poems, it might sometimes be difficult for me to understand the point, but somebody in Japan whose first language is Japanese is going to. So how can we keep it simple like this? It's better to keep it simple, in most cases - to communicate better, you know, to try. And so I'm always aware, are people feeling isolated with what we're doing? You know, how can we and these people who are on the other side of the world with different languages? How can we make it more meaningful for everybody? It's not an easy thing to do.

For example, I quite liked playing about with spotlights [on Zoom] ... like, sometimes there's songs that you can drum to. And there's Takao in Osaka playing her drum. So kind of spotlighting her, kind of brings her right into the circles. Then you know, somebody else in Germany or something.

So I'm aware of this globality. In fact, I mean, it's run a parallel with my spiritual practice, really, because my spiritual practice is very much now about globality about oneness, about realizing that I'm not an individual ... that I'm connected intimately to everything. I think this Zoom has helped to bring that out - to make me more globally aware naturally it's just all one thing. So it supports that kind of practice.

**MH**

And have you discovered through how people are connecting with you in emails that it's meant something comforting to them, maybe in a way how they're experiencing turbulence locally or regionally?

**David**

I think so. You know, I could say that many people have got serious issues in their lives, relationship issues or health issues. And of course, we do the Zoom breakout rooms as well. So you get to know people quite intimately. A lot of people say to me that this is very good for them to be able to come along [to the breakout rooms]. This group, they know [each other] quite well now and sang together, and sometimes shared - they come to the sharing. Many people say how important that is to them - you know, it's like a bit of a haven or an oasis in, in what could otherwise be a grim day or something, you know, so I feel good that people get that out of it, you know, are able to access something to take them into another realm in a way, you know, take them out of their kind of issues and problems.

**MH**

I think that the breakout rooms were something that you also gradually offered. How did that start? And what has been the value of the breakout rooms?

**David**

I think that was someone's suggestion, again ... I've been doing some online programs with the Foundation and, and I think it was the first time I really used breakout rooms for any degree. And I realized that this is a very nice way of communicating with a few people, you know - to step out of this big group, maybe and into a small group. So I just thought we'll give this a go in Taizé. And somebody else I think, suggested it as well, in the Taizé. I usually split into four people, four people per room, if I can. And yes, we have very deep sharing sometimes, and you wouldn't think that you were 1000s of miles apart. In some cases, you know, that intimacy thing people could never do, without Zoom - not just with Taizé, but without Zoom, really without that ability, that opportunity to connect with somebody.

**MH**

I think it's really beautiful. And I know from my own schedule, I'm not able to participate in your breakout rooms, I do it in many other places. But I thought that was a huge, extra added value that you gave for people to have that opportunity. So it's really nice to know the depth and the trust that people have developed with one another,

**David**

It's also I should have added, an opportunity for people to connect with the Findhorn Foundation as well. You know, one person in Japan, who came here quite a bit in the late 2017 2018, something like that, but can't afford to come anymore - and longed to come but can't afford to. But for her, she has been through almost every session since we started in April 202. ... and it's really very amazing. But she's not the only one - many people. So they're connected to the Foundation as well as to each other. It is helping to spread this kind of network of light, isn't it? You know, the focus is Findhorn, really, on all that we do. And another way without having to travel to connect into that, to that center.

**MH**

I think you've given people an opportunity to discover leadership they didn't know they had in both these ways. And maybe you can tell us how you got the idea to invite others to host the Sundays and how that's worked out with some of those people? How did that work?

**David**

I like the idea of my trying to move away from being self-centered and doing everything you know - which is an old passion of mine - to do everything. But also, I could see that there were some good musicians, and people who really looked as if they could make the agenda. So we started and initially we had a few Taizé leaders provide content. But gradually people who hadn't led before and from all over the place - from Japan and Germany – [they]decided they would have a go. I kind of invited most people like that to do it.

And most of them did it straightaway. And they tell me that they get a lot out of this. [I can] help them in a supportive way because I'm still playing the music - but I leave the design of the whole thing to them. - with very few guidelines really. I prefer them to stick to a rough format of what we do. But they bring their own kind of [preferences] - their own Taizé on music - and poems and prayers and things like that. And so it's a creative process for them as well.

So, and I think it adds variety for people. And it also gives me a bit of a rest as well - I just have to push the buttons, which is very easy, as long as nothing goes wrong with Zoom. And, you know, I've done it so many times now that it's very, very easy to host the session. So yes, it's relaxing for me, too.

**MH**

And so when you put those playlists together, do you spend a lot of time with some of those co-hosts? Or have most of them [already figured it out]? Have you managed to develop a relationship and they know what songs they want, and, and you just do your regular [curating]?

**David**

... I just say, please send me all this by Friday. But if you've any doubt about it, because sometimes I don't have the track – [because] they want to do a certain song. And now too - the *Songs of Heaven and Earth* - not all those songs have been recorded. Some of them – say about 30 – 30 more we've recorded ourselves ... And ... other people have done our own recordings ...

**MH**

We're just talking about how those co-hosts and the playlists are assembled – right?

**David**

Yes, they get the list to me by Friday, and maybe by Wednesday, just to check that I've got the tracks. I sometimes give them advice. Are there too many tracks or something like that? But, you know, [sometimes] getting towards the end, you're ready to just skip a couple. So we just manage that process.

**MH**

You all make it very, very elegant and enjoyable for all of us who are participating? So David, I know that one of the impetus for me of doing this interview is that you're changing your connection to the Taizé Zoom.

What would you like to say about how you think this contributes in a cultural way to the cultural community or the Taizé community? I think you've created something that [delivers a] valuable gift. And I'd love to know what your perspective is.

**David**

I think everyone's realized that this is a resource. And it has been under-used in the past, you know. And if we want to build a network of lights, then this is an important element of it, I think. You know, that, how to engage with people - there are many online programs now, and a lot of things have been live-streamed. So I guess what I'm doing is a part of that culture of just realizing [what is possible].

Of course, the pressure of climate change and so forth has really focused people's minds. And perhaps we're a bit slow to realize that, but this is just one element [of addressing world concerns]. Now, if ... people can engage with and feel part of the center of light network and feel part of this spiritual network ... through Findhorn, they can engage with spirit more. You know, it's like-minded souls that are kind of speaking to each other and sharing the things they love. I think that that kind of networking has happened before, because when you came on the program, you would give a list of the participants and then you would often email each other for a while. But it often kind of dropped off a bit. But I think keeping this going indefinitely into the future builds a small element of the total kind of way that people connect together for spirit - you know, the planetary transformation and so forth.

**MH**

Thank you. I like the idea of thinking about it going on - and for you to have a life that itself will continue to mature for yourself. What are you planning next? Have you got some new opportunities have opened up?

**David**

Well, I'm enjoying going to Cluny every morning to sing.

**MH**

So getting back in that personal connected space is also enjoyable?

**David**

Yes. I've been going on Monday and Wednesday because we do Zooms on Tuesday and Thursdays, you know. But I just feel like there's something else that wants to come out and, and my partner Kyoko, is here with me.

And so in November, she has to go back to Japan. But we get to spend more time together. And I mean that this has been a transformational relationship for me as well, you know. I want to really honor it. And so that's maybe just pure pleasure for the rest of the summer - really, you know, it's just to go out into nature. And I've got a little camper van, so we can go and camp in places in that. It feels like I



wanted it to continue - and I was a bit disappointed that nobody had come forward to continue for doing Sunday, but I'm going to continue Tuesday, and someone [Elyn] is doing Thursday. But yesterday, someone confirmed that they want to continue to manage Sunday [this is hot from the press :-].

**David**

And she's pretty competent with computers. And so it looks like it's going to be good. So, maybe we'll have a couple of weeks break. And then I'm hoping on the fourth of September, the first Sunday in September, it'll start again - in the same way, with a variety of leaders leading it. I'm going to hand everything over to her to manage apart from MailChimp (contact list). I'm going to keep administering the MailChimp account. It's a bit complicated to move that around. But that's not a big thing.

**MH**

That's wonderful. Well, that gives me a lot of encouragement because I know I have wanted to do a Sunday Taizé, but I've had limited bandwidth. But I had accumulated a playlist and theme. So maybe I'll finally get to do that.

So I'd just like to thank you so much for having this discussion and sharing with us your background and how you've been a leader yourself, I think in supporting and really making a very rich culture for us during a period of time when it would have been easy to feel isolated. But you've given us an opportunity, as you say to see the community and City of Light online alive on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays.

So I want to thank you on behalf of everyone and I look forward to being able to share this story.

**David**

Marilyn and thank you for asking me.