

*An ICONICITY is the analogy between the form of a sign and its meaning. All three of these pieces are through-composed using simple processes applied to both the sounds of the instruments and their realtime electronic transformations. The players synchronize exactly with the rhythms produced by these transformations, and together the acoustic and electronic layers of sound create closely interwoven textures that evolve into more complex forms. The acoustic sounds and the patterned variations of their recurrence affect the listener's experience of time, and provide a metaphor for its transcendence.*

—Chris Brown

In *Iconicities*, **Chris Brown** presents a music constituted by opposing conceptions of time, multiple registers of timescale, and multivalent axes of their intersections. The method is through a knot of the threads of axiomatic and serial procedures, a spectralist approach to the equivalence of diverse registers of sound—timbral, sentential (melodic/rhythmic), and formal—and the suggestion of the infinite expansion of spectrum and timescale, moving on one side toward the immediate, and on the other toward the eternal. On the side of immediacy, an Icon is created, which presents itself to consciousness whole, outside of the perception of time, as in a geometrical truth. On the side of eternity, Becoming approaches the infinite, as in Heraclitus's river into which we cannot step twice: each moment is an Icon of another Icon, and so on into pure multiplicity.

Iconicity describes the essence of these three compositions, their relationship to the referents of their titles, to each other, and to the methods of their creation. *Stupa* is constructed in the form of a stupa, and so becomes a stupa itself, creating a riddle of different conceptions of time, as described in a quote from its dedicatee, the great composer José Maceda. *Gangsa* takes up the structure and timbre of a traditional instrumentation and recognizes that tradition's compositional and historical survivance,<sup>1</sup> but reflects it from another timescale, producing a cycle of polytemporal dissonance and harmony. Another dialectic in time is conceived here, one which brings the listener's share<sup>2</sup> wholeheartedly into the compositional process. *Iceberg* expands the listener's share to include elemental sentiences, going further down the register of time to its extremes, iconizing a geological fact in the dynamics between technology and music. In the stasis of this expansion, one feels a sense of the uncanny, as though an alarm is sounded with no one there to hear it.

The concept of Iconicity is concerned with a kind of passage of identification, of Becoming becoming Being, which is of central importance in religious and talismanic magic, evidenced in Sacred architecture and in the sciences of Mandala and Mantra. It finds semiotic currency in the terminology of C.S. Peirce, who divides the sign into the trinity of Icon, Index, and Symbol, and declares Icon to be “a sign of which the character that fits it to become a sign of the sort that is, is simply inherent in it as a quality of it.”<sup>3</sup> He draws from the Platonic discourse on Ideas: “For example, a geometric figure drawn on paper may be an *icon* of a triangle or another geometrical form.”<sup>4</sup> An Icon of sounds is entirely possible: in prayerful language, for example, it is neither customary nor necessary to translate “Amen,” due to its sonic iconicity. This marks an important distinction between musical and linguistic sound. If the imbuelement of phoneme with referent is the main obstacle to the conception of music as language, the abstract nature of musical sound makes music the ideal prism for the process of Iconization.

The sounds that are presented here are chosen from a highly defined bandwidth, on the timbral as well as the sentential, and formal levels. They are elemental, suggesting the materials named by their titles: stone, metal, ice. The pitch register is generally high, with a tendency toward rising on multiple levels. There is a sense of great longevity, even permanence, although subdued; they are Icons unconcerned with monumentality as spectacle, grandiosity, complexity or virtuosity. The aura of their presence is enhanced by electronic reflections based on continuous live sampling and playback, operations of hearing and memory which further intermingle the deterministic procedures of the composition and the subjectivity of the listener's share, displacing the listeners' now within their hearing, creating a spiral of hearing, of hearing how one hears, and so forth.

But the main medium of Iconicity here is time itself, and in these compositions, what astonishes is the clarity of structure. The development of each piece proceeds along principles which are introduced as self-evident, and unfold with eminent transparency. The composer's dual presence as constructor of forms whose organization is immediately transmissible, coupled with the authorship of the language of the electronic processing of the sound, suggests a framing of the work as spectral Icon within the bounds of languages of timbre and form, each determined by axiomatic procedures.

## **Stupa**

“India and Southeast Asia were absorbed in another concept of the world, another measure of time, not a linear, cause and effect entity of logic and matter, but a metaphysical world with a profound respect for nature and the divine for whom temples, stone monuments and stupas were constructed. . . . One musical element concerning time is the concept of a vibrating medium which . . . is allowed to vibrate freely with one stroke, without further control of the fingers, the hands, or human volition. . . . A gong sound is at liberty to vibrate by itself.”

—José Maceda, *A Concept of Time*

The form of a stupa, a square base with circular domes rising above it, is used to structure this piece. The piano and vibraphone are treated like the sound of a single gong, and a series of four octatonic chords whose notes are shared between the instruments gradually expand into upward sweeping melodies. The chords are sampled during the first half of the piece to provide material for electronic halos, and a drone gradually emerges beneath.

—Chris Brown, *Stupa* (2007)

The riddle that is told in *Stupa* is that of the braid of two concepts of time, the metaphysical and chronological, represented by the two quotes above, conceived of from each other's perspective, expressed in each other's terms.

The concept of time that Maceda calls “another” and territorializes in the names of India and Southeast Asia is manifested by the Iconicity of Brown's music, which becomes *in fact* the work of Sacred architecture invoked by its title. At this level, a Stupa is given to consciousness as a whole, as eternity—it has always been, it is already done. Like Peirce's icon of the triangle, it is not a different Stupa that appears at each instance to each listener, it is necessarily the same Stupa in its transcendental form.

As Icon, *Stupa* can be heard with great reverence. *Stupa* (lit. “heap”), a Sanskrit form of the Pali *thuupa*, which can be traced back to the Indo-European *tumba*, and thereby the English *tomb*, originally denotes a pile of stone wherein a relic of the deceased is contained. This aligns with the Tibetan translation *Chorten* (Tib. *mCh’od*, “offerings” or “worship” and *rten* “a container”), synonymous again with the Sanskrit *dhatu-gharba* (“relic holder” or “womb of the relic”), further corrupted into *dagaba*, and from there to *pagoda*.

That the Stupa is itself an Icon of the soul of the deceased in its passage between eternity and duration is confirmed by architectural symbolism: circular disc or spike descending to crescent moon, lotus bud or triple canopy, to conical spire, hemispherical dome, and finally to square base. These five forms describe the continuity between immortality and mortality in correspondence to what the *Samkhya* terms the five envelopes (*kosha*) of individual existence: the Beatific realm where the Universal Self is not distinguishable from the individual self (*anandamaya kosha*), the envelope of Universal knowledge or gnosis (*vijnanamaya kosha*), the envelope of individual intellect (*manomaya kosha*), the envelope constituted by the vital breath (*pranamaya kosha*), and the nutritive envelope (*annamaya-kosha*). Within this last envelope we find the microcosmic correspondents, the sensible elements ether, air, fire, water, and earth said to constitute all bodies.

On the side of duration, an operation occurs here which reflects the transcendental form of the Stupa in an immanently temporal acoustic image. The immediacy of the Sanskrit *stupa*, which is traced in our English *stupefy*, *stupor*, etc., is mediated here by a denumerable time line—16 sections of equal length, of 53.33 seconds each, named A(1–4), B(1–4), C(1–4), D(1–4)—although one which tends, by a beautiful curve, toward the infinitely divisible.

As in ceremony, in sixteen rounds of four groups each, as in a prayer to the four directions, to the four seasons, to the elements, one follows the form of the stupa—square base becoming hemispherical dome, conical spire, crescent moon, circular disc, as Earth becomes water, fire, air, space—ever upwards. In pitch the ear is led by a spiral of ever-transposing degrees of harmonicity from an almost imperceptible witness tone (A=110Hz). In time-consciousness, the mind is led by careful increments toward the infinitesimal. An amplitude curve, a long decrescendo, confirms the sense of vanishing quantities.

In the approach to the crown, the formal transcendental curve itself is reflected within the aura of immanent material elements. An echo of an echo, a reflection of a reflection, the “electronic halo” opposes the acoustic image of the Stupa at every level. At the technological level, it is constituted by a language Maceda calls a “linear, cause and effect entity of logic and matter.” This language is found in the procedural development of the composition itself. Brown describes a “congruence” in the procedures of programming the electronics and composing the acoustic elements, how they are “really part of the same process.” Here too there is a riddle; in its stochasticism, the linear language is utilized to create a degree of randomness and irregularity as in no other element of the composition.

There are four principal structural considerations: pitch/range; amplitude; density; electronic algorithms. The dynamics of each of these are manifested in the passage between active and passive aspects; increase/decrease, ascent/descent, recording/playback, forward/backward, determinate/indeterminate, from different perspectives at each formal register. At the Earthly register (A (1–4)), the four corners of the square base are indicated by octatonic chords, with four notes being played on each instrument, in a *sforzando* sequence with additive repetitions of single

pitches in ascending order. These correspond to an initial stroke of the Gong, which as Maceda explains, is then “allowed to vibrate freely . . . without further control . . . of human volition.”

In the watery register (B(1–4)), there is a corresponding decrease of note density on each instrument, from tetrad to dyad to arpeggio, in a descending sequence of pitches, establishing a pulse of quarter notes in asymmetrical durations. Another layer of amplitude dynamics emerges here, a “sweeping” ascension of pitches played at “maximum” volume. At the igneous register (C(1–4)), it is this secondary ascending sweep of pitches which moves to establish the finer pulse of eighth-note triplets.

The electronic halo which assumes prominence at this point is a magnification of the developments of harmonic envelopes within the time frame of an initial stroke of the gong. The Gong, Icon *par excellence* in the onomatopoeia of its proper name, is among the few instruments whose overtones could oppose its fundamental pitch so directly. Recall here William Blake’s “opposition is true friendship.” Is that the idea that lay behind his mischievous grin at my last meeting with Chris, the boast that “José Maceda would not like this piece”?

## **Gangsa**

Where *Stupa* introduces polytemporality in the metaphysical and chronological senses, with all their playful capacity for harmony, *Gangsa* addresses the listener’s time consciousness itself by opening up the compositional process to the phenomenological experience of sound and tempo. Rather than inscribing a movement within a formal stasis, *Gangsa* arises within the continuity of a movement, in the absence of an absolute time. Here, the form of the piece is itself a curve, a single oscillation, that of a slow acceleration, faster stasis, followed by a mirror deceleration. It is an icon of periodicity, giving an image of an oscillation as a time frame which contains a continuum of time frames. This widened sense of time introduces an expanded unity of being in the now, while relaxing the unitary grip of an absolute time, opening up a zone of subjective possibilities for the performers as well as the listeners, where each can experience a unique *now*, in simultaneity with “other” nows.

The compositional generosity in which the listener’s subjectivity is called upon to create meaning on the harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic levels, coupled with the experience of what Brown describes as “the wrinkles and crumples of temporal dissonance,” suggests an expansion of the spectral concept of correspondence between dynamics of pitch and tempo into the registers of memory and history. In this expanded field of time, on the individual as well as the communal levels, the genetic and ancestral axes of memory would extend into each other. The dissonances and consonances on the temporal level could be heard as overtones within a conflicted historicity.

For Brown, it is here that the intersection of personal memory, his childhood in the Philippines, is recovered, and merged with an ethnomusicological stake in the traditions of indigenous Filipino cultures. Although the name *gangsa* is shared with many gong-chime traditions of Southeast Asia, it is the bronze flat-gong of the native peoples of the Cordillera mountains in northern Luzon, Philippines, iconized here as a living example of pre-Columbian cultural survivance, which is the referent of the title of this piece.

The nations of the Cordillera (Ibaloy, Kankanaï, Gaddang, Ifugao, Kallahan, Kalinga, Payao, Bontok, Balangaw, Itneg, Isneg), who heroically resisted the Spanish conquest for more than 300 years, and many of whom continue to resist the rising tide of economic neocolonialism to this

day, have been positioned within the temporal dissonance between historical narratives. The continuity of an Indigenous narrative, on the political and cultural levels, can be read as resistance against the historical narrative of global capitalism in its various guises as technological or scientific progress or as the neoliberal “End of History.”

The dissonant wrinkle or crumple in historical time goes much deeper yet. The parallel between dissonance/consonance in periodicity, in pitch, in tempo, in a single composition can be heard as resonant with those of the multiplicity of historical narratives within whole musical traditions. If these in turn are resonant with the parallels observed in other cultural structures like architecture and agriculture, here too, the Cordillera cultures provide an iconic case. Keepers of the 2,000-year-old Banaue rice terraces, masterpieces of ecological engineering which cover an area of more than 4,000 square miles, the native peoples of these mountains demonstrate a clear example of structural parallelism between the techniques of the traditional music composition using *gangsá* and the distribution of positive and negative spaces, of vertical and horizontal layering, and the interaction of geometrical and organic forms in agricultural zoning.

In this piece, it is not only the polymetric rhythmic structure of accumulating and diminishing patterns of 8, 7, 6, and 4 beats which phase into a composite cycle of 168 beats (21 cycles of 8, 24 cycles of 7, 28 cycles of 6, and 42 cycles of 4) but also the displacement by half cycles of the playback of the individually programmed memory buffers (one per each gong) in the electronic processing which create the deep *hocket*. There is also a tempo curve, increasing exponentially from 30 to 62.5 bpm for the first composite cycle, then abruptly doubling to 125 for 8 composite cycles, before decelerating from 62.5 back to 30 bpm for the last of the composite cycles. Therefore it is this process of displacement by half cycles, the mechanical creation of the new now points over the original tempo curve, which creates the primary sense of temporal dissonance and consonance.

As in the buffer between the architectural geometry and the organic curve of the mountain in a single rice paddy, *Gangsá* interprets the relationship between a technology and an environment—in the iconization of a Southeast Asian Indigenism, the recognition of its historical struggle and survivance, the recollection of the advanced technology of an ancient continuity.

## **Iceberg**

Taken together, *Stupa* and *Gangsá* make Icons of duration, describe the manifestation of degrees of individuality and particularity through time, and expand the scale to include that of memory and history over multiple axes, bringing the listening subject into the polytemporal knot of the processes of the composition. However, in *Iceberg*, as the time scale expands to that of the geological, the polarity of the Icon is reversed, and a corollary is brought about—a composition is created, and within it, the listener dissolves. From this vantage, it is as though there is no time passing at all, as though a stasis has transformed the musical act into a purely spatial entity independent of listener or composer. It glistens, it describes a topology, but it exists in isolation.

The image of a geological fact—what does it signify? *Iceberg* is a breaking off *from*, and at the same time a melting *into*, like the elemental Iconography of *Stupa* and *Gangsá*, although the material here is the most ephemeral of all. *Iceberg* embodies the transition from a permanence of the order of stone and metal, as glacier, to a particularity which is constantly disappearing, as water.

As in water, the process of dissolving itself disappears. Where the metal percussion—glockenspiel, crotales, and hi-hat—indicate crystalline edges of an icy surface, they are reflected and recirculated in a digital delay, which describes what the composer calls an “underwater geography” corresponding to the unknowable portion of the iceberg. On the acoustic side, while each of the twelve sections of the piece modulates downward by semitones, the interval used to generate new pitch sets within each section increases correspondingly. In the electronics there is a complete symmetry, a strictly additive algorithmic function that parallels the series of transpositions. To complete the circle of reflections, the percussionist synchronizes solely by means of the audible rhythm of the electronics.

*Stupa*, *Gangsa*, *Iceberg*: Icons within their own proper names, as well as Icons of Icons, networks of generative self-reference on ever-expanding orders of signification. The sequence of pieces is itself an envelope which iconizes the Gong, the ever-present “vibrating medium which is allowed (by the composer) to vibrate freely with one stroke, without further control” (Maceda). The initial stroke is sounded at the beginning of *Stupa*, followed by giving a long form increase of density along with a rising in pitch, sustained and continued at the center of the envelope in *Gangsa*, with *Iceberg* bringing about the decay, with a corresponding descent of pitch.

In *Stupa*, the ground of the Icon is the polarity of immediacy and eternity, of duration both physical and metaphysical. In *Gangsa*, the experience of time is conditioned on consciousness, through the memory of the composer and listening subject, on the history of the instruments and their sounds. In *Iceberg*, both these Iconographies are collapsed—the eternal is folded into the immediate, the subject dissolves, history and memory disappear, and sound seems to exist alone, without intention, uncreated, unperceived.

Yet the uncanny nature of this decay in *Iceberg* raises a significant question: is the decay of the gong really “allowed to vibrate freely . . . without further human volition”? (Maceda). Or is time, as nature, irreversibly affected by the experience of consciousness, as shown by a glacier which recedes, which melts, which breaks into an iceberg, which in turn dissolves into the ocean, just as the listener has dissolved into time?

—Eyvind Kang

*Eyvind Kang is a violist for whom the act of music and learning is a spiritual discipline.*

**Chris Brown** (born in 1953), a composer, pianist, and electronic musician, is best known for his music for acoustic instruments with interactive electronics. Collaboration and improvisation are consistent themes in his work, as well as the invention of and performance with new electronic instruments. These range from electro-acoustic instruments (*Gazamba*, 1982), to acoustic instrument transformation systems (*Lava*, 1992), and audience-interactive FM radio installations (*Transmissions*, 2004). He also writes interactive music software that he uses in his compositions and improvisations. He has been a member for more than 20 years of the computer network music band *THE HUB*. Recent works also explore alternative tuning systems. Other recordings of his music are available on the Tzadik, Pogus, Ecstatic Peace, Intakt, Rastscan, Red Toucan, SIRR, and Artifact labels. He is a Professor of Music at Mills College in Oakland, California, where he is also Co-Director of the Center for Contemporary Music (CCM).

**William Winant**, percussionist, has performed with some of the most innovative and creative musicians of our time. He has made more than 200 recordings in a wide variety of genres, including classical, avant-garde, free improvisation, and rock. Mr. Winant has premiered many new works written specifically for him by such noted composers as John Cage, Christian Wolff, Lou Harrison, John Zorn, Roscoe Mitchell, Alvin Lucier, and Terry Riley. He is principal percussionist with the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players and teaches at the University of California at Santa Cruz, as well as at Mills College.

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

*Chain Reaction*. Included on *CDCM Computer Music Series, Volume 17: Music from Mills College*. Centaur Records 2195.

*Duets*. Artifact Recordings ART 1016.

*Lava*. Tzadik 7002.

*Rogue Wave*. Tzadik 8014.

*Snakecharmer*. Artifact Recordings ART 1001.

*Talking Drum*. Pogus 21034.

Producer: Chris Brown

*Stupa* and *Gangsa* were recorded by Philip Perkins at Littlefield Concert Hall, Mills College, Oakland, California, in July 2010. *Iceberg* was recorded by Tom Erbe at the Center for Contemporary Music, Mills College, in 1989, and was previously released on the CD *Snakecharmer* on Artifact Recordings.

Digital mastering: Paul Zinman, SoundByte Productions Inc., NYC

Design: Bob Defrin Design, Inc., NYC

All compositions published by Chris Brown, BMI.

**This recording was made possible by a grant from the Francis Goelet Charitable Lead Trust.**

Thanks to Philip Perkins, Steed Cowart, Eyvind Kang, and Johanna Poethig.

#### FOR NEW WORLD RECORDS:

Lisa Kahlden, President; Paul M. Tai, Vice-President, Director of Artists and Repertory; Mojisola Oké, Bookkeeper; Angelica Sanchez, Production Associate.

#### ANTHOLOGY OF RECORDED MUSIC, INC., BOARD OF TRUSTEES:

Herman Krawitz, Chairman; Amy Beal; Thomas Teige Carroll; Robert Clarida; Emanuel Gerard; Lisa Kahlden; Fred Lerdahl; Elizabeth Ostrow; Cynthia Parker; Larry Polansky; Paul M. Tai; Blair Weille.

Francis Goelet (1926-1998), *In Memoriam*

For a complete catalog, including liner notes, visit our Web site: [www.newworldrecords.org](http://www.newworldrecords.org).

New World Records, 20 Jay Street, Suite 1001, Brooklyn, NY 11201

Tel (212) 290-1680 Fax (212) 290-1685 E-mail: [info@newworldrecords.org](mailto:info@newworldrecords.org)

© & © 2011 Anthology of Recorded Music, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A.

CHRIS BROWN (b. 1953)

*ICONICITIES*

*3 Pieces for Percussion and Live Electronics*

80723-2

1. *Stupa* (2007) 15:12

(for José Maceda)

William Winant, vibraphone; Chris Brown, piano and live computer processing

2. *Gangsa* (2010) 19:17

(for Ramón Santos)

The William Winant Percussion Group: Jordan Glenn, Krystof Golinski, Shayna Dunkelman, and David Douglas (left to right), flat-gongs; William Winant, conductor; Chris Brown, live computer processing

3. *Iceberg* (1985) 17:38

(for William Winant)

William Winant, crotales, glockenspiel, and hi-hat; Chris Brown, computer-controlled analog electronics and digital delay

**NO PART OF THIS RECORDING MAY BE COPIED OR REPRODUCED  
WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION OF A.R.M., INC.**



<sup>1</sup> The term “survivance” is borrowed from Gerald Vizenor, *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*, Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase “listener’s share” is borrowed from Christopher Norris, *Music, Platonism, and the Listener’s Share*, London, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> C.S. Peirce, *New Elements (Kaina Stocheia)*, within *Essential Peirce 2*, as referenced at <http://www.cspeirce.com/menu/library/bycsp/stoicheia/stoicheia.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*