

The background of the entire page is a detailed topographic map. It features a complex network of white contour lines of varying thicknesses and colors (including shades of grey and blue) on a dark background. These lines represent elevation and terrain, creating a dense, organic pattern that fills the entire frame.

SOUND AMERICAN

No.28

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28

SOUND AMERICAN 28 THE MAPPING ISSUE

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CARTE DE TENDRE

Nate Wooley

"I have made maps/diagrams of fictional worlds, where the real and the imaginary coexist in varying, often elusive, proportions. The figures are different. But when they are collated and juxtaposed, they allow us a glimpse of what D'arcy Thompson had in mind in his great final chapter on 'The Theory of Transformations':

*We rise from a conception of form to an understanding of the forces which gave rise to it ... and in the comparison of kindred forms ... we discern the magnitude and the direction of the forces which have sufficed to convert the one form into the other."*¹

When Kyla-Rose Smith, the guest curator for this issue, proposed the idea of mapping as its theme, I was intrigued ... then unsure. The problem was mine: mapping is a term that is ubiquitous in my little mental universe, and I'm not sure I still know what I mean when I use it. Outside of a general feeling of trading one formal constraint for another, the term has become my way of making large leaps in logic, a catch-all for the unexplainable and relative. Essentially, I've stripped the term of its meaning by using it as the pivot-point within phrases that are, consciously or not, absurd. I "map" noise onto jazz tradition; some celebrity chef "maps" Bulgarian-French fusion cuisine onto the entertainment complex; a driver in my neighborhood "maps" our collective rage onto their horn. Kyla's use of the idea of "mapping" as a way of contextualizing the contributions she's gathered, however, has inspired me to pay closer attention to my thought process and has, thankfully, rescued the term from an empty metonymy.

Kyla speaks eloquently for herself in the interview that opens the main body of this issue, so I will use this space to offer what I've learned during my navel-gazing in hopes that this example of reexamining meaning inspires someone else to do the same: a reevaluation of the way they speak, listen, interact, or create.

Always a maker of schedules, outlines, and blueprints, I rarely start a project of any size or type without finding a way to make it comprehensible at a glance. Because of this, of course, the ideas of graphing, cartography, and mapping are ever-present in my mind. And it is this pragmatic sense of map-making that brings up questions around this issue: Does my work-a-day conception of mapping—articles on how we plan our work—translate as the central idea of an issue of *Sound American*? Perhaps only to someone with my particular kink. When, on Kyla's prompt, I opened myself up to a broader sense of mapping, however, I was almost overwhelmed with possi-

bilities for this issue and in general. Of course, there are the concrete examples in modern geography and historical cartography, but there is also the concrete history of colonialism and the imaginary fancy of the *Carte de Tendre*—the technology of GPS and the intimacy of DNA.

I think the epigraph above is an apt distillation of my current thinking about mapping, and it seems to sum up what Kyla has achieved with this issue. The extract is odd for being an excerpt-embedded-within-a-quote, but I think that strangeness highlights the shaggyism of the subject. It also gathers the many threads of “mapping” into a coherent cloth: the real and the imaginary; the exact and the proportional; the concrete and the ephemeral. It shows a map not only as a picture of where we’ve been or directions for where we will go, but as a way of understanding why the past, present, and future are the way they are. This is exactly the open and mutable sense of mapping that I get from *SA28*’s contributors. They plot out their personal experience, their cultural history, and the music they make as a combination of the two, inviting us to follow the ways in which their past flows into the present and the future. Their writings allow us to “discern the magnitude and direction of . . . forces” that have affected them as musicians that may work in areas unfamiliar to us. They provide us with concrete knowledge of where they come from and who they are. And most importantly, they allow us to open our own emotional maps of what it is to be human, adding new continents to our own *Carte de Tendre*.

LOUIS ARMSTRONG RECORDS “WEST END BLUES”

Ben Lamar Gay

“Whatchu on?”

Sometimes this question can catch you so off guard that you feel it resonate at the center of your chest in the most peculiar way. Its unexpectedness leaves you and your hesitance side by side to try to piece together a halfway decent response. One false move and you’ll find yourself in a pool of “Should’ve, Would’ve, Could’ve (s)” drenched until the day after tomorrow.

<A brief silence>

“What am I on?”

This is the first thought that enters after the silence. Then, just like ancient folk, you look to the sky for answers only to be blinded by a star, our star. You were sure that the perfect ball of hot plasma was at the center of everything for all these years. Now it seems that at the center of the previous plans you once thought were essential stands an attentive listener waiting for your answer.

<An improvisation>

“Whatchu on?”

Depending on its delivery, this question could be interpreted in many ways. It could be an entryway to a lovely adventure or a blade in search of blood.

<Use your ears, baby>

It’s wild when you can feel the sound of a person before a word is spoken. It usually happens in that brief moment, right before the seal of silence is broken. The way a body moves inside this split second is what alarms or seduces you, pushes you away, or draws you near. Body language is a tongue that constantly reveals the actual music. What you’ve mistaken as the blinding light of a star was just the brilliance of this person who offered you a golden opportunity to hang. You’re now wide open to the thrill of randomness.

“Whatchu on right now?”

<Eye contact>

“Nothing”

“*You Wanna . . . ?*”

“*Yes! I wanna . . . !*”

<cue trumpet cadenza>

There it is. The host and you, the invitee riding down King Drive in an '86 Cutlass, no plates and young with the nerve to be black no matter what type of quota needs filling.

<Trust>

The hang is real.

Chicago 1928.

It's about one year and some change before the stock market crash and the end of a period historians refer to as “the Jazz Age.” This period could also be known as “Oh, Now They All Up On It, Huh?” which marked the public indulgence of Black culture within mainstream, middle-class, white America in the 1920s.

On June 28th, Louis Armstrong and His Hot Five stepped into the studio and did something we all do when we document—make history. Some of our documents may only resonate within a single household or take shelter on hard drives, while others bounce continuously around the corners of the earth. The 1928 document of “West End Blues” is still bouncing through the lives of many. It most definitely comes in and out of my life, especially in the deep seasons of reflection.

I first heard “West End Blues” 22 years ago while watching the Ken Burns *Jazz* documentary in my parents' living room. The song and its lore were placed at the climax of an episode entitled “Our Language.” I already admired Armstrong's sound, years before my introduction to “West End Blues,” although my imitations of his voice and mannerisms easily exceeded my knowledge of his catalog of sound. From what I did know of the catalog, I adored it. This sentiment left me glued to the TV at the moment of introduction, attentively listening and allowing the recollections of musicians and historians to guide me through the importance of the music. This style of guidance can sometimes create a distance between you and the thing you seek, leaving a divine wall between your mediocrity and your ambition. I definitely anticipated this distance while waiting for the first note to sound.

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Much to my relief, the opening trumpet cadenza of “West End Blues” pulled me in closer and allowed me to see the hang that was happening beyond the threshold. The timelessness of the first twelve seconds of sound erased all dividing lines of space and time as if allowing me and all the spirits—past, present, and future—to be involved. By the time the Hot Five joined in with the blues, my imagination was constructing connections between the musicians, Chicago, and us.

<Trust>

The hang is real.

Louis Armstrong's six-year residence in Chicago was unknown to me until I heard “West End Blues.” Before this, I figured his journey followed the route of New Orleans to New York, then the world. Somehow I missed the part about the Chicago years, one of his most creative and innovative periods. More and more, this makes me wonder about how the influence of Chicago and its creative community has had on experimentalists throughout the years, such as Armstrong, Sun Ra, the AACM, etc. Is there something in the water? Or is it just a thing that happens inside the draw and promise of a large city.

Although “West End Blues”—composed by King Oliver—was named after an area in New Orleans, Bronzeville is all I see when I hear it. Bronzeville is the neighborhood on Chicago's Southside where at least two members of the Hot Five lived during the time of the recording. It was the Black Mecca of the Midwest. It is also where I spent at least ten years of my childhood. This hood gave me my first music lesson, first bus ride, first fistfight, and my first French kiss. It is the place that allows the imagination to connect with all of the spirits. Like when you walk into a beauty supply store on 35th street and realize that you're in the actual space of the Sunset Café, where Louis, along with Earl Hines, was in fellowship—hanging, playing, working the night before the Hot Five recording session. I'm pretty sure on that evening one of them said in some way, form, or fashion: “See you at the session tomorrow!”

<Eye contact>

“Word!”

<A brief silence>

“How much is the bread again?”

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<An improvisation>

This June will mark the centennial of Armstrong’s train ride to Chicago, invited by his mentor and big homie, King Oliver, as the story goes. This story alone reminds you how special an invitation can be, especially when it comes from a person you feel is brilliant.

“*Whatchu on?*”

<Just say, “Nada” baby>

“*Nada*”

<A brief silence>

“*Let’s hang?*”

“West End Blues” is trance music. It sounds like a person reflecting on an amazing hang fifteen minutes before that hang ends, right before the participants split ways. It has a vibe of looking back and forward, the sadness that lives inside the fact of knowing the lovely moment must come to an end, yet with the positive outlook and anticipation of the moment happening again soon.

Louis, Earl, Jimmy, Fred, Zutty, and Mancy had a strong vibe that summer day in a city accustomed to housing beautiful and exploratory sound experiments.

<Trust>

LOU HARRISON

FOUR STRICT SONGS

Dr. Matthew Welch

I had a kid—late 2016—and like many, my 2017 turned to politics. Because of this, I failed to celebrate the centennial of one of my favorite composers, Lou Harrison (1917–2003). My entry point to Harrison as a listener was through his compositions for American-made gamelan. This was mature work composed for the Bill Colvig-crafted aluminum gamelan, “Si Betty” (after Betty Freeman, arts benefactor, built 1979), and that reflected a life-time of composing and musical curiosity; imaginative lyricism balanced perfectly with the results of research in both just intonation and Javanese *Karawitan*.

My time at the Database of Recorded American Music (DRAM) and New World Records in New York allowed me access to much of Harrison’s recorded output. Like a proverbial kid in a candy store, I devoured past and imminent releases of his music. And in doing so, I got a real handle on his life’s work despite its broad outlook and his prolific oeuvre.

Lou Harrison’s importance within the development of the American sound is vital. His unique world fits somewhere between Henry Cowell’s and John Cage’s. It acknowledges both the transcendental and the futuristic but is dreamy in its approach to modern multiplicity. One over-arching aspect of his composing that has kept me listening is a persistent warbling of melody that propels every work. Also present is a sense of a place—far-off or far-fetched—in the construction of each work’s sonority.

Four Strict Songs for Eight Baritones and Orchestra from 1955 represents a turning point in Harrison’s music where the melodic organization and fabric of gamelan music offers pervasive inspiration (and overt reference). Commissioned by the Louisville Orchestra, started at Black Mountain College, and finished when Harrison returned to California, *Strict Songs* (for short) consists of four pieces, each using a pentatonic set of pitches derived from the *slendro* and *pelog* combinations used in Javanese gamelans.¹ Each pentatonic set was given its own micro-tuning in just intonation (secured by re-tuning the harp and piano) so that the intervals sound crisp and crystallize stability and movement on their own acoustic terms.²

In *Strict Songs*, I hear a re-birth in composition for Harrison, where his interest in melody and timbre could reign and spin out its own patterns of accompaniment. The application of *slendro* and *pelog* to the scale formula of these four movements clearly shows his blossoming love for the melodic shapes and infinite forward motion that arise from these modes.

The text for *Strict Songs* was Harrison’s own. Supposedly “modeled on Navajo ritual song,” the four movements are a salute to holiness, nourishment, tenderness, and splendor, respectively.

The text is an ecstatic exaltation of the natural world. “Here is Holiness” is an upbeat declamation with a clear “nuclear-gamelan” orchestration concept (faux-gamelan from within the orchestra)³ in the bright, *slendro*-like G-major pentatonic. Praises abound to crystalline-leaving begonias, mountain deer, and the star Aldebaran lighting the night sky. “Here is Nourishment” creeps along slowly in a darker and more plaintive *pelog* mode, dominated by a melody trading back and forth between the harp and strings; Harrison explores each little and big interval in the *pelog* mode with a sort of beginner’s luck. The text sings of the swamps and black-bird’s song, and also of the meteorite of the fallen star. “Here is Tenderness” returns to *slendro*, this time in another transposition and tuning. This movement pushes forward again with a bright rhythm and tempo, but with perhaps a more serious and purposeful determination. The song covers ancient redwoods, ageless goldfish, and Jupiter’s moon, Ganymede. “Here is Splendor” returns to *pelog*, yet another variety that exudes Splendor! It moves in stately waves in a bright major-seventh sounding *pelog* as the text expounds on the sky and cosmos.

The whole work’s joyous sound and audience resilience has led to both its setting for a dance by Mark Morris in 1987 and being rearranged for a more conventional SATB and solo baritone line-up, helping popularize the already extroverted songs. What I hear in this work is Harrison “finding his religion”: after some years of experimenting in sounds and in abode—including reportedly stressful years out East—one feels the freedom of a personal homecoming in this set of songs. He has fallen in love, in a way, with the basic materials of Javanese *Karawitan*’s modal and stratification grammar, and this set off a wave of exploration—and renewed a melodic tap—for years to come.

For many composers like Harrison, gamelan became a path to liking music again: after all he was a student of Arnold Schoenberg, whose academic importance in creating twelve-tone music must have weighed heavily on the younger composer. That a music like gamelan could be so sophisticated without being part of the social fabric of modern classical music attracted valid counter-arguments to the prevailing notion of what the modern musical language was to be built on. Harrison’s work—from *Concerto in Slendro* of 1961 to *Concerto for Piano and Gamelan* of 1987—shows an entrenched dedication to exploring the chemical capabilities of a mixed approach in composition heavily balanced by a long study of gamelan.⁴

It is fascinating to see *Strict Songs* as something that is, in actuality, not that strict. To me, the piece represents Harrison at his most free: clearly in the present; looking at redwoods in the

California mountains and the boundless universe above; feeling both at home and upon the cusp of a new musical journey. From here—where holiness, nourishment, tenderness, and splendor first arose—Harrison moves forward, fashioning his own gamelan-inspired sound, and beyond, by collaborating on and catalyzing the creation of the rare instrument-building tradition known as American Gamelan. For me, *Strict Songs* represents the birthplace of this focus. Because it precipitated a lot of research into gamelan and led to some composition-modeling afterwards, the work sounds, to my ears, the least gamelan-informed but the most gamelan-inspired. From this vantage point, it is nice to bask in the pure joy of freedom that makes up *Strict Songs*. Its encapsulation of a first encounter gives it an endearing naivete that many of his more conventional-sounding gamelan works miss.

1 *Slendro* and *pelog* in their original context are not just “scales” but often *slendro* and *pelog* are housed in completely separate yet compatible sets of gamelans, built often in complement. To inadequately describe the general difference between *slendro* and *pelog*, one would characterize the overall intervallic distance between the steps, further noting these sounds on separate bronze slabs or gongs placed in a row. *Slendro* is naturally a five-degree collection, approaching equidistant interval and falling on the Western keyboard somewhat like the black notes—no half-steps. *Pelog* is a set of seven steps, of which five are used in sub-modes called *pathets*. *Pelog* is very different than *slendro*, and the five-note *pathets* feature a variety of intervals between steps, falling on the western keyboard with half-steps and thirds.

2 Just intonation advocates argue that these intervallic colors have been lost as instruments have been equal-tempered to accommodate more complex scales, keys, and more notes.

3 A “nuclear gamelan” is a term borrowed from composer and gamelan specialist Colin McPhee, whose works predate Harrisons, but share this feature. The idea is that some of the instruments of the orchestral body that sound most like a gamelan are treated together to represent a gamelan (vs. composing for gamelan itself) routinely as a textural and extra-musical device. In McPhee, his *Tabuh-Tabuhan* of 1936 explores this concept in depth. Perhaps more importantly, the nuclear gamelan serves to propel the rhythm and timbral/tuning of the piece, in which the “very Western instruments, such as the string body adhere to a new practice set from within, but borrowed from without. In *Strict Songs*, the piano and harp, both retuned, serve many of these roles.”

4 Harrison spent years with vocalist/composer Jody Diamond and Pak Cokro of Java, modeling his style in comparison to the canon of Java’s Court music.

INTRODUCING SA28'S GUEST CURATOR, KYLA-ROSE SMITH

In conversation with
Nate Wooley

NW Although we're mostly concentrating on your work as a "cartographer" in this issue, your journey started as a very successful musician in South Africa. What drew you to music in the first place and how did that evolve into your current life, which makes room both for music and your work with Found Sound Nation?

K-R S I love the idea of curator as cartographer! Well . . . how many lines on this page?! I grew up in a musical home. Not that either of my parents were professional musicians, but there was always music and musical instruments, dancing, family sing-alongs, a vast record collection, and my father blaring Vivaldi's Flute Concertos when he delivered tea to our bedsides and woke us every morning as we got ready to go to school. When I was about six-years-old my mother suggested I take up a musical instrument and immediately followed it with, "I think you should try the violin, and here one is, and you have a lesson next week."

It was interesting because growing up in apartheid South Africa as a white person and attending a government elementary school, which ultimately only really provided to the needs of the minority white population, there was the privilege of having a well-resourced music department. So, I got music lessons at very little cost to my parents. A bitter pill. I played from a young age—violin and piano—under the strict and watchful eye of my mother; you know how that goes! To her credit, as I grew older and felt stifled by classical training, she was really encouraging and actively sought out other musical forms and teachers for me. And I think growing up in a very eclectic household where creativity was in some ways the highest state—and very much encouraged in all things—shaped me and the path I ultimately took.

My first working gig as a musician was writing music and performing with a contemporary dance company in Johannesburg—The Vuyani Dance Theatre, which is led by the incredible South African dancer and choreographer Gregory Maqoma. This experience was deeply profound for me for a number of reasons: I think dance is one of the highest art forms; I am completely enthralled and inspired by the way great dancers make work and the deep excavation and study that takes place in order to finally whittle something down to only its essence—to shadows and gesture. I also love the intense space of working: long grueling hours of development and rehearsal, a finite time on something, and then it is done. It's something I am still aspiring to as a maker.

This gig, and also my work with South African hip-hop band Tumi and The Volume, led me to meeting the founders of Afropop band Freshlyground. I joined the band and stayed for fifteen years. We were wildly successful—selling hundreds of thousands of re-

cords, touring the world, collaborating with Shakira on the global smash hit “Waka Waka”—in some ways dreams come true. But somewhere along the path of commercial pop success, I realized it wasn’t what I wanted. It wasn’t the thing that lit a fire in me. It wasn’t that “higher state” space of creativity. And I had to do some searching, and some circling, to find where I was in all of it. And that’s when I met the folks from Found Sound Nation (FSN) and became aware of their work with OneBeat and a global collective of socially engaged musicians: folks all around the world who shared an ethic in their work. I felt like I had found my creative home, a community that could support me in continuing to strive for that higher state. And now I live in New York City, working with FSN, on OneBeat, and all of our other projects that engage musicians from all over the world.

NW For many of our readers, the work of FSN and OneBeat will be new, as will many of the insights from the contributors you’ve chosen. Can you talk a little bit about the mission of the organization and how it goes about getting people from around the world together to share their practice?

K-R S FSN is an artist collective and non-profit production house that uses music- and media-making to connect people across cultural and social divides. We believe that collaborative music creation is a deeply effective tool for awareness of others and the beauty, trauma, and hidden potential in our communities. We partner with local youth, social organizations, music festivals, and artists across all disciplines. Our work emphasizes a mobile approach to recording and producing professional-quality music. This technique combines the art-music traditions of *musique concrète*, hip-hop, audio journalism, and contemporary composition. Our method is adaptable to different environments, based on finding the sounds and resonances of each space, drawing upon the talents of musicians in the local scene, and examining issues most relevant to each community. Our aim is to enliven a global conversation about how creative collaboration in music can address issues we face locally and collectively, while doing this all in the most funky and harmonious way possible!

We have worked and collaborated with many institutions, music festivals and musicians over the last twelve years, from running pop-up studios at the Lucerne Festival in Switzerland to capturing street sounds at Big Ears in Knoxville. We have led audio production workshops for Cine Institute in Haiti, worked extensively with Carnegie Hall in New York as well as in Indonesia, and Mexico, and developed music composition workshops with incarcerated youth in the Bronx and Brooklyn. In the field of cultural

diplomacy, we developed the Dosti Music Project¹ with U.S. Embassies in Pakistan and India which brings together politically divided artists to create and tour original work.

Since 2012, we have partnered with the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and Bang on a Can to produce OneBeat, our most ambitious initiative. OneBeat convenes young, professional musicians from around the globe to develop initiatives that use music as a tool for the betterment of our communities, forming a growing web of interconnected musical change-makers from around the globe. It’s a unique program and methodology because we do not want musicians to come and perform already-written work. Really, we take these artists out of their home contexts—out of their comfort zones—and we actively explore what lies in the uncomfortable spaces, in the awkward silences of new meetings.

NW FSN’s methods “emphasize a mobile approach to recording and producing professional quality music [and is] adaptable to different environments, based on finding the sounds and resonances of each space, drawing upon the talents of musicians in the local scene, and examining issues most relevant to each community.”² It sounds perfectly designed for a global pandemic. How do you feel you were ahead of the curve in “virtual” music making, and what challenges did you—do you still—face in fostering collaboration with the ups and downs of Covid?

K-R S Interesting question. I am not necessarily sure we were “ahead of the curve” in virtual music making because, as you and all other musicians are aware, the virtual space of music creation leaves much to be desired! However, I think where we did have an edge in this was our willingness to be experimental and, as I said before, to embrace awkwardness—to step into the virtual world and treat it less as a platform and more as an entirely new medium. As FSN, we love exploring alternative space for musical performance and presentation and treating the virtual space as a new stage, as a new world to present in; I think this allows us to view it not as a hindrance, but as a new palette for creation. I think another strength is the incredible network of artists we have developed through our programs: how they become part of our team, help us expand our pedagogical approach and give us a much broader perspective on all of this. We can see the world and these challenges from many different angles simultaneously. As for continued challenges, definitely Covid is still with us globally, and it makes the work of global exchange challenging—from basic things like flights and visas to the challenges of an unequal world where some folks have more privilege than others!

NW You chose the idea of mapping as your way of structuring this issue. Can you talk about why that particular concept is important to you, and how you used it to choose the contributors for *SA28*?

K-R S I am really interested in cultivating spaces where musicians can speak to the “why” of music-making more than the “how,” which is where I feel the conversation usually falls—especially non-academic spaces. I am also very interested in ideas of experimentalism and contemporary music that come out of non-western traditions; particularly given the world we work in as Found Sound Nation. I think this space is dominated by western practice and thinking about music, and yet there are a plethora of cultural traditions and practices, not necessarily rooted in western thought, that embrace modernist approaches to music making. I think that very simply brought me to the idea of mapping—when we are looking at things from a global perspective. At the same time mapping and cartography are all about the investigation of the unknown and the representation of that unknown so it can be known, revealed on a surface for others to see—here for eyes and mind in this *SA28*!

MOTHERSHIP PARTITA

Eva Salina Primack

I meant to write today, but instead ended up cleaning my house for hours. I find it impossible to separate any element of my creative life—thinking, performing, imagining—from the consumption of motherhood, all of it enmeshed with the ceaseless demands of the domestic. Cleaning, cooking, cleaning again—only by embracing the ritual, submitting to the urgency and constant necessity, can I find peace in knowing that the house must be in order if my brain is to find the space to think beyond the immediacy or find the words to articulate the beauty of my consumption.

It's a hard thing to come to terms with, that sometimes spending the entire day cleaning your house truly is the best use of your time. The first fifteen years or so of my adult life would surely have me think otherwise. I should be living and breathing my ambition, working tirelessly towards its manifestation. But here I am, putting a pot of beans on the stove as I run out the door to pick up my toddler from preschool, feeling relieved to have crossed off two-thirds of my to-do list, of course not the career-related parts (there is really no career to tend to at the moment), but a few of the self-care items that I had hoped not to neglect one day longer are at least done.

Right now, I only know how to write about my daily life—and barely even that. I write mostly with one hand, often the hand at the end of the arm that my daughter rests her head on while she sleeps. Even as I attempt to work, my body is doing double duty, one arm trying to comfort and create at the same time. This, it turns out, is a big tell about my whole existence since becoming a mother. I'm never just doing one thing, and certainly never doing anything without also thinking about other things needing to be done or what I am neglecting by attending to one particular thing.

I often wish I could observe myself as I fall asleep. In two short (and long) years, I have witnessed my daughter fall asleep hundreds of times, that precise moment when she goes inside herself, still often lying on at least part of my body, almost always still nursing. I leave her nursing until she un-attaches on her own, or I gingerly extricate myself from her grasp when I feel confident she is sleeping deeply. A few months ago, she took to climbing up on my chest and falling asleep there, the full 25 pounds of her sinking in, letting go, head on my heart. As she lies there, I wonder: How loud did my heart sound to her all those months it pumped blood to her, too? How did my voice sound to her? Were those choir rehearsals I led repetitive and boring? Did they lull her to sleep, or does she perhaps know all those melodies? She's an expert at rest and finding her comfort, but I am so constantly fighting tiredness that when it's time to sleep, it's also work—a concerted effort to downshift. And the hardest thing is for my brain to give my body

permission to unwind and for my body to believe my brain and listen and shut down.

The woodpecker has started in on the frame of the door leading to my kitchen. It's sixteen degrees out and the sun is shining. Time to put out the bird seed. The woodpecker and the cardinal provide most of the local color through the winter; the suet feeder is right outside the window by our dining room table. Last winter I jokingly called it Rosie's television, but I realize now that having bird-song near me throughout the day keeps me anchored to the hopefulness that comes with Spring.

These past days, I am thinking about what it means to winterize. Not just how to winterize my house and my garden (though after living in the city with no garden for the last thirteen years, it is certainly a steep learning curve), but also how to create a comforting, nourishing, and stable infrastructure for myself and my family during the months ahead, months filled with much greater uncertainties than how much snow will fall or whether the roof will start leaking. I'm thinking about having enough meat in the freezer, enough books to read, enough small projects to keep me inspired and fed. At the beginning of last year, we moved our entire lives to a small town two hours north of New York City and got Covid two weeks later—then it snowed for six weeks. My partner commutes to the city, and we only had one snow car, so there were many days when I did not step outside the house. I'm from coastal California; I understand very little about winter. I mostly know that when you're walking in Brooklyn, you really should be careful not to step into a curb cut after a big snow unless you want your foot full of freezing slush. It took me a while to internalize that snow is not only cold, it is also *wet*.

Christmas. Tonight, as I drove with my daughter in the back seat to a motel in another state, I was trying to get her psyched up about our change of plans. (Rosie and I had both gotten sick within hours of completing the big schlep to my terminally ill mother-in-law's and therefore had to remove ourselves from the gathering so as not to risk potentially exposing anyone to anything.) We were about three hours from home, but I thought it prudent to stay closer to my partner in case I started to feel worse and needed hands-on help with our kid. As much as I tried to build the excitement of staying in a hotel, Rosie was not having any of it. She could surely feel my discomfort, the sudden redirect of plans—something was not right; we were not where we were supposed to be. She started crying a mantra: *I want to go home, I want home, home, mama, home.* It was the first time I was certain of her ability to differen-

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tiate home and not home, the gravity of hearing your child ask for home and knowing you both know what and where that home is. Leaving the city—our own migration precipitated by our daughter's birth in 2019, then catalyzed by the pandemic that followed soon after—the transition of displacement, even when voluntary, is a slow, shifting, ongoing thing. It's hard to feel settled in an unsettled world with work and commitments and relatives and aging parents all pulling us back to the city and other states and coasts. But for my child to ask for home, and for that home to be our dilapidated but endearing and gorgeous farm (*"full of potential!"*), it settled me. Even in the midst of ongoing anxiety, lots of travel, plans changing as quickly as they are made, my kid knows where her home is. In our family we often try to make light of how complicated our lives have become in order for our kid's life to be simple and carefree. When Rosie cried for home in the backseat, I knew we were succeeding.

Getting to the motel after dark and another scenario you try not to imagine when you think about how motherhood will be: alone with a kid in a seaside town in the off-season, in a motel where nobody wants to be, vulnerable, run down, surrounded by other misfit strangers in some place that feels like no place at all on a day that has arbitrarily been named "family" and "celebration." I sidled past the man chain-smoking in the parking lot who watched me unload the car. Carrying my kid and too many tote bags I said, "Daddy will be here when he is done working" just loud enough, my lie casting some hopeful protective spell around us, but also commenting to myself: *Why isn't daddy here?*

How am I supposed to work? Thinking about working makes me anxious. Work that involves thinking is a different animal entirely. I loved gigs because, in doing them, I left behind my domestic environment and brought some augmented, elevated, curated version of myself to a place so that I could then present it to others. Often times, the hardest part was just figuring out what to wear. (I have never much liked the pageantry that accompanies being a woman who sings.) I loved that I could leave my home in whatever state it was in and know that it would be exactly that way when I returned, the dishes waiting for me in the sink. Now I find myself needing to do the kind of work daily that involves real thinking. I welcome it, but it creates new challenges: thinking beyond the baseline of tiredness and preoccupation, balancing daily chores with big picture worries. And I find myself falling into that trope—I have to clean my house before I can think. Before I was a mother, I looked at very tidy houses and thought, "Well, I guess people have to control the things that they can control." But it wasn't until recently

that I began to embody what it was to live in that feeling. For me to sit and think now—to write, to work on something intangible—is to abandon my daily responsibilities. I am never caught up. On sleep, on laundry, and cleaning. I wake up at 3:30 in the morning, planning my garden in my head. *Where am I supposed to put the tomatoes this year?* I'm planning the food we will eat for the next week. I'm planning my daughter's education. So, how do we make time when there is no time?

Ostensibly, I'm here to write about music and diaspora, particularly the songs of other women who have endured far beyond anything I can imagine. The pandemic has created a spiral in my way of being, constantly turning inward. I plan gigs and imagine forays back into the world of music without my child, away from my home; then I watch as they get cancelled, postponement upon postponement. I want to cancel my gigs before someone else cancels them for me. I want to walk into the grief of another change of plans knowing I didn't give it a chance to surprise me. I'd rather wait than rush. I'd rather maintain some semblance of control and autonomy. I'd rather spend my days with my hands in the dirt, knowing food will grow to feed me and the people I love in an elemental and practical way. You can't cancel a cucumber or a squash plant that grows with such unrestrained vigor and determination.

I do want to write about things outside of me. I want to write in a way that continues the work that I've always done: taking other people's stories and making them my own, coaxing them along from other worlds, villages, and centuries to help them resonate now with the relevance that they deserve, to move them along in the current of time. So, I will tidy the house again and hope that doing so will allow me to see and write beyond myself. Today, for example, I sat in a cafe among bravely unmasked strangers, all of our lives one unfolding calculated risk. Someone else's soundtrack. A conversation next to me in a Central European language that I didn't understand, somehow the perfect chaotic accompaniment to my own cloudy thoughts. Early this morning, my daughter clung to me and wept, growing more and more distressed every time I told her I was going to leave her at school so I could work. Work on myself. Work on her future. She had come home two days ago singing in the back seat: "*Over the mountains and seas, that's where my hearts is longs to be's*," which was clearly not the intended lyric, but it sounded with a purity that was only made more charming and tender by the tiny voice that sang it. I looked it up: "I See The Moon," recorded by The Mariners in 1953. Last night we danced in the kitchen—"I See The Moon" on repeat—holding hands and skipping and laughing to this new old song that I never knew. *Over*



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the mountains, over the sea, Back where my heart is longing to be. Please let the light that shines on me, Shine on the one I love. She was laughing and free and joyous, and for a moment, I was too. This is what songs can do for us. This is why we keep needing songs.

Earlier that day, I had taught a singing class online for 20 remarkable people gathered together from four different countries and seven different states. I spent the first 30 minutes with everyone introducing themselves before all were muted for the remainder. Later, I felt guilty for asking these paying participants to listen to each other talk for so much of the class. But then I tried to shift that guilt to appreciation for the choice I had made: Who are we without our stories? How can we create connections at a time when we feel so isolated and anxious? How can we chip away at the distance we feel and look more intently at each other, even in a small box on a crowded screen? And then we sang—a song from at least the early 1800s, a Bulgarian traditional melody in which the forest tells a band of brigands traveling through that, yes, the forest can provide them the shade and cool water they need, as long as the men respect the forest in return. (literally: It is not respectful that you break my branches.) Old song, different time, but here's the relevance: We must honor that which shelters and protects us. I hope everyone felt it. In singing, I bumped right up against some rusty nails in myself; it had been a few months since I taught songs to anyone. The voice is a muscle, and all my muscles are tired and in need of rest, repair, care. I'm so grateful to be surrounded by nature at this time; isolation is what breaks us, and the beauty outside my door does comfort me. *Over the mountains, over the sea, that's where my heart is longing to be.* I fear that no place can give us what we need right now. So, I try to give my daughter what she needs because I can do that.

Finally, the snow came in earnest this morning, quieting the outside world and carving out the space for me to sit in that quiet and think. This past year of living in the country has taught me about snow, and I was eager this winter for the snow to come, to slow me down and keep me in my house. Living with the seasons in this intimate way has already changed me. Snow isn't something to fight against. Rather, it urges us inside to nurture the home and the hearth and the heart. Warm foods, picnics on a blanket in front of the glowing fire, reflection and digesting of all that has happened. In a few days we will mark one year of living on the land. I am so appreciative of this time to learn how to live *with* the seasons and to better understand the gifts they bring, and what I can tend to when the garden is resting for the winter.

In the fall, my daughter started to fixate on the accordion; namely, watching clips on YouTube of my past performances. While visiting my family in California, I ordered her a small piano accordion of her own—a toy, but a playable one. She is in love. I joke that I’m either the best or worst mom, and we won’t know which for about 25 years. Shortly after our return, I received my own accordion, which had been rendered unplayable early in my pregnancy and only recently sent to the repair shop. I’ve never been an ambitious accordion player. For me, playing accordion was both an act of rebellion and an assertion of autonomy. Though it was never a particularly confident or consistent assertion, few things have felt more rewarding than sitting by the fire playing accordion duets and singing with my daughter—her shouting requests, stopping every so often to observe what my hands were doing, making small adjustments to her own, spaces between her tiny fingers on the keyboard, chords forming. Her favorite songs include the Beach Boys’ “In my Room” (which she plays on her own, as those chords are above my paygrade), The Soul Stirrers’ rendition of “Oh, Mary, Don’t You Weep,” “London Bridge is Falling Down,” Esma Redžepova’s “Mehandžija,” and the Albanian traditional song “Xhyxhyle.” She claps for herself after every song, and when she needs a break from the accordion, she will run over to this funny old Wurlitzer electric organ we have and play there for a while. I took the legs off of it so it could rest on the floor for her, and she crosses her legs and sits at it like some strange plastic avant-harmonium from the 60s. When she tires of that, she’ll gallop—a new skill spontaneously acquired one evening—over to the living room to play the upright for a while. My partner and I have very different musical educations: I learned almost entirely by ear and read just enough music to get by; he was subbing in the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra before he’d turned 20. But neither of us play piano well, and I think it’s an important part of why we get along. Rosie, however, is instantly musical with the piano—nuance, dynamics, finding octaves, resolving all her pieces—and my instinct says to just stay out of her way and give her a few years like this, all intuition and impulse, before any intervention with pedagogy. We will see if we can agree on it as parents. It’s reflexive to want to guide your child, if you sense them heading in a direction, toward scales or intervals or the early, easy songs many of us learned. I, on the other hand, am fascinated to see what she does without interference and with an instrument constantly at her disposal, making her own rules or no rules. When I think back on my early childhood musical development, the enduring question is how piano might have changed my trajectory. Singing is so internal, kinetic, sympathetic to our emotional states and physical health, and it necessitates constant



emotional mediation and psychological work to find a grounded, balanced fluency, as the instrument is one's very body, sounding. Piano has so much math to it—linear and relational—and when I listen to someone play Bach fugues, I immediately consider them to be a person of superior intellect. Would that I could also have worked to develop my brain in that manner. Maybe I need to start playing piano. I'll add it to my list.

I think about how we translate our lived experience into musical expression, about the simultaneous integration and abstraction the process requires. I admit to finding refuge singing in languages I speak only partially or not at all; that abstraction is intrinsic without my needing to work to create it. When I began singing Balkan songs as a child, I understood none of the lyrics precisely and had minimal interest in learning their meanings. I was only interested in falling in love over and over again with melody, and I'm still mostly that way, honestly. With language utterly abstracted and unintelligible to my younger self, I melded the sounds of the words to the melody, fusing them, making them not words but musical syllables. And I loved the vowels, so specific and consistent, that were found in non-English lyrics. With this approach, I could sing about whatever I wanted, more like an instrumentalist might: hidden, protected from the vulnerability of connecting words and emotions so overtly. There are other ways to protect oneself while singing. Many of my teachers, folk singers—who had come up under various communist regimes' somewhat codified approach to folklore—sang songs less as interpretations, and more as faithful renditions of widely-accepted and often canonized versions of folk songs. Already this was a departure from the folk way of singing, but it was safe and dependable and presentable. Often, it demanded a staid, feminine, and contained presentation by the female singers. I never would be able to shrink and adapt myself to that model and, fortunately, tried to only briefly in early adolescence. My hair, my body, my voice was too unruly and noncompliant for the perfect restraint that was expected. It wasn't until meeting with an extraordinary woman, Tzvetanka—who was my primary teacher from age 17 to 25—that I was given permission to be myself within a tradition, Bulgarian songs in particular. A consummate musician and most generous teacher, it was under her tutelage that I was able to rediscover my love for Bulgarian traditional songs and then learn to make them my own, something no teacher had ever asked of me before. That blessing from her tasked me with taking ownership of my expression within the tradition. It was a homecoming, and it answered so many previously unresolvable questions I had been carrying in me.

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But now I turn to the songs I sing. They are, by the very act of my singing them, songs in diaspora, having left their countries, traditions, singers of origin, and made their way to my body where they sound and resound in their adoptive homeland. These songs have traveled far away from their singers on 8-tracks; unwieldy, temperamental resin 78s or the beloved vinyl that followed; and, later, cassettes. (Really, some of my best music is still on homemade cassettes that I was given as a child.) In my adolescence, the songs and I found each other through painstakingly slow and inefficient, but surprising, means: Napster, in particular. I'd type in any Albanian or Romani word I knew, select all results, leave my computer on and downloading all night long, and then hope to find one or two good songs out of every 100 files. That was an odd migration. With the advent of YouTube, my whole world exploded as everyone's cassette collection started to appear as mp4s—incredible, personal archives of Roma songs recorded in the 70s through the late 90s. Here was a rabbit hole without end. And then, a few years later, all the great, centralized recording companies from former Yugoslavia—collections created in a complicated but musically more inclusive era—began to digitize their catalogs, so not only would I have access to many more songs and artists, but I could also start to understand who did the arranging and who took that amazing clarinet solo and who *was* that extraordinary violinist. The songs weren't just some treasure found while searching at a flea market or the internet, sifting meticulously through terrible pop music for the one vintage gem, but now started to have context and connection.

That context and connection slowly blended, over years, with my own to move into something beyond rendition. While learning a handful of her songs for a recording project a few years back, I learned about Vida Pavlović's life. At the time my own life was a bit at loose ends in ways that slightly resembled hers (though hers was arguably much more tragic: Vida was a beloved Serbian Roma singer with a life full of sadness, and she died of alcoholism before her 70th birthday.) When it came time to record those songs, my body stopped me; my voice would not cooperate. I became ill. We were too close. It was too tangible, too sad, and I was so scared that, in singing them, our lives would start to match each other's in the overwhelming melancholy. This, I felt, was the other end of the spectrum from what I'd felt as a young teen. Then, I'd been fighting against how unnatural the disconnected song execution approach felt. Now, my life was being consumed by the songs and the story of the singer and beginning to emulate them. I had to stop myself in my own tracks and work on my life for a few months. Only then could I revisit the repertoire.

So, we want to be able to relate to the old songs we sing. And sometimes this is hard. Our lives are so distant from the time and place and way of life of those who sang them first—sometimes thankfully so, when the subjects are too heavy to bear. I find, though, that the more I live, the more I have to assimilate into my engagement with any given song. And knowing this makes me ever more thankful to be working in traditional music, where one does not age out but rather grows in: into oneself, into the melody, into the words, into what lies beneath in the secret story that is told through the song. With this, I try to console myself in these periods of upheaval—of cancellations and disruptions and the total consumption of motherhood—by telling myself: The songs will be waiting on the other side, and I will have more to bring to them when we get there.

MY SHAKUHACHI JOURNEY

Shabaka Hutchings

I'll tell you about my relationship to the shakuhachi, though if we consider everything to be reflected within everything else (as above so below), then I'm actually just telling you about my relationship with my "self." This ancient instrument is a part of Japan's cultural heritage and was originally used by Buddhist monks as a meditation tool. I don't know much about Zen; I'm guided by my intuited perception of "the state." The study of contextual particularities can only serve to activate a self-reflective mode of thought within me that I generally deem to be contrary to my desired aim to ascend past the body's restraints and the trappings of the mind using sound. I do not prescribe to the notion that life's unilateral purpose is to maximize efficiency within every conceivable process. We are all in our specific states of trance and becoming—tradition as the noose wrapped around the neck of every believer.

My journey began in Swaziland, where I acquired my first flute. A disheveled-looking guy stood before me on the street after he had been chased out of a shopping mall. He had a bag full of small wooden flutes which he'd been unsuccessfully trying to sell inside. I bought one from him, struggled to produce a sound, and felt the blossoming of a private obsession that would precede my relationship with the shakuhachi. I was fixated on the notion that my breath contained the power to animate this object, which looked like a piece of tree bark with some holes rough-cut into it.

"Primitiveness" signifies the first, the fundamental, the essential manifestation. Its presence illuminates ways of relating to the natural world and ourselves that we have largely forgotten and must strive to learn from. This was my first encounter with a primitive flute. With typical human-centered logic, I assumed that, in the union between person and plant, the tree is "played." What if the tree affects our own vibrational field in a manner which is both subtle and powerful, causing us to become tuned to nature?

Many years later at a shakuhachi store in Tokyo, I engaged in an awkward standoff with the store assistant as she tried to sell me a student-level instrument. Owing to the specific craftsmanship that goes into the making of each instrument professional horns are seldom given to beginners, only to students who have shown that they are actually on the path of study. What is being sold is the time and dedicated focus of an individual who is committed to bringing a specific piece of raw cane into its most resonant form. To respect the sound is to respect both the plant itself and the craftsperson who shaped it. I understood the assistant's hesitance yet was resilient in the knowledge that it was no match for my stubbornness. I explained my seriousness in pursuing study of the instrument and mentioned that I would be able to have a lesson with Clive Bell if there were elements of the technique that I needed specific guid-

ance on. From that point everything changed. Clive Bell is the father of Betamax, who plays the drums in one of my groups—The Comet is Coming. Having studied in Japan, and being widely respected for his skill and experimentalism, Clive is regarded as one of the foremost western exponents of the shakuhachi. At the mention of his name, the dynamic shifted: She knew Clive, and he'd been into the shop many times. She commented on how exceptional his playing was, then proceeded to get me an instrument from the back cupboard that she said would be appropriate.

I could hardly make a sound. I struggled out some squeaks and forced tones inside the shop, but I was denied a consistent sound on demand. The shakuhachi requires the performer to blow a tiny airstream across the carved mouthpiece at the very tip of a bored-out piece of bamboo which, in turn, resonates. There is no reed mechanism to jump start the process such as with the clarinet or sax. I was truly a beginner student, but I was without the self-doubt that often plagues beginners and possessed an analytical mind as to how my body would have to adapt to play this instrument. I felt an obligation to go beyond the stereotype assumed initially by the store assistant. I had to practice diligently to learn this foreign body.

The instrument's surface-level simplicity is deceptive, as it necessitates the use of our own body as technology. There are four front holes and one at the back. These make a minor pentatonic scale and can be played two octaves (three in the hands of masters). All other note choices and timbral variations happen as a result of subtle adjustments to the lip/head position, airflow direction, air-pressure manipulation, and by half-covering the holes. On western instruments, we provide each chromatic tone an equal temperament which results in us manipulating the emerging sonics less with our own body and more by relying on mechanized technologies to aid the pursuit of (a misguided one, some would say!) tonal equality.

And so it began. I practiced the flute daily. I assessed what it meant to "do practice," resisting pre-existing ideas of what I thought was appropriate for me to work on toward my development. I simply spent time with the instrument within an ultra-conscious mode of awareness. I prepared myself to feel and follow whatever instrumental direction felt necessary and urgent in the moment. Eventually, I stopped considering my time spent with the flute in terms of minutes and hours. My relationship with it progressed to the point where chunks of focused playing were incorporated throughout my day. This was a departure from my usual practice routine whereby the boundaries governing when I was and wasn't practicing were strict and delineated. I thought a lot about breath control. This is

a really strange concept when unpacked: To control something assumes a measure of dominance over it, the ability to maneuver the "thing" controlled to one's own advantage. The breath was my own, though, not an external force. This meant that self-control had to be at the heart of breath control. Self-control is about will power, and this is at the crux of spiritual energy—the power to orient one's will towards intentions and see them manifest.

I breathe deeply—trying to "feel" my diaphragm—as I'd been told to do in innumerable classical clarinet lessons and master-classes. Nothing emerges from the instrument, only the sound of air entering what seems to be an infinitely large hole at the front of the stick. The more I blow, the less I seem to be able to create a sound. The frustration of not being able to express myself was deafening. Whenever I thought of breath control, a tension would form in my diaphragm as I endeavored to steady the flow of air from within my depths. I wondered if it was possible to provide my flow of air with forward momentum without the seemingly inherent tension in my blowing technique.

I would fill my lungs with air completely and make sure my lips are sealed with only the tiniest opening allowed at the tip for the air to pass through. Imagining myself spitting out a single grain of rice helps in conceptualizing the smallness of the distance between the lips. The key with this instrument is internalizing the fact that more force doesn't equal more resulting sound; it's a focused airstream that does, and a consistency of pressure. To create this small airstream, the lips must be pinned back as if making a wide smile while the very tip of the lips must remain loose and sensitive. It's a fine line to thread between the tension inherent in pulling your lips back to create the right embouchure for the sound and the relaxation required for both the material to resonate fully and to be able to position the airstream with flexibility. The breath outward must be infused with intentionality from its initial conception until its finale. Whether the body can physically maintain itself within this position of muscular uprightness for long, however, is another matter. The physical result of pinning one's lips back in the manner necessary to create the sound is muscular exhaustion. This can only be remedied by practicing for hours until to the point where muscles are formed which can facilitate the embouchure relaxing into its correct position with a relaxed uprightness. Without adequate muscular development, the mouth has to exert undue force to maintain its posture as air flows through it in a pressurized stream.

There is an area of my core technique that has remained unresolved since my days of playing bass drum in my high school's "tuk" band—how my body responds to moments of pressurized in-

tensity. Tuk is the traditional music of Barbados, typically played on double-headed bass drum, snare drum, flute, and triangle. The playing of African drums was banned on the island in the late-1600s because of plantation owners' fears that the slaves could communicate using drum language. As a result, slaves transmitted fundamental African accentuations, articulations, and linguistic nuance into the music of the British fife and drum corps. This allowed the slave communities to play and hear the essence of "their music" within the shadows of the empire's cultural assault. I am given life and inspiration from the attitude of the early musicians who were resigned to playing the instruments of a foreign culture and infused it with what they intuited as the essence of African principles, the basis of the society's cultural food. While playing the interlocking drum hits, I'd become overwhelmed with a depth of feeling that caused my body to lose its sensitivity of touch on the drum. I would then tense up while exerting more energy to add what I (in my youthful folly) thought was more vibe to compensate for my loss of control. In a similar way, if the flute is blown with a raw, unfocused force, more sound isn't necessarily generated. The instrument reveals its tonal complexity with the forces of energy, precision, and stillness, all working together to maintain a compact airstream that invigorates the bamboo into life. I remember a quote from a 90s American action film that's stayed with me throughout the years and seems applicable to the shakuhachi's demands: "The hotter the situation, the cooler the response."

My relationship with breathing has become softer after having incorporated practice of the shakuhachi into my daily routine over the past two years. It has become oriented more towards an awareness of the subtle shifts and nuances that enliven the breathing process. On my reed-based instruments, the function of the breath is to activate a vibrating reed which in turn causes the instrument to resonate. This meant that I formed a technical habit of expending a lot of force towards the reed—more than was actually necessary to produce either the sound I wanted or my desired dynamic. I would then squeeze my body—starting with my lips, but including the shoulders, wrists, and general frame—to control the resulting sound, molding it into something I found pleasurable. With this excess force came a bodily tension that permeated the depths of my playing. Tension describes what occurs when the body wants to expend energy in response to a strain but can find no appropriate outlet, so the energy is directed inward. (Impotence in the ability to affect the result of a course of events is one of the primary causes of tension in my experience.)

By deeply listening to what the instrument was sounding, and actively allowing my body to become aware of itself, I relaxed.

The specifics of how my body adapted while listening happened in a dimension residing outside my capacity to articulate intellectually. In any case, if I tried to tell myself just what to adjust (as if any action can ever really be replicated within a changing body) then the actions I undertake are too gross, too literal. The body as a technology operates in a micro-perceptive space where listening and intuitive awareness of what needs to be adjusted in service of the sound's fullest resonant capacity is the only real guide. Practically, this meant me sitting for hours and hours playing long, sustained tones.

All the master instrumentalists I've had close proximity to swear by the practice of playing long notes every day. I've always known about its benefits, yet up until learning the shakuhachi, I never had the sustained focus to embark on a rigorous practice of this method because I found it boring. Faced with an instrument that needed to be addressed from a foundational technical level upwards (or around, if we strive to see in circularity), I found solace in not playing music but engaging in this technical work that I had previously disregarded. When I was a teenager, I always designated a chunk of my time to HIM practice (Horn In Mouth). This was a zone that also wasn't about music; it was about time spent with the instrument in my mouth thinking about what my body was doing while I played (literally) anything. Back then, I often applied myself to scales and patterns over hip-hop and basement tunes in the HIM time, but on the shakuhachi, long, sustained tones seem to be the most appropriate.

For years, I've been trying and failing at an exercise that Steve Lacy describes in one of his interviews: He said that you must play a single note for three hours. For the first hour, there is an awareness of the exercise at hand and a dedication in completing it. The second hour brings with it boredom and the desire to give up. Past this point, however, into the third hour, the mind starts to work inwards toward the essence of its perception of the sound. At this point, it's possible to hear the depth and intricacy of the harmonics that form the foundation of each tone the saxophone produces. This exercise is about sustaining consistent awareness of the sound produced at the expense of any other mental forays. I would always start with the best intentions but would become unfocused; my mind would briefly indulge some instrumental tangent, and within 20 minutes, I'd have forgotten my original exercise and be back playing "music."

Now, I understand that the point of the exercise is to work at increasing the mind's capacity to focus on a single element over a sustained time. This only works if the instrument's role is meditative as opposed to performative. The meditative is concerned

with internal procedures whereas performance necessitates the sharing of an internal procedure with an audience. Those lines get blurred, though, since I've found that performance elevates itself from a mere commercial exchange of skill resources for money when the conditions facilitate moments of the meditative detachment. This is what I search for, these rare moments when I'm able to transcend the profane reality of performance in public by focusing on the communal sound created by musicians I trust.

Learning the shakuhachi took me back to a point of musical infancy, and in doing so, I had the absolute pleasure of learning from scratch. It's easy for me to forget the joy I felt when practicing the clarinet as a nine-year-old kid. I would get home from school, and the possibilities of what I could "try" to do on the instrument were endless. As a professional, I still have moments where I achieve this level of inquisitive focus, but I'm much more consciously aware of the factors to be considered in transitioning myself into this state. Actually, there's only one big factor to be considered: You must stop thinking about what is happening yet proceed with focus and energy. Practice must be then considered accordingly to ensure the desired orientation is ingrained and adhered to, even within the grips of self-reflexiveness. As Charlie Parker (is supposed to have) said, "You've got to learn your instrument. Then, you practice, practice, practice. And then, when you finally get up there on the bandstand, forget all that and just wail." I use the shakuhachi as a tool in this regard; its study has become my gateway to what appears to be a limitless dimension of tonal possibility.

This multi-dimension of tonal possibility exists only if you intentionally listen for, and travel toward, it. There is, after all, still a surface to all that contains depth. To access this space, I was forced to stop thinking in musical terms. I just played one sustained note at a time and tried to keep my focus on the singular point of contact where my breath intersected the tip of the mouthpiece. I started to see practice as more than simply a means of learning to articulate myself within a particular melodic or rhythmic tradition. I was trying to narrow my point of focus inward—away from an awareness of the sound created and toward an awareness of the material vibrating underneath my fingers, and further inward toward an awareness of the source of the breath and each point in its journey outward: leaving the lips and contacting the resonating stick. This is where I kept my focus. My temptation was to think about how it sounded or what possibilities were at my disposal in terms of variation; I endeavored to forget all of this. Those are the considerations of someone who is trying to play music, and what I was trying to do was definitely not that! I simply tried to keep all my attention on the sound of the sustained tones and shepherd them

toward their most resonant manifestations. This ritual focusing is the entry point of the multi-dimension where sound is infused with heightened poetic meaning. Artists must continually search for access to this space, embody the experience within a ritualistic framework, and apply the vision reaped from its spiritual vista to everyday life as an alternate lens with which to regard reality's processes. We must perceive reality as poetically and symbolically as possible. This aids us in understanding deeper spheres of meaning governing our actions and interactions.

I have mainly been practicing outdoors in parks around London and in resonant spaces of various descriptions that I've come across during my wanderings throughout the city. As a result, I've been able to sit in an atmosphere of quiet, reflective practice within the soundscape of bird life. This has broadened my dimensional awareness of their presence and the contour of their language. At times, the bird cries are so loud and insistent that I can't imagine, as someone who proclaims to be interested in sound, how I could have taken for granted this source of constant inventiveness operating right before my ears. I sit for hours at a time listening to the birds, trying not to understand or draw any precise meaning from what was happening. I feel myself changing, the assumed roles of subject and object being reversed. I no longer dominate the space with ideas and grand pretense. The birdsong acted upon me, as does the stick.

Previous to my immersion into the world of birds, they were still all around me, proclaiming their songs loud and free. However, because I didn't "tell myself" to listen, I didn't hear them. Playing the shakuhachi in public opened me to a dimension in which birdsong was an insistent presence in my experience of the city. There is a dimension of racism in society which is invisible to the skeptical. This is the irony of those who try not to "make everything about race" or those who "don't see race." They become deaf to a reality in which a past shaped upon white-supremacist logic has molded a present characterized by racism and racist violence that is there if you listen for it and are receptive to the signs of its existence.

One of my most profound lessons was given to me while in Lagos chatting to a saxophonist who was playing in the bar of my hotel. We were talking about how musical vocabulary is learned; at the time I was deeply engrossed in a book on intervallic patterns and fascinated about how ingestion of the new shapes and tonal relations contained within would influence what I decide to play in spontaneous moments of creation. At some point in my appraisal of the book, he looked at me scornfully and said, "You know, all you need to do to learn this language is listen to someone speak it. Listen deeply and listen often." My immediate response was defen-

siveness; I had more freedom and agency if I “knew” what I was doing, and knowing—at that stage of my life—was connected to being able to understand theoretically how various constituent parts of music worked together. Many years later, the truth in his words would haunt my dreams of shakuhachi. There are areas of knowledge which can only be accessed through direct contact with the thing itself. No amount of books, lessons, ideas, or ideals can serve as a substitute.

I’m learning the shakuhachi for myself. I feel no pressure to fulfill obligations demanded of me by “the tradition” in terms of path of study. I believe that the instrument itself and my intuition is enough to guide me towards a place where I can disappear into the sound and be healed. There is a human impulse that favors mechanization, which demands that if something is shown to effectively work that for the sake of efficiency, it must be analyzed, taught, and repeated. I prefer to fall over repeatedly in the hope that at some stage, in picking myself from the ground, I will secure a footing more stable than where I began.

A NATION OF ENABLERS

Poetra Asantewa

There isn't a corner or tuft of earth in Ghana that doesn't contain music: on farms; in long Monday morning queues and rusty old cars; at the back of a classroom; the reception of a hotel; both ends of an emergency ward. Even the unlikeliest places have music. If you've ever been to a public toilet in Accra, you'll know it's only for people who had no other option, who chose the lesser shame of the stench of putrefaction over soiling their pants. Yet still, there's a radio small enough to sit in your palm tucked into the neck of a window and blasting music for the incredibly long—and fast—ten seconds you spend inside.

There's music everywhere, but somehow the music industry in Ghana remains a turbid assemblage. Some say it's a wonky structure upheld by the spidery legs of patriarchy—appeasing to, and sustaining, male sensibilities. Some say thriving within it is entirely based on luck. Hard work and talent? Merely garnish. Some say it's a movement, a community, a defiance even—anything but an industry. Others say it's nonexistent, and to call it an industry is to give it too much credit. And yet, Ghana continues to pioneer, lead, shape-shift, sustain, manipulate, and reinvent sound. What, then, keeps the music going?

To move your entire body like a well-coordinated choir is an art:

feet conforming to the beat per minute,
hands in sync with a swaying torso,
shoulders inching backwards—dramatically pushing the
chest forwards and backwards,
waist responding to the rhythm in enviable fashion
and a face with a mean expression that both agrees with
the beat
and coordinates with the body in motion.

To dance well—to know how to dance in a club or bar or house party—is a thing of the ordinary. You rarely get applause or a pat on the back; in truth, you are merely blending into the crowd. The only time you get singled out is if you're a bad dancer or an exceptional one.

It was a few months from the pandemic that nobody knew was on its way. I had made the decision to enjoy my last summer in Chicago instead of going to Accra. I had missed the ordinary. I had missed dancing; I danced in my apartment all the time, but I missed the sweaty congregation of people in an open bar. I missed the random communion of bodies inspired by a song we all loved. I missed going to Republic bar with my friends, ordering a plate of yam chips and chicken wings, and stopping in the middle of chugging a mug of *Kokroko* to dance because Pappy Kojo's "Balance" came on. Or

driving to Labadi beach after a long day at work, comforting our tired selves with sticks of kebab and a bottle of coke, playing “never have I” and dancing to lovers rock and hiplife songs. I missed dancing with people.

And so, somewhere in July, when Gina suggested we sign up for a dance class, I immediately said yes. But when she mentioned she was going to join the ballet class, I paused. As far as I understood, ballet was not for adults. At least not a dance you start learning as an adult. Plus Gina’s slender body was more suited to the ballerinas I had seen in the media, whereas after fifteen minutes of yoga, I was ready to roll up my mat. According to the dance studio’s website, ballet was for everyone. There were beginner, intermediate, and advanced classes. Anyone could join the beginner ballet class, regardless of age or size. There was also a contemporary movement class, which sounded like a viable option for me, as I thought it would make room for hip-hop, contemporary music, and maybe even afrobeats. But one look at them during a dance session—their interpretation of free form and its translation to sudden arm jolts and elbow air jabs—and I could feel the disapproving stare of my ancestors penetrating the back of my head. And that’s how I became the newest ballet student.

On the first day of class, after five minutes of warm-up exercises, our first lesson began. After a brief history of ballet, the instructor informed us that she was going to teach us how to *plié* in the first position. I remember her demonstration and thinking, “That looks easy. I can do that.” Reader, I could not do it. I bent forward and failed miserably on my first try. It looked simple, but there were a lot of things to be mindful of: your toes have to be out to the side with your heels touching; you move up and down with your spine straight and your knees moving sideways, directly to the center of your foot—not backwards, not forwards. Soon we were doing *demi-pliés*, *grand pliés*, *degagé*, *port de bras*, *rond de jambes*, *adagio*, *penché*. I could hear her instructions even when I wasn’t in class: “Do not droop your arms. You want that nice, rounded shape of the shoulder going down the back. Extend your arm. Let your feet brush the floor. Make sure your shoulders stay square.” It was both simple and hard but very rewarding when I got it right, and I got it wrong a lot of times before getting right. Every other week, I ached somewhere new. I pulled a muscle, overstretched my calves, and wrenched my knee. Each time, I would go home, practice some more, and wait for the pain to disappear. And it always did. That is, until I noticed a pain in my right knee that had overstayed its welcome. I ignored it at first—mainly because it was barely noticeable, only present when I tried to squat or extend my knee. But it persisted, and, gradually, I couldn’t move my knee as freely as I used

to because of the debilitating pain. So finally, I dragged myself to the hospital. After some scans, a misdiagnosis, and two consultations, I found out that I had knee-cartilage damage.

In a properly-structured food industry, there exists lands to be used for farming, people with expertise to cultivate these lands at both small and large scale, resources to ensure that the raw produce is of good quality, and strategically placed markets that people can access. There are tools to transport produce from the farms to the markets, and there are people who market the individual product in and outside of the marketplace. And then there are the consumers who, by virtue of these systems being in place, can pick out the ingredients they need in order to cook a great meal for their individual consumption, for a family, for an event, or for communal use. There’s an existing network that ensures that everybody within it is fruitful. In places where a structure like this does not exist—where there is no easy access to lands, to farms, to fertilizer, to markets, to produce, and to ready-to-eat meals—the people have to find different ways of getting what they want and need.

Music-making in Accra is not a solitary act. A handful of people come together to make a three-minute song. There are different ways in which to arrive at a well-cooked song. One of the ways I have heard of and seen is what we’re going to call the *mixed soup*. There’s the lyricist who writes the words of the song; the melodist who composes a tonal pattern with the words written by the lyricist; and the song architect who uses both the lyricist and melodist’s work to structure the song into a full block. Sometimes one person takes on more than one role, and sometimes two or more people take on one role. What exists to ensure that the tools, resources, and people who need to come together to make this happen can do so?

Take my song, *Mother*, for instance. *Mother* is a phone call between a worrying mother and her far-away daughter as she tries to convince the mother that she’s taking care of herself, working hard to make her proud and be half the woman she is. I originally wrote it in English, but because it was an ode/love letter to my mother, I wanted it to be in a language that felt closer to her heart, which was *Kyerepon*, her mother tongue. And since I could barely speak *Kyerepon*, I had someone translate it. Once it was translated, I worked on a melody for the words. I didn’t know yet how I wanted the production to sound, but I knew I wanted it to be soft enough to take up space in the generational gap lying between mothers and daughters—not too pop, not too folk. And I felt like that was something I could work through with NiiQuaye.

NiiQuaye is a multi-instrumentalist, producer, and founder of the Musical Lunatic band. I met him at Ehalakasa (a bi-monthly

poetry and music show) somewhere around 2012. I forget who introduced us, but I remember that, at some point in time, we were paired together for an event, and from then on, we performed at several small shows—him playing the guitar and me singing or performing poetry. When we met for my song, Nii had me sing the melody a couple of times. After every round, he would pull out his guitar or sit behind the piano. After an hour of pitch changes and melody tweaks, we had a rough draft. In the next couple of days, he emailed a polished production of our session. The melody had been perfected, the structure of the song had slightly changed, and the third line of the first verse was now the second line. The song began with a gentle, hollow beat, similar to the sound of the metallic thumb-ring used in Presbyterian singing bands followed by the soft shake of an *akasai*, or what you would call a rattle or maraca, and then the ever faithful guitar string twanged through. I knew then that it was going to be one of my best songs. I spent a little over an hour in the studio with Qube, who recorded my vocals until we had gotten a perfect take and then mixed and mastered the track. *Mother* was a complete three-minute-nine-second beauty that was going to cement itself into my debut album.

It was a song that was both achingly sad and joyous. It contained a story that needed a visual retelling to propel its message and expand its reach. I wanted a visual storytelling that wasn't a replication of the cliché mother-and-child imagery. I wanted it to exhibit the touching and confusing and comforting feelings that were often present in mother-daughter relationships in a way that causes the roles to reverse without either party realizing it. So, I sent the lyrics and a draft of the song to Desouza, whom I had met via the now defunct Vision Inspired Music label. Desouza is a multimedia creative whose expertise spreads over film, photography, design, and music. That's the thing about Accra: You have to be an expert in more than one thing to really thrive. And that's the thing about making music in Accra: It requires an intersection of multiple disciplines to blossom, a bowl of fruits that didn't necessarily converge from the same soil, but their gathering still results in an excellent meal.

The knee is the largest joint of the body. A massive percentage of your body weight goes through the knee when you're walking. Our knees are extraordinary structures to be able to cope with this enormous strain. Bones, cartilage, ligaments, and tendons work together to form your knee joint and allow you to bend your leg. Cartilage is a connective, rubbery tissue that acts as a cushion between the bones of joints and supports our weight when we bend, run, or stretch. Cartilage articulates the knee bone which enables movement like walking, running, bending, jumping, etc. In forcefully wrenching

my knee during a ballet lesson, I had damaged my cartilage, which had affected my movement and limited the range of movement in my knee. Unlike other types of tissue, cartilage does not have a blood supply. Because of this, damaged cartilage takes much longer to heal compared with other tissues that are supplied by blood.

The film for *Mother* tells the warped story of daughter and mother, except the mother is played by the daughter and vice versa. Of chores and lessons. Of rebuke and love. Of the reality of being grown enough to leave home and the longing that comes with it. Under the comments section of *Mother* on YouTube, someone has left this: "This is a beautiful collection of art: voice, language, instrumentals, video concept." And it is a collection of art. A collection of disciplines from inception to completion: writer, translator, composer, singer, instrumentalist, producer, sound engineer, cinematographer, videographer, designer. Ten disciplines to create a three-minute-nine-second song.

*To tell a singular tale of m-o-v-e-m-e-n-t is an expansive
network of links
In which moving parts only mean as much as the fuel that
binds them together
For body to jump,
knee must curve
For knee to bend,
bone must shift forward
For bone to glide,
cartilage has to be a gateway
And who maintains the gateway if not the network?
After all sound is a continent,
and music is the story of how all continents
are built out of parts in conjunction
Today Africa sounds like a streaming channel
but its legs are made of old radio parts
To be honest, this is a nation of enablers
what the thigh feels the mouth professes,
what the leg gives the hand receives
but because the face beholds beauty
it is often mistaken to be the sole worker
but we know
that
this city sees another day
because it's held together by moving parts*

The first year of the Black Girls Glow sound residency brought together a gathering of six women with different talents and back-

ground. (Black Girls Glow is a non-profit organization I founded in 2017 with the aim of fostering collaboration among women artists and exploring ways in which art can build community.)

Adomaa, with her silky voice and charming personality, had gained a following by creatively mashing up popular Ghanaian songs from different genres: dancehall, gospel, and highlife. Coming from a musical family, together with a creative set of friends—some musicians, a mix of experts and amateurs in production, composition, video, directing and set design—she managed to create the Vision Inspired Music label that existed both as a collective of creatives as well as a management and support system for individual artists.

Cina Soul was distinguishing herself and quickly cementing herself as one of the people's favorites by performing covers of pop songs fused with her Ga heritage; she rewrote and sang the songs like they were originally written by a young woman who had been born and raised on the streets of Jamestown. Barefoot, playing in the streets and against the handwritten, poster-clad, paint-peeling-off walls, and eating fish that was caught a mere 400 meters away.

Dzyadzorm was well known in the poetry community as the woman who carried emotion in her voice. She could turn a bored listener to a dedicated fanatic with her words and voice.

Mz Fu's primary craft was rap, and she had made a name for herself with her lyricism. But what really stood out about her was how she employed different voices—and dare I say personalities—in her rap to tell a story.

There were a lot of things to love about Ria Boss: There were very few female vocalists with deep voices, and the quality of her voice was a happy memory to dwell in. But it was her songwriting, song subjects, and the way her stage presence pulled you in and gave you space to belong, that made her stand out.

And then there was me, whose EP, *Motherfuckitude*, had gone viral; who was bent on making a name for herself regardless of how little Ghanaians cared about spoken word; who insisted on not boxing herself in. *Motherfuckitude* represented the refusal to be bogged down by my inadequacies or lack: an audacity to thrive in spite of.

The six of us creating together was phenomenal, but I recognized there was a lack of representation for women in music production. So as part of the residency, I called on Gafacci's help to run a production workshop for the women. Gafacci (pronounced Gafatchi) is a Ghanaian electronic producer who pioneered asokpor music. Asokpor is a reimagining of electronic music through the traditional Ga lens. What was particularly intriguing about Gafacci's sound to me was how he used the body as an integral part

of creating his beats. He made sounds with his mouth and fused it into his production—everyday sounds that you would typically hear in conversation with someone from Labadi or Accra: the echo produced when your tongue hits the roof of your mouth when expressing shock, for example, or the mush sound your mouth makes when the insides of your cheeks smooch each other. His methodology of being heavily inspired by his culture, traditions, and interactions seeped into his teaching. I remember sitting in the workshop and watching him break down the lesson into basic steps, proceed to walk us through each step, and finally insist that we carry our everyday interactions into our beat making. Our conversations, laughter, language, mannerisms, even our anger—how different will our sound be if we pick inspiration right from our backyard?

It wasn't until my knee injury that I realized and appreciated how much work my knee was performing, and the quality of that performance. For a joint to be fully functional, everything within it has a part to play. We may not see it in motion—or at all—but underneath it, the tendons, cartilage, and ligaments are all crucial to its success. It is only when we know and acknowledge these that we are able to tell if they're working as they should, or if they're working at all.

The practice of multiplicity and intersection in disciplines is integral to the music community in Ghana. It's what makes things possible. It's how things get done. The decision of a group of artists to come together and create Ehalakas—a space for singers, poets, and dancers to convene—ensured that there was room for me to practice my craft. It ensured that there were different musical and sound artists to collaborate with, both in the present and the future. It ensured that I met NiiQuaye. The decision of young amateurs to come together and create a collective of artists ensured that I was introduced to other women artists in an environment that rarely produces them. It ensured that I met artists from different fields like Desouza. The creation of outdoor events and street festivals that required sound engineering and acoustics for a local audience ensured that I met Qube. And many others.

When next they ask how this music was made
tell them it was fleshed from the mouth of a hundred-
bodied head

A toothy grin and a slight limp raised to the market folks
as testament of a war no one knew was being fought
Struggle nestled itself in a hungry throat
and made it sing of plenty

MPUMELELO A STORY OF GRIEF AND SOUND HEALING

Umlilo (Kwaai Diva)

In the past few years, I've heard a lot of people say: "You don't ever get over grief; you just get better at dealing with it." This is one of the few things that have stayed with me during this pandemic and when overcoming my own grief, mostly from losing the quintessential figure in my entire life: my mother, Nompumelelo. Nompumelelo is the Xhosa feminine version of Mpumelelo, which means success. My grandparents, like any parents, wished their daughter to be a success one day. In the Johannesburg East, South Africa of the late 1950s, this was the hope and dream of many Black migrants coming to the city for opportunities during a harsh apartheid system. In many ways, that journey is what got me here today—a Black trans-femme in Africa writing and producing electronic songs about the different stages of grief in my native tongues mixed with English. This is a story about how a musical project about grief has helped redefine my experience of the world through sound healing. It has accelerated the death of the old me and the regeneration of a new version of myself.

No one can deny that the pandemic, with its constant surprises, reveals, and outfit changes like a true drag queen, has really impacted our inner psyche in a big way. Spending time by myself revealed so many different layers that I didn't know existed before. I finally came to terms with my Black trans-feminine artist existence in South Africa, a country of extreme paradoxes. There is nothing I can do to change my origin story; it's happened. It's tough to plan for the future too much in this pandemic because things change rapidly, so the only moment that matters is the present. This is what has helped me unpack and change my approach to making music especially when it came to making my debut album, *Mpumi*.

Mpumi started during the toughest year of my life: 2019. Some of the songs were written in different cities around the world during a very turbulent period when I was juggling my career and my family in crisis. The biggest relief was that everything was happening in real time, and I had no time to process my mom getting sick, losing her after a long illness, and then my uncle (her younger brother) passing away a month later. The realization that I had lost six family members in a space of five years didn't hit me until the pandemic—after losing even more loved ones. In the moment of stillness amongst the chaos, death quickly forced me to face my own fears, loss, and grief. It catapulted me into a deep nostalgic dream-world of sounds and visions beyond space and time. I wanted to make an album about grief through the lens of an Afro-queer intergalactic diva. With the help of my collaborators—Akrobat, Jumpin Back Slash, and Leon Erasmus—we began to shape this unique sound through an investigation into my past traumas. The most im-

portant part of the process for me was to go back in time and re-discover songs I grew up with—songs that connected me with my loved ones—and sound frequencies that brought me relief.

As a kid, I always had an overactive imagination; it becomes a great source of strength when you're a queer kid in a small town in Johannesburg. Sound, fashion, music videos, films, and TV shows fueled my escapism and showed me what could be possible from a young age. I was in a musical movie, *Sarafina*, at four years old, and being surrounded by iconic artists like Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekela, Brenda Fassie, and Whoopi Goldberg at such a young age made me fall in love with music, film, dance, and art. Fast-forward three decades to the making of *Mpumi*, and I had to adopt the same child-like curiosity, which was scary.

The aim was to try and overcome an overwhelming sense of pain and heartache through sound and writing. I had immense writer's block at times, and some ideas would pour out in the written word or through melodies, but I was too depressed to catch all of them. I like to play with different instruments: electronic toys, plugins, and anything that makes an interesting sound. During lockdown, I could give myself time to flesh out an idea as it happened. When a memory came, I wrote it down, sang its melody, and archived it in a sound bank. Before the pandemic, all I could do was record on my phone because life was busy back then. This time around I could immediately record and play in my home studio—even at three in the morning—and this is how many of the ideas began to blossom. The minute a song would come and go, I felt a great sense of relief, which helped to keep the process moving.

For this essay, I decided to put some of the songs through a frequency-analyzer plugin to see what kind of vibrations each song was emitting and unpack a few of the songs, their origins, and the emotional state of being that inspired them. These are songs of my childhood journey, my internal struggle with my gender/sexuality, my community, my family's grief, and the death of my former self and my loved ones. These are also songs about rewriting herstory, protest, culture, regeneration, and the rediscovery of one's roots told through an Afrofuturistic lens. The reason I gravitated to this form of expression is because Afrofuturism evaluates the past and future to create better conditions for the present generation of Black people through the use of technology, often presented through art, music, and literature. I wrote these lamentations in hopes of creating a new language and sound in which we express our unique experiences in life as modern-day queer African people. By sharing our common grief through music, maybe we can find solace in this unpredictable world we live in.

Though their eyes are telling, I can see the hate, yeah you wanna love me, but then you kill me. Why is my life a regret to you? You want to off me.

“Senzeni Thina” is the album’s opening song and recorded *a capella* using vocal live-looping. It is inspired by an anti-apartheid folk song titled “*Senzeni Na?*” (What Have We Done?) Its overall frequency is 396 Hz, which transforms grief into joy and guilt into forgiveness. It is traditionally sung at funerals and was important during the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa because the implication was “What did we do to deserve this?”—so many people were dying at the hands of apartheid police and acts of racism. In modern day South Africa, we adopted the song at funerals of queer or LGBTQ+ people who died from HIV/AIDS or at the hands of homophobic or transphobic killers. The amount of people in our community that are raped, assaulted, and murdered is staggering. And it keeps rising every year. The song made me realize that it’s almost become normal to bury our people since the HIV/AIDS epidemic began in the 90s.

Grief is a huge part of my community’s history and still continues to be. Being Black, femme, and queer comes with a huge weight on our shoulders. I wrote this song as a response to this type of grief: the impending fear of living as your authentic self because of a violent society that can take your life in a heartbeat. In many ways, it’s a provocation: when we die, we multiply, so they could never get rid of us. My Black struggle is congruent with my trans and queer struggle; both have to be uplifted. The meditation on this helped me understand the fight-or-flight response that many of us carry within our community because we live in constant fear of dying. Add a pandemic to the mix, and this response is exacerbated; depression and suicide rates also, inevitably, start to rise. It becomes a vicious cycle.

The fight-or-flight response is described as an automatic physiological reaction to an event that is perceived as stressful or frightening. The perception of threat activates the sympathetic nervous system and triggers an acute stress response that prepares the body to fight or flee. If you are constantly in this mode it can lead to General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS). GAS is the process your body goes through when you are exposed to any kind of stress—positive or negative—for a prolonged period. It has three stages: alarm, resistance, and exhaustion. If you do not resolve the stress that has triggered GAS, it can lead to physical and mental health problems, among other serious illnesses. Death, or fear of death,

can trigger this syndrome, and many of us wouldn't even know it. I learned about it because my aunt was hospitalized the same year her sister, my mom, had died. For weeks, the doctors couldn't figure out why her body was depleted—partly because many doctors do not try to find the deeper causes of our health problems in order to come up with holistic solutions. My aunt was lucky to be able to recover. It made me think of how many people in my family and community have suffered for long periods in silence and how their bodies would eventually cave in. The trauma we hold in our bodies is real. I had to look into my own suffering—carrying the trauma of being bullied, othered, hated, abused, rejected—on top of the current trauma of losing so many loved ones. My body became the site of struggle that needed to be released. The more you peel the layers the more painful it becomes, but you have to keep going because this is only the beginning of processing the grief and understanding yourself more. For me, daily sessions of yoga and meditation before making music helped me connect to my body and the being that existed beyond my mind and body.

BHUTI

*He wena awuyazi intoy'funayo, Ngoba ndikunikile
isandla, ndakunika nengalo, ndakunika amabele*

Translated: *Hey you, you don't know what you want
because I gave you my hand, gave you my arm
and gave you my breasts*

Once I had discovered the source of eternal grief that I carry from generational pain, from childhood, from my father passing away in a mysterious car accident when I was four years old, I moved into a new realm of understanding. How did growing up without my father influence the person I am today? It definitely shaped my relationship towards men. There's a song my late sister used to sing when they'd come back from boarding school. You'd hear it at Xhosa weddings or umcimbi (party or ceremony), and recently we started hearing it more at protests against femicide in South Africa. The song's name is "Bhuti," which means mister, sir, brother, or man in Xhosa. As a very effeminate young boy, I never related to the masculine. My family made sure to add boys' and girls' toys in my arsenal, or I just wouldn't be interested. I liked dresses instead of shorts and fought my mom a lot about what to wear at preschool and wanting long hair. Even from a young age, my gender dysphoria was real. Gender dysphoria is a term that describes a person's sense of unease because of a mismatch between their biological sex and their gender identity. This sense of unease

or dissatisfaction may be so intense that it can lead to depression and anxiety and have a harmful impact on daily life. In many indigenous tribes around the world, the two-spirit person who has qualities of both feminine and masculine always existed and was recognised until colonization.

I had a good sense of who I was from a young age: a girl born in the wrong body. But over the years of being bashed down by society, family, friends, church, and school, I tried to adapt. Once I was honest with myself, family, and friends, it became a lot more bearable to live in this gender dysphoria because I had a label for it and could find my sense of belonging in a community. "I must be gay," was the next step of realization in high school, where I truly discovered my sexuality. In university, though, I realized I didn't identify as a gay man; I was way too fabulous for one gender. I was still reluctant to accept the masculine part of myself but finally had freedom to explore my divine feminine. It was a balancing of the binary scales. It had sad consequences for my love life because I never met anyone who truly accepted me as I am. I always felt lost dating gay men because of the self-inflicted misogyny in that specific community; many hated the fact that I am femme while others hated the masculine side of me. It was a mess as a teenager to even explore my sexuality, so I didn't. Later in life, I got into some toxic relationships where I never saw my worth and kept giving until my glass was empty. I wanted to be loved and accepted so badly that I lost myself in the process. I became my own sacrificial lamb, trying to conform to society's expectations. That's a heavy burden to carry for all your life. In many ways, my meditations during the pandemic also helped me see that my relationship with men was toxic, and I needed to free myself from those behavioral patterns.

All of these layers made it hard for me to connect with men romantically. I don't blame this on my dad passing away, but I know that the lack of his presence—and growing up with my late uncle's aggressive and homophobic form of masculinity instead—shaped my idea of the kinds of men out there. "Bhuti" was inspired by this love/hate relationship with men as a trans woman. It became a reclaiming of my feminine body through the vulnerable confession that I can no longer give any more of myself or my body to please a man. It became a song about empowerment and being okay with being alone and loving yourself. I began to really unpack the trauma that I held in my body through tantric exercises, breath-work, and lots of crying—mourning the old me and allowing myself to release this trauma. The song's frequency is around 700 Hz, which is meant to cleanse the body from all types of toxins. Seems appropriate.

*Ndandine qhakuva emqolo nda qhonda ukuba ndiye
kugqirha, ugqirha wandi xeleda ukuba kutheni
ungaligqabhuzi iqhakuva elisemqolo.*

Translated: *I had a pimple on my back, and I went to the
doctor and the doctor said why don't you pop this pimple
on your back that's throbbing and causing you pain.*

“Qhakuva” is a single from the album I released before the pandemic hit. It’s thumping low bass and an electronic mix of high and low frequencies with vocal layering and looping. Its frequency peaks around 800 Hz, which awakens intuition and helps return to balance. It’s originally a Xhosa tongue twister that simply translates to: “A doctor popped the pimple on my back that was bothering me.” I remember my siblings, cousins and I singing these tongue twisters in my childhood, and it brought such fun and laughter to our lives. We didn’t know the meaning—we didn’t even try to figure it out—the thrill was to make the sounds, twist the words, and get the clicks right. Singing and dancing together was a legacy of our traditional culture that survived apartheid and other oppressive systems. It was the one true expression that no one could take away from us. Later in life, it kept ringing in my head. I have always had problem skin, and acne was a huge part of turmoil as a teenager and adult. I felt that there was a hormonal imbalance that caused my skin to breakout more than the average person. In many ways, my gender dysphoria was exacerbated by my skin—being uncomfortable in my skin but not having the tools and language to fix this issue. I tried every skin product, including toxic ones that made everything worse. The metaphor of the throbbing pimple in this song spoke to my years of not acknowledging the growing pains that I carried for so long. For decades, I felt like my body had betrayed me and turned me into an alien both inside and out. Until I finally dealt with my situation head on and popped the pimple that was my gender dysphoria, I was never going to find healing or freedom.

I was with Jumpin Back Slash on a very inspired occasion at Red Bull Studios in Cape Town where we recorded three songs in one day. We were on a roll, and “Qhakuva” was the last song we recorded. It was never meant to become something more than a jam, but I got inside the booth and started singing these tongue twisters, and JBS was making the beat; we were in the zone and improvising. I didn’t think it would become a song on my album, but we loved the recording and developed it from there. The main crux of the song is that if you don’t deal with something (like a growing

pimple), it will keep coming back bigger and worse. So, in many ways, grief is something we are forced to face because if this pandemic taught us anything, death is a huge part of life and rebirth. Death can play a huge role in helping us appreciate life.

MISSING YOU

*Mama, oh, mama, you got the whole world on your
shoulders, mama, oh mama, you carried the same
burdens young and older*

“Missing You” is a very low- and high-frequency electronic ballad that poured out of me during an emotional moment in Berlin a few months after the passing of my mother. The frequencies that range from high to low clear negativity and any subconscious blockages there might be. It’s become an important song to me because it was one of the first songs I wrote after her death. I remember going to the studio on the last day in Berlin in a very sad state—missing home but not wanting to face home. After my mother died, it took me months to be comfortable in her space at home; everything reminded me of her. What I realized while traveling and performing in foreign countries was that the feeling of despair followed me everywhere. Sometimes I’d forget for a second, and then I’d have flashbacks of being in hospital next to my mom—nightmares repeating themselves. And I felt really lonely. It was the first realization I had that I was now an orphan with no parents. While many of my peers could still turn to their parents for advice, help, love, or anything, I couldn’t. This song was me dealing with the loss, pain, and guilt. I asked myself: “Why I am I still alive when so many people I love are dead.” Some call it survivor’s guilt, which was synonymous with the AIDS epidemic where many felt guilty about being alive while their loved ones had died. I recorded this song with Akrobat in one take while holding back the tears, and it is still the most difficult one to listen back to. It did, however, help me come to terms with being alone and finding the comfort in the discomfort. Today, I see being alone as a gift; self-reliance and love can help facilitate healing.

REMEMBER ME

*Andikhoni umzimba uphelile kudala nditwele, nditwele
kanzima, kodwa ndicela ungandikohlwi*
Translated: *I am unable, my body is finished, I've been
carrying heavy burdens for so long but please don't
forget me*

“Remember Me” was inspired by a conversation I had with my mother on her deathbed. We had tried so many different ways to alleviate her pain. She had developed early-onset Alzheimer’s disease in the last few months of her life, which made her unable to recognize some members of the family. She was on heavy medication that made it impossible for anything else to work. She was unable to speak at times, and her body was pretty much paralyzed. I had tried sound-healing, meditation, CBD oil, and all kinds of alternative remedies but nothing was working. One morning in hospital, she had woken up and recognized me. She asked me to get an English breakfast. She was herself again for this moment, and we talked about so many things. She had accepted the fact that she was not going to make it, but I hadn’t. I was playing her a song I had made a few months before, and she asked me if the song was about her. We laughed for the first time in ages. She asked me to never forget her, and I promised her I wouldn’t ever. On my way home, I was a mess; I couldn’t hold back tears and cried uncontrollably. This was the end. The next day the doctors had told us she didn’t have much time to live, and the realization hit all of us hard. I was with my aunt and brother staring into space in silence. That was the last time my mother was able to speak to me, and in many ways, that was goodbye. “Remember Me” has mid-range frequency around 432 Hz: the miracle tone of nature. Sonically, it’s a feeling of machines pumping life into a person and eventually stopping. This song was my last goodbye, the lamentation of death, and the final countdown. My mother left this reality a few days later.

HAMBA

I hear symphonies and they lead me to a point of repeat and repeat and repeat and repeat. Dream paralysis, where my body is dead, but my mind is awake

There’s a lot of stories about people intuitively knowing the moment when a loved one has left this plane. Some people get a gut-wrenching feeling; others get a visit in their dreams; some actually have a vision of their loved ones in front of them or see a symbolic animal or insect. When my mother passed away, it was a feeling of extreme anguish, but also of peace. She had been sick for a while, and I could see how it was taking its toll on her and our entire family. When the end came, her suffering was gone; that’s all I could hold on to. The suffering of the ones left behind, however, was still there. The gut-wrenching feeling came and went at all times. I struggled to sleep for months and would have awful dream paralysis, which is a feeling of being conscious but unable to move. It

occurs when a person passes between stages of wakefulness and sleep. It can be very frightening. When I was a child, I’d get dream paralysis or nightmares and have to sleep with the light on or not sleep at all. It returned with a vengeance this time with images of my mother on her sick bed or in a hospital. The best way I could handle it was to describe it in detail—once I had calmed down—with voice-notes on my phone.

Every single day since my mom died there would be a lone bee buzzing around on my patio, trying to catch my attention. I’ve been stung twice by bees, so I don’t really mess with them, but the appearance of this bee like clockwork every single day reminded me that somehow there was a deeper meaning to this. The bee was giving me comfort that my mother’s spirit was still there.

This inspired the song, “Hamba,” with a frequency of below 350 Hz which influences the energy field and removes pain. It was written from one of the descriptions of my dream-paralysis state, where I got to meet a lot of my ancestors and wasn’t afraid to be stuck in a dream-like element anymore. It was almost a rite of passage to not fear death, to understand that somehow our souls live on another plane when we die. I created a ritual in the evenings before bedtime where I’d light some sage and candles and talk to the growing numbers of my departed family. Acknowledging them every day gave me a sense of relief; seeing them in my dreams gave me comfort; and almost dying in one dream made me fear death less. It was in those moments that I began to surrender to whatever the universe wanted me to understand about my life and purpose. I found acceptance of things that I cannot control and beauty in the boundless nature of our being.

THE WORLD

Goodbye to the good times, lights out on the sidelines, watch life go and fall apart, it’s a good lie or a big surprise

Once you do find acceptance within yourself when you are grieving, the hardest part is how you negotiate your existence in the world thereafter. When you’re in a dark place like I was, the world seems like an antagonist in your story. I grew up with a sense of the world being against me, and I know exactly where that comes from. Whether it was school, friends, or family, there was always a feeling that I didn’t belong. So, in this state of grief, I was really lost, afraid, and angry. “The World” became the song where I assertively begged the universe to please give us a break, a reprieve. On the news, it was stories about increasing murders of LGBTQ+, femicide, Black Lives Matter protests. To add insult to injury, after

spending the holidays with my family, everyone contracted Covid except for me and a few other members. The fear came rushing back, and everything around me spelled doom. Whatever lesson I was meant to learn from this needed to be revealed soon. I was tired of being in this fight-or-flight mode.

My family recovered, and no one was hospitalized or died. I soon realized that I had to let go of fear of the unknown and embrace it. This song was me raising the white flag and calling a truce with the universe—and within myself. This song, produced together with Akrobat, became an epic surrender with a bombastic bassline, strings, and intergalactic synths mixed with ancestral Zulu chanting in the background. The frequencies are high, and the vocals are reaching for the sky in a desperate plea for the universe to hear my pain. In that moment, I was ready to start the journey to heal and let go of the past. The upward turn had started; regeneration and reconstruction were imminent. The mix of high and low frequencies attracts a soul tribe and also facilitates change.

POWER

*Everything's written here in black and white, lost
everything and the love of my life, my will to live and my
strength to survive, but I got that power*

The closing song on the *Mpumi* album is called “Power.” Its frequency sits between 70 Hz and 21 Hz which is meant to connect to light and spirit as well as repairing DNA. I thought it would be a fitting way to close a project about grief, pain, heartbreak, and loss. “Power” starts with syncopated synth over a deep techno bassline with ballroom drums and claps. The song is simply about empowerment, but the irony of it is that I wrote it at a time when I didn’t believe that this phase would also end. I wrote it as a prophecy to my future self, and only now does it resonate with me because some time has passed. It showed me that I have completed what the tarot card readers call the Fool’s Journey.

The Fool represents each of us as we begin our journey of life in tarot. He is a fool because only a simple soul has the innocent faith to undertake such a journey, with all its challenge and pain. At the start of his trip, the Fool is a newborn—fresh, open, and spontaneous. The figure on the card usually has his arms flung wide and his head held high. He is ready to embrace whatever comes his way, but he is also oblivious to the cliff edge he is about to cross. The Fool is unaware of the hardships he will face as he ventures out to learn the lessons of the world. The Fool goes through death himself and has to realize that death is only a process of transition

and not a permanent state. When the Fool sees the sun at the end of his journey, it’s a sign that he has found hope and inspiration. This serene calm helps him move forward and find understanding. This is a process of rebirth and marks the last stages of grief. I’ll never understand why certain things happen to us in this life, but I can certainly understand the cycle of life. I am my mother’s child in every way; I carry her genetic features, her pain, her trauma, and her beautiful life. She would’ve wanted me to live happily in this life—authentically me, fulfilled and successful. I have the power to change the course of this story from tragedy to triumph, and this song is the beginning of the triumph.

When I discovered this truth I cried for days. I decided that I could no longer live my life to please others. I felt the strength to carry on and to be my authentic self. With that came the decision to transition mentally, emotionally, and physically to a new chapter. I needed to try match the person I knew inside with the body outside, and with my environment. It was a profound relief that brought so much clarity. I remember a conversation with my late mother where she thanked the universe for giving her a son and daughter in one child. If she had embraced and come to terms with who I was, why couldn’t I do the same? I had to at least try. Since then, I have had amazing support from my family, friends, and community. It makes the light shine so much brighter at the end of the tunnel. The painful journey was meant to get me to this point of self-realization. I’m a different person and artist now.

This album, in many ways, has become a tribute to my late mother but also to this difficult journey of processing grief, understanding life and death, metamorphosing into a different version of myself through music, and most importantly, healing. I have experienced true love through the unconditional love of a mother, and for this alone, I am grateful.

There’s a hilarious ad on YouTube where this person is stressed with deadlines, a long to-do list in their head, and worry about the social media algorithms until they find an app to manage all of that. I always laugh at this ad because it reminds me of a time period before the pandemic where most of us had this level of stress over so many things. My mind would spiral into all directions juggling career, family, finances, friends, love. And was it worth it? No. The reason I can tell I’m healing is because where there used to be chaos, now there’s more peace; where there was fear, there’s confidence; and where there was turmoil, there’s joy. Secrets cause illness and the truth can set you free. This harmonious feeling of catharsis through music indicates to me that I am living in a different state than before. Or perhaps the way I am dealing with life has changed for the better. So, maybe that old saying about grief is

actually true—we need death to appreciate life—and music can be a great vehicle to push that forward and bring a universal understanding that transcends race, gender, sexuality, space, and time. It is these frequencies that help us connect with each other and tap into our collective neurological pathways to heal. Today, I'm excited about sharing my story and the music that came from a dark time, and I can't wait to release—perform these songs and start conversations with other people about grief and love.

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MY SISTER, PLEASE MAKE ME A SONG CALLED KIDUNG KINANTHI

Peni Candra Rini in conversation
with Elena Moon Park
Introduction by Jeremy Thal

We met Peni Candra Rini in 2014, when she was a Fellow in the OneBeat music residency program, but we were already connected to her by bonds of shared grief. Two years before, her friend and colleague Sri Joko Raharjo had been part of the inaugural OneBeat program, which brought together 32 musicians from around the world for a month of collaborative exchange. A year before that, my colleague Chris and I had traveled to Java for another project and serendipitously had the chance to meet Sri Joko and film him playing a number of traditional instruments.

Sri Joko came from a long line of *dhalangs* on both his mother and father's sides, a special position with the Javanese tradition of *wayang* (shadow puppetry) and the gamelan music that accompanies it. Sri Joko was an extraordinary multi-faceted artist, excelling, like every master *dhalang*, in the arts of shadow puppetry, improvisatory storytelling, singing, and dancing as well as playing all the instruments of the gamelan. (When we met him in Surakarta we recorded him playing at least ten different instruments.) When he performed, time seemed to stop, and people dropped what they were doing to be with him in the moment.

In the midst of a rather chaotic first year of OneBeat in 2012, Sri Joko was consistently an island of calm, radiating love and respect for those around him. And beyond this singular ability as an artist, he was quite possibly the sweetest man I have met on this earth. A true mensch, a lover of life, a deeply spiritual person—at times fasting for days without mentioning it—a profound and deeply concentrated listener. And so, when I heard the news of his passing—a car accident that also took the lives of his wife and young son, leaving his daughter orphaned—I had never known such an intense sensation of grief. I had lost people in my life, but never someone so much in the prime of their life, with so many gifts left to give. When I heard the news, I was on tour in Portugal and took a few days off to wander the mountains near the Spanish border, singing songs to these lost souls. Just a few years before I was sitting in their living room as their young daughter, a promising young *Dhalang*, played with her own *wayang*.

So, I can only imagine what Peni must have felt. She who studied with Sri Joko—who taught down the hall from him at the same university; who knew far better than me his virtues and the beauty of his family—must have felt infinitely more the pain of these losses. Peni is an incredible artist in her own right: a vocalist, educator, composer, dancer, and improviser of the highest caliber. And she is also a spiritual person, which is reflected in the deep kindness with which she treats anyone she meets and the radiant deep artistry that she pours into every note. For Peni, struggling with the gap between the physical and the spiritual,

between the living and the dead, is a fundamental part of her artistic practice.

In this conversation between Peni and Found Sound Nation co-director Elena Moon Park, Peni reflects on her life in music, how her tradition relates to death, and how this helped her to manage her grief over the loss of her friend, and how she carries on his legacy and spirit.

- Jeremy Thal

EMP Let's talk about your early life and introduction to music. You were born into a family of traditional musicians.

Can you tell me about them and how they influenced you?

PCR Yes, I was born into a traditional artist family. My artistic heritage comes from my great-grandfather Seran, a traditional *gender* instrument player, which is one of the main instruments of the gamelan ensemble. That heritage was then passed down to my grandfather, Suradi Blonot, and my father, who was a puppeteer with the title Ki Wagiman Ganda Carita.

(My father's real name is Wagiman, and Ganda Carita is a title given to him by the community, which means "the storyteller who has a good influence on the world," like the calming scent of flowers, or the spread of cultural arts education through shadow puppet performances.)

I was born in a small village called Ngentrong (in the sub-district of Campurdarat, district of Tulungagung) in East Java. But I grew up in Brumbun Beach, which is 7.7 km from the village where I was born, until I was eleven years old. At the age of fourteen, I moved to Surakarta to study gamelan at the Conservatory Karawitan, which is equivalent to a vocational high school, and then continued my studies at the Karawitan Department of the Indonesian Arts Institute Surakarta, from undergraduate to doctoral. And this is where I work now as an educator.

Since my childhood, my father has always held the belief in his body and soul that one day his youngest child would become a *pesindhen* (female solo singer in a gamelan ensemble). Apart from being a *Dhalang* (a puppeteer in Indonesian *wayang* performance), my father was also a fisherman because to meet the economic needs of my family at that time, it was not enough just to live as a traditional artist.

From when I was a toddler until I was eleven years old, I grew up in two places: in Ngentrong Village and at Brumbun Beach. I lived in the village where I was born with my brothers and sisters, but sometimes my father and mother would take me to Brumbun Beach, where they worked as fishermen to provide for the economic needs of our family. I was always frightened at night by the

darkness of the beach, where there was no electricity and only the sound of the nighttime animals and of waves crashing. The fear of the sound of the waves crashing and the animals made me believe that I had to fulfill my father's dream to become a traditional *sinden*.

I was filled with anticipation and anxiety every time my father said goodbye and set out to row his little boat out to sea. I think it was because of a childhood story I heard from my eldest brother, who almost lost our father at sea. My father was caught in a storm and was lost in the middle of the ocean in his small boat for three days. By that time, everyone thought my father had died. But a miracle saved him from the storm, and he found his way back home. So, I always worried, and I promised, in my heart, that one day when I grew up, I would fulfill my father's wish as a *Sindhen* and earn an income, and I would not allow my father to sail out to sea again. I would make my father happy by fulfilling his dreams.

Every trip from the village to the sea took half-a-day's walk, and along the way, my father taught me traditional children's songs. The first song he taught me was the song "Macapat Pangkur Nyamat" in the scale of *Pelog Nem*, with lyrics that contain all kinds of sweet foods sold in traditional markets. From learning that interesting verse, I became very happy following my father's singing, so it didn't feel like I had even arrived at the Brumbun sea, where my father and mother fought for the life of my family. My father insisted that I learn to practice my vocals loudly to overcome the sound of waves and fear.

Throughout my childhood, I was very poor, but we were all happy with the inner belief that this path of art, tradition, and culture would one day support us. So, my soul is deeply attached to the sound of gamelan and *tembang*, especially since my father has a puppet theater stage which, although he rarely performs, is where my father shares his education with his children. I sang at his *wayang* stage, which further honed my musical skills. And now, I am very grateful that I can realize my father's very simple dream: He only wanted his daughter to live from her voice, through cultivating the sensitivity of *rasa* to preserve the noble arts and culture of the ancestors.

EMP How would you describe your relationship to your ancestors and to the idea of musical lineage?

PCR I carry on the lineage of true traditional artists from four generations in my family. My two other siblings have also inherited the blood of traditional artists, and we all have children who are currently also studying traditional cultural arts, both gamelan and shadow puppets.

My father still performs in *wayang kulit* shows as the *dhalang ruwat*. The *dhalang ruwat* is a person who has a greater

spiritual depth and who thus holds a special role in the *ruwat* ritual. He is also known as the *dhalang ruwat*.

The *ruwat* ritual can be described as an attempt to throw away the fate of someone who is “unlucky.” The *ruwatan* ceremony is often performed by the Javanese, usually for children who are sick, someone who has not found a mate, or other situations that are considered unfavorable. For example, if someone makes a mistake and has repented, then a *ruwat* ceremony (*ruwat* puppet show) is held. This cannot be done by an ordinary *dhalang*, but must be carried out by a *dhalang ruwat*.

My father felt very happy and always told everyone, as a point of pride, that his belief of instilling traditional arts in his children’s souls had paid off and that now the traditional art of music could support and become a way of life for all of his children.

I am also married to Dwi Nugroho, who is a maker of musical instruments—not only traditional ones, but also Western instruments, along with innovative instrument models. He owns a musical instrument-making business called Sentana Art, and together, we have created a foundation called the Jagad Sentana Art Foundation. The Foundation encourages and cultivates the creativity of the younger generation in developing and preserving culture, from traditional to contemporary arts. I have a six-year-old son named Aruna Jagad Anuraga, who from an early age recognized his own talent as a traditional artist. My husband supports every step of my artistic creativity, which is not only in traditional arts, but also in creating new works of music for the stage, dance, film, theater, and more, from the traditional to the contemporary.

EMP Is there a spiritual aspect to the music you perform?

Some scholars speak about mysticism in gamelan music, particularly through the concept of *rasa*, or inner absolute truth. Can you share your thoughts on this concept?

PCR Almost all of the music and vocals that I create or perform are born from the experiences of my soul, which come from the deep forging of memories on my long spiritual journey. And of course, I am guided by the spirit of the gamelan ensemble, which is always a relationship between instruments and vocals, a willingness to listen to one another, to give feedback and reply, and to respect the sound itself. The sound that is born through this is a direct expression of the soul and becomes the identity and the character of the gamelan musician and vocalist.

Rasa is the highest level that a gamelan musician or singer can achieve in interpreting the music, and it is the purpose of playing the gamelan itself—namely, to find happiness, to meditate through sound, to express one’s heart through sound, to talk and listen to each other through playing music that is full of sincerity.

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This is no longer just a matter of technique in how to play or sing, because at the *rasa* level, the techniques of performing an instrument or vocals have been mastered. This becomes about a union between body and soul and enters a realm of spiritual depth that can only exist from a long journey—a descent from an artist family, a maturity in attitude to respect all of the sounds in the gamelan ensemble, a willingness to listen, and also a willingness to give love through sound with sincerity from the depths of one’s heart.

When performing gamelan and vocals, this is my solemn point, which is very close to God. God is in every groove and breath of the sound of the gamelan, and without God’s blessing for us to breathe, there is no sound of gamelan. Therefore, most gamelan musicians who have reached the highest level of *rasa* or *taksu* can guide the *rasa* of gamelan listeners and lovers. Whether it leads to contemplation, meditation, spirituality, love, anger, lust, or any other feelings depends on the intentions of the gamelan player and vocalist in the gamelan ensemble. That is why, even though I often sing about *rasa* in Javanese, I can guarantee that all human feelings in this world are the same—like feeling the moon on a serene night or the sweetness of sugar.

The concept of *rasa* is achieved by the depth of inner truth in each gamelan player. And without that depth of spirituality in life, it is also impossible to reach that depth in gamelan.

EMP Would you describe your singing and performance as a ritualistic practice? If so, how?

PCR I am always practicing a ritual for myself when I sing and perform gamelan. My aim is to bring myself into dialogue with my feelings and to find the inner happiness that is the core of my search for truth in life itself. So when I sing, that’s where I visit myself, see myself, carry myself, take care of myself, and offer myself, my voice, and my expression to the creator of this self. With this simple awareness, the songs that I sing and the music that I make become an odyssey of self-rituals and a sincerity of offerings I am making to the heart.

EMP Can you tell me more about these offerings you are making to your heart through your music? How do you connect to your heart and to your inner self through singing?

PCR Music is the heart and breath of my life. Every beat of my blood and pulse grows alive from my family lineage that make this music, these traditions, and these cultural arts a part of the rites of life. When this soul is touched by music, all of my sensory awareness immediately synergizes. This is why music is a breath that continues to blow within me and a rhythmic heart that is my lifeline.

Singing and performing is like giving nutrition to my heart and to my soul. And it is this soul and heart that make my music

soulful and heartfelt. I dedicate this music and performance to my heart. I open a dialogue with my heart and connect my heart, my love, my lover, my god, and also all of the hearts that watch or listen to my performance. And when the nutritional needs of my heart are met, I am able to offer heartfelt music and performances to all souls who open their hearts.

EMP What is your relationship to your body when performing? Where do you feel the musical expression is physically located for you, or does it depend on what you are performing?

PCR My own body movement occurs because of an intention to bring out and support the expression of the soul from my vocals. My body moves naturally with sincerity to emphasize the meaning of a sound that is conveyed through a unity of soul, body, and voice. Intention is the work of the heart and feelings; it is not just physical. This is not just an awareness of dancing or moving physically, but a deep inner awareness to express solemn feelings in the voice.

When I sing I feel that my body is also singing, and that my voice is dancing. And between my body and my voice is a give and take unity, just like love and respect. With that unity and sincerity, we are able to take care of each other and give each other life forces and inner power.

EMP What happens in your family or in your community when someone dies? Is there a ritual for the passing of life, and if so, how does music play a role in that?

PCR Javanese people believe in rites of life from the womb to the grave. There are eleven types of *macapat* songs that mark the journey of human life. A *macapat* is a poem that is sung, each with a different notation, meter, and pattern. Each has a meaning for every stage of life and can be sung by anyone at any stage of life. The readings are based on the arrangement of notations determined by meter. *Macapat* is sung without a set tempo in order to sing them without breaking syllables and thus keep the meaning of the poem intact. Because the *macapat* is read in this way, it is called a *tembang macapat*, or it can become a *sekar macapat*. *Macapat* take on various types of meters or patterns.

According to tradition, there are eleven *macapat* songs—*maskumambang*, *mijil*, *sinom*, *kinanthi*, *asmaradana*, *gambuh*, *dhandanggula*, *durma*, *pangkur*, *megatruh*, and *pucung*. These eleven *macapat* songs describe the journey of human life:

- 1 *Maskumambang*: *Maskumambang* tells about the human condition while it is still in the spirit realm, which is then implanted in a mother's womb or *cave garba*.
- 2 *Mijil*: *Mijil*, or *mbrojol*, meter-pattern illustrates the human birth process, which results in a baby named a human.

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- 3 *Kinanthi*: The *kinanthi* pattern describes the period of forming one's identity and walking the path to one's ideals. *Kinanti* comes from the word *kanthi* or *tuntun*, which means that we need guidance so that our dreams can be realized.
- 4 *Sinom*: This is the depiction of youth. A beautiful youth, full of hopes and dreams.
- 5 *Asmaradana*: *Asmara* means love. This meter-pattern tells of times of romance or being dissolved in a sea of love.
- 6 *Gambuh*: The beginning of the word *gambuh* is *jumbuh*, or unite. This meter-pattern is about the commitment of marriage and love in one household.
- 7 *Dhandhanggula*: This meter-pattern describes a life that has reached the stage of social stability and prosperity, sufficient clothing, housing, and food.
- 8 *Durma*: *Durma* comes from the word *dharma* and speaks about how a person should perform alms and share with others.
- 9 *Pangkur*: This meter-pattern describes human lust. *Pangkur* or *mungkur* means the leaving behind of lust and anger as well as any negative desires that eat away at the soul.
- 10 *Megatruh*: *Megatruh*, or *megat*, means the separation of the soul from our body, and the release of the spirit or life, leading to immortality. This meter-pattern speaks of human death.
- 11 *Pucung*: *Pucung* means *pocong*, or a human body wrapped in white *mori* cloth. This meter-pattern tells of the human body that is left wrapped in a shroud when buried in an eternal resting place.

The role of a vocal or musical ensemble in death rituals in Java is an expression of inner life and prayers that are chanted naturally through vocal songs and gamelan music called *gendhing duhkitan*. There are several ways in which music is associated with the ritual of death in Javanese culture, including:

- 1 Playing a *gendhing duhkitan* ensemble, which contains prayer songs for the spirits and for families who are still alive.
- 2 If in a Muslim family, a ceremony is carried out with a vocal ensemble led by an imam, who recites *tahlilan* prayers called *yasinan*. The prayer aims to alleviate the torment of the soul's grave in the realm of eternity. Even though the leaders of these prayers are not performers, the vocal ensemble could create a trance as the prayers emerge from the most sincere and deep feelings of the heart. The Javanese people's beliefs about what to leave behind in death include leaving knowledge that is beneficial to their generation; leaving good deeds for the world as well as the hereafter; and

educating the children of the next generation, who can pray for their souls and their ancestors.

EMP Is there a ritual for the birth of new life, and if so, how does music play a role in that?

PCR Yes, the ritual for birth, or the sign that a new life has begun, is almost the same as the ritual for death. In Javanese Muslim culture, when a baby has just been birthed by its mother, the father whispers a call to prayer in the baby's ear. There is a belief in Javanese Muslim tradition that if you sound the *adhan* in the baby's right ear and an *iqomat* in the baby's left ear, then the baby will not be disturbed by bad things, or evil *jinn*, as the first thing it will hear is a sentence that contains the majesty and greatness of the name of God.

For Javanese people who still hold on to their cultural traditions, the birth ceremony will be accompanied by a gamelan ensemble or vocal ensemble that will play *macapatan* songs containing prayers of hope for newly born humans. This is done by singing from ancient *wulangreh* fibers, *wedhatama*, as well as poetry sung in *macapat* that is especially made to mark the birth of the baby.

EMP Who was Sri Joko, and what was his impact on you and your community?

PCR Sri Joko was my best friend, an incredibly intelligent musician, a *dhalang*, and an educator. He was my colleague when he taught in the Karawitan Department at the Indonesian Art Institute (ISI) Surakarta, and we grew up together under Rahayu Supanggah, who was an influential gamelan maestro and composer in Indonesia. For a time, Rahayu Supanggah's works always involved me and Sri Joko as musicians together. Sri Joko was a multi-talented person, a traditional artist who had incredible vocal skills but also an open mind and heart for novelty and innovation, even in the contemporary realm.

Sri Joko's presence in the performing arts and in my community was an incredible influence and inspiration for us. He taught us that by learning and being part of strong traditional roots, one will be able to grasp the world of performing arts with all of its variations and developments. One will be able to collaborate beautifully and work with artistic backgrounds of all kinds very easily—that is, if one holds an open heart and a broad mind. That was all manifest in the late Sri Joko.

I will always remember Sri Joko's smile and his voice that greeted me every morning to pick me up in front of my house, to go together to the office, to educate generations of students on Javanese arts and culture, to learn the science behind gamelan music and the philosophy of the cultural life of Javanese people. I hold these

memories from the campus that raised us both, namely the Karawitan Department at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts Surakarta.

EMP Are there particular rituals or ceremonies that take place when a master *dhalang* such as Sri Joko dies?

PCR When a *dhalang*, or master, dies, the ritual usually involves playing the masterpiece works along with *duhkitan* songs and death prayers in large gamelan ensembles or *gadhon* (minimalist). During the ceremony, the history of the master's artistic journey is also read aloud. And a prayer is held by singing the *tahlil* song on the first day until the seventh day of his death, then again on the 40th day, 100th day, 360th day, 1000th day, 2000th.

These prayers, or *tahlil* songs, are sung with various free-singing styles, each according to the ability of the voice of each person praying, which is of course led by an imam. The scale and tone are very free, but at certain parts, all of the people praying chant at the same tempo repeatedly, and sometimes the body is moved to follow the rhythm. Usually, this ritual ceremony is attended by the family, neighbors, and friends of the deceased.

EMP Are there particular pieces of music that connect you to death, or that connect you to Sri Joko?

PCR Yes, I wrote a song for the late Sri Joko, my best friend who passed away at a young age. It is a composition entitled "Kidung Kinanthi," which I wrote to pay homage and to chant a prayer to deliver the spirit of Sri Joko to his eternal realm. Three days after Sri Joko's death, I had a very strange dream. In my dream, I saw Sri Joko on a voyage in a small boat to go somewhere, but at that same time he came to me and gave me a message: "Yu, tulung gawekke kidung kinanthi ya?" which means, "My Sister, please make me a song called kidung kinanthi."

When I woke up from my dream, I was crying. Although I was very sad because a good friend died, I was also very happy because I was able to see him in a dream. This is when I started to think about writing a song from the *macapat kinanthi* pattern, which, in the Javanese rite of human life, means to be guarded, guided, shown direction. At that time, I thought that Sri Joko asked me for the *kidung kinanthi* song to show him the way to go home on his voyage to his new world, the realm of immortality.

I wrote the lyrics in the pattern of *macapat kinanthi* to contain prayers, hopes, and memories. It also has a code name for Sri Joko, his wife Wulan, and his son Satya, all of whom died with him in the accident. I wrote the song, "Kidung Kinanthi," in the form of *macapat* at the beginning, and then in the *pelog nem barrel*. I performed the song at the OneBeat global music exchange, which Sri Joko had also attended two years prior. The song was the first time I performed at OneBeat. Here is its translation:

Satengah palunging kalbu : In the depths of my soul
Rerangin donga pamuji : I sing prayers and hopes
Ilang Sirna Sang Caraka : For a messenger who has
 currently disappeared
Jejangkung pamoring ngelmi : A brave hero of science
Obor padhang sumik'a : Bright torch light please open up
Kondur manembah mring Widhi : For him to return to
 God's house
Rambu Rangkung mbal ambal lumaku : They are like
 the gamelan *rambu* and *rangkung* that go hand in hand.
Harda arga sirna : But that hope is now gone
Janur mumur ancur sih jenar : It's like coconut leaf buds
 that are still yellow buds that have been crushed when
 they were very young.
Koncat ing pundi paranya : Lost don't know where to go
Setya Satya Wulan : The loyalty of his son named Satya
 and his wife named Wulan
Sajiwa Saraga : To live and die together in one soul and
 one body.
Landung nggen sun nglagu : Loud in me sing
Kidung Kinanthi Lilahi ta'alla Allah : In a song of
 sincerity that brings you home to God.

EMP What are your beliefs about death and dying?

PCR This is a very difficult question to answer. I will answer with two things that I don't know yet are true, but we will all meet in the future. According to Javanese culture, humans who are in the phase of dying are in the "*megatruh*" stage of *macapat* in the rite of life. The word *megat* comes from the root *pegat*, which means to separate, *Ruh* means spirit. This means that it is time for the human spirit to separate from the body. Just as at birth when a baby first receives only sound, a person in the dying phase can also only hear voices. This is when relatives will whisper the *shahada* and chant the call to prayer to show guidance and direction to return to the house of their God.

After life is gone, there is only the body, which would one day unite with the earth. The Javanese gave a sign that his last bit of clothing was *pocong*, a piece of white cloth that wraps his body and returns it to the holiness of the earth. In this stage, humans are in the phase of the *mocopat* song "*Pocung*."

AMTASIÑAWA¹

Cergio Prudencio

Translated from the Spanish
by Geraldine O'Brien

“Experimental,” said someone. In reference to what? To what has been established. To experiment is to transcend canons—socially accepted and validated—to be codes of representation and communication. To experiment is to transgress, to subvert, to destroy, to replace, to oppose a given order.

Insubordination. I do not accept; I do not want; I am not within those limits. Rebelliousness. May the world be other, may it become wide, populated, resounding, soundless, libertarian, revealing, astounding, new. New?

Wide. Interwoven cardinal points. Over here is over there. There is beyond there. We are planet, and we are also the first stone of the genesis, and perhaps the last one. We are everywhere, and yet we are in the county. Wide.

Populated. Others arrived later. Some before. They will come. Let them come. Let's go. They shall wait for us. Embraces. You are I. We are they. “We” is the multiplication of “all.” It is the game and the balsam. It is the joyful number of movement.

Sonoro. Qué te digo. aaaaaaaaaaaaaa ¡Dilo!² Goom bá. Tom bá. Caním – bá. Tum tum – bá. Rrrrampascat – shhhh. Tukábm – aaaaaaaaaaaaaa ¡Dilo! Chow chow. Goom goom. Zómbalakatm. Páraparam. aaaaaaaaaaaaaa ¡Dilo! Goom bá – goom bá – goom bá. ¡Dilo! Khunuskiw. There is no such thing. ¡Dilo! Unerhörte Farben. ¡Dilo! Nunca te calles. Allin hora qananpaj. aaaaaaaaaaaaaa ¡Dilo!

Soundless. Voyaging through the veins towards inwardness. Do not say anything (Jaime Saenz). Let the mountain speak to you. At night in solitude. Let the sea . . . listen . . . and when it resounds, do not listen. Assess it. It may not resound. Don't dream. From afar it will come approaching and will silently pass through. When it drops, it will wake.

Libertarian. The sky lands, time gets inverted. No one is/was anyone. What ignited, now smothers. To walk is to remain. To fly. To leave. To return. To remain. The unfolding is the round.

Revealing. I breathe and comprehend. I close my eyes and see the music plunge. I greet someone, and I find myself. While sleeping, I appeal the decrees of the world. Beneath a tree lie the orderings of the universe. There is a tune for the harvest. Someone sings because she/he holds what is intrinsic.

Astounding. Nothing is astounding without astonishment at oneself, at twoself, at some, at all. Astonishment is the emotion assigned to what is chosen. No morning is the same as tomorrow morning—tomorrow, the morning will not be that of the birth of

the universe. Loud sonorities resemble the earth. They perform the miracle. The offerings yield abundance.

New. It is unexpected because it is unknown; it is unknown because it is unexpected: that which expands territory, spirit, sonority, soundlessness, freedom, revelations and amazement. All at once.

Experimental. With respect to what? To what has been established. Where? One thing is “what has been established” in the center and another thing, “what has been established” in the periphery. To experiment in order to transcend “what has been established” within the sphere of historical hegemony is an action of autophagy. Some canons are exchanged for others and end up giving continuity to the former as a mechanism that solely reproduces (presumed) cultural supremacy. Incest. The Empire conceives itself as superior and imposes its image and likeness on everyone it reaches, using appropriate tools: sword and cross, cross and sword; culture, culture, culture, and more culture. No sound or visual or audiovisual or literary or scientific experiment developed within the bounds of the metropolis ever affected or questioned its implicit coloniality. To experiment inside the bubble does not happen to be more than a game of trinkets or a play of war—or the acceptable “misconduct”—as long as it perpetuates the lighthouse from which someone looks at the world and shoots vastly. Then he takes *selfies*. And uploads them. And everyone downloads them. Ironies.

To experiment in the outlyings (here) is something more than transgressing an exhausted aesthetic or renewing a software or inventing an ultratonic scale. Here (in the outlyings), experimentation is the action standing in rebellion against the lighthouse. Blocking its visual field. Warning it. Impugning it. Threatening it. Summoning it to descend to the plains, to look it in the face and exchange holdings and knowledge, and build together, to see if . . . Truce? Agreement? Battle for dignity, survival, honor of the ancestors, foundation of a new world (not the “New World”)? To experiment from subaltern otherness is a political act that becomes aesthetic; the aesthetics that wield the rupture of an unequal, asymmetrical, and unsustainable system. To experiment is to inquire into the amnesia³ of the pre-Hispanic, the pre-pre-Hispanic, and the pre-everything. It is the sovereign volition to accept/replace/construct identity—one or several. I am who invents myself; I am who I was; I am the procreated by those who were who they were, and here I stand. So what!

Experimental. In reference to what? To that: colonial domination. The experimental here could be an action of opposition to the experimental over there, of insubordination to its meanings in intercultural relationships. We are neither equally experimental, nor equal experimentarians. And something is not right when we

begin to resemble each other. The experimental is a conditioning category in the colonizer-colonized relationship, where the vanguard (who goes to the front) constitutes a reference of experimentality for those who replicate (go behind), who will never go to the front no matter how far they walk, unless they move from such reference to other vectors of history and of the socio-cultural condition in which they develop or discover themselves.

If a composer (here) chooses to place her/himself in different contexts—and to explain him/herself in/from those contexts, be it, for example, that of the powerful Aymara musics or of the aboriginal traditions of the Philippines or of the popular *marimbás* of Guatemala or of the *gagaku* of Japan or that of the drums of Ghana—the experimental as a univocal category loses meaning and ceases to be a reference. New musical creation emerges, then, not as a reaction to the race of illusory and inflationary (unsupported) and fashionable inventions, but as a process of assimilation of unimagined notions related to sound, sonority, time and temporality, organology and technique, control and liberation, nature and dance, etc., and the opening of musical horizons disconnected from—or, at least, independent of, or related to in an egalitarian, non-subaltern way—the colonial matrix. Other problematics are undoubtedly installed beyond the technical or aesthetic (experimental), and in any case, are of an ethical order, configuring transgressive spaces/times of the prevailing hegemony.

Here, in this space/time:

Sound. A spirit, an anima that is not explained in what is physical (acoustic) but in subjectivity. It is someone. A brother. A being that inhabits us. It encircles; it circumscribes; it travels; it is there; it is not there.

Sonority. Cultural construction with sound. Dense. Consistent. “Dirty.” Torn. Compensates for the immensity of geography. It moves the earth, unsettles the clouds, exhilarates the heart.

Time. Spiral. Sphere. (Apparent) return. Past: what can be seen in front, what ensued in constancy before the eyes. Future: what cannot be seen, is behind the body. Past/present/future: permanent state/condition (no flow); also in music—it always returns without ever having left, and it is another but the same. A realm.

Temporality. Time within time. A different time. They who dwell in time. The perception of a time subtracted from time as a consequence of sonorities underway (music) or of complex rituals: invocation, evocation, offering, attires, movement, libation. Constructed time. We are Gods.

Organology and technique. Musical instruments conceived and built (we are gods) to liberate sound (not to subdue it). If it is “a brother,” may the sound exist in full, without mutilations. The

reed pipes are the channel through which sound flows and impacts, not a reformatory. The *sikuri*⁴ (*siku* player⁵) blows to find it and release it. He knows that, in the knot of the bamboo, it lies waiting. The *sikuri* blows in dialogue with other *sikuri*(s), alternating efforts and concurrences to awaken that *ajayu*⁶ (soul), in community. They are instruments enchanted by the *Sirinu*,⁷ that immanent force of the *manqhapacha*⁸ (underworld) that consecrates the spirituality of sound/sonority/tone and delivers it to the *sikuluriri*⁹ (luthier) and the *wayñuapsuri*¹⁰ (composer), conscripted in the mission of receiving the sonorous good to bring it to the *akapacha*¹¹ (this earthly dimension) for the honor of nature and communal rejoicing.

Nature. Earth: provider and mother. Consort of the water given to her by the mountain. Sun, moon, rain, hail, frost. It is appreciated. *Ch'allando*¹² (offering, giving back) is always appreciated. You have to play, dance, celebrate for the good sowing, for the animals (also siblings), for the dead (when they visit), for the new season, for the required rain. Sound/sonority/music, they are never alone. They are “community” together with celebration, sung or prayed words, choreographic traces, colors, the beautification of the llamas, the stirred entrails. Everything is explained in what is other, exists by/for the other. Everything is coupled. Duality of complementary opposites. Opposites that are inverted when time is overturned. What is above will become beneath and the other way around. Who said “experimental”?

I said “experimental.” I said to experiment. I approached, and was dazzled by, the surrounding Aymara world. I discovered it by opening my senses. I found it in the subconscious depths of my ancient self. It gave me a name. Desecrations? I loved the sound/sonority in freedom. I loved it. I became a volcano with its energy. I was *wayñuapsuri* of consecrations excavated in the secular amnesia¹³ of the/my ancestors. Remote tones. Archaic flow. Restless pulsions. Desecrations? The freedom of sound set me free. “Free in sound,” proclaimed Graciela Paraskevaídis.¹⁴ I loved it. I was welcomed and invited to the *apthapi*¹⁵ of knowledges extirpated from this profuse continent (and from my own inner continent?) throughout the centuries of horror. Comprehension was given to me. Was comprehension given to me? I had reached another place having always been there, without consciousness, crossing the tight-rope to go and to return—to bring and to take. Desecrations? To create was to unveil that which (I believe) already sounded before my eyes in a scrambled and confusing past. To create was to imagine. To put on wings. Or to accept them. To hurl off the cliff. Desecrations? Set there/here, it had to be assumed, even at the risk of desecrations or miracles. I loved it. I cried so many times un-

der the influence of vibrant *tropas* (Aymara musical ensembles). I cried also in the time of the vibrations that were dispensed to me in the guise of “compositions” by the tutelaries. I know that. Do I know? I felt warm air next to me while conducting the *Orquesta Experimental de Instrumentos Nativos* (OEIN)¹⁶ in a cold church. I would be someone concurrent. I hesitated. Never hesitate. I said “experiment” with my back to myself. On another occasion, we were all scorched by the vibratory power of that OEIN, this time in a church in the Austrian Tyrol. The balance rope had become a bridge. The “extirpated” world was visiting the extirpators’ home three-hundred years later. It was the *Taqi Ongoy*!¹⁷ The reincarnation of the *wakas*¹⁸ (sacred spirits) in the youth, practically children, of that vessel we call OEIN as they became one with their arcane ancestors, there, at the foot of the Alps. I loved it.

*What I admire the most in a writer? That he may handle forces that captivate him, that seem to destroy him. That he may own that challenge and dissolve the resistance. That he may destroy language and create language. That he may have no past during the day and be millenary during the night. That he may like pomegranate, which he has never tasted, and that he may like guava, which he tries every day. That he may approach things out of hunger and move away out of repugnance.*¹⁹

- José Lezama Lima

I resonate in this *Lezamian* challenge, and here I confess: Yes, the forces I dared to approach captivated me. What turbulence in those thunderous circles of air hitting my soul and my body and my mind, logics and standards. I thought I had fallen dejected at one point. I did dissolve the resistance, took up the challenge, destroyed languages (desecrations?) and created my own (or thought I did so), even if I had only dug it out of the mythical void. But I destroyed languages—all those that could take over my freedom: the dominant ones and the dominated ones; the learned and the discovered; those from over there and beyond; and those from over here and further within—not without first having honored them, as the officiant does with the offering consecrated to the fire and whose ashes he then buries for a new germination. Thus, as it is, the music I made is a language destroyed and created and burned and buried and germinated. At the same time, it is all and in any order. I believe I am/have been the “idolater,” the extirpator, and the one reborn in this life—the one that still inquires and makes me restless.

Diaspora. We are at the threshold. We are threshold. Here they came. From one side, European-style composers (European, Latin American, and Bolivian) arrived to face the challenge of creating with sound sources that are unattainable for their, histori-

cally hegemonic, musical/cultural categories. From the other side, *sikuris*, *tarqiris*, *luriris* from Aymara communities also arrived, to undertake the unusual mission of teaching (us) what is ancestrally their own, but historically subaltern.

Both were seen here, outside their environmental space.

The first ones had a hard time understanding those musical instruments: pitches, not absolute ones; a “pitch” as a conglomerate—or an approximation or an ambiguity—never a definitive and measurable or wholly controllable concreteness. How to create music with such an unattainable matter, coming from the logic of composing by closing behaviors to all the parameters of sound/music? What does a common composer do with an organic and living element that imposes its own conditions? Do they subdue it? Do they give up? Do they turn a deaf ear? Do they negotiate? Do they switch places? “To compose is to liberate sound,” I concluded when I myself was overwhelmed by these questions in the process of decrypting a number of flutes of multiple organological forms—which arrived in the space/time of contemporaneity—as someone who proffers another planet. The OEIN-composers experience produced many things in repertoire: from impossibles to revelations, passing-through blunders, intuitions, collisions, negations and other results that remain bestowed to this ineffable and questioning continent called OEIN, still open to other explorations and, who knows, to unimaginable unveilings and constructions and inventions and The scenario proposed is a different one, inverse to the secular colonial order where the North teaches and the South learns; the North paves the way and the South follows behind; the North invents and the South replicates; the North expands and the South contracts. Here, in this experimentality we talk about, the North (either by origin or way of thinking/being) had to learn, to contract, to follow, to feel uncomfortable, far away from its dominant territoriality.

The latter had to deal with the change of position in which they found themselves. In the same way in which the North imposed supremacy over the South, the cities do so over the rural areas. The cities founded during the colonial period became centers of power in the colonial republics, from where, even today, indigenous peoples, peasants, and miners are subjected to conditions of marginalization, exclusion, dependency, or even extermination. In this profound context, the *tarqas*²⁰ of Kurawara de Carangas²¹ visited us in the city of La Paz. They came to transmit knowledge, to teach, to perform a technical/aesthetic/cultural model for an OEIN avid for these enigmas. In wielding this, they were there to invert colonial relationships—or at least to compensate them—for an instant of *Pacha Kuti*,²² where that which is “below” took the

place of that which is “above,” and that which is “above” took the place of what is “below.” I am not sure that this difficult interaction was viewed in its profound intercultural dimension by the protagonists on both shores, but something happened. The women of the community, present there to dance and provide food, observed that the women in the OEIN played instruments on a par with the men, in equal competence and practice, breaking patterns of Aymara behavior where it is not for women, at all, to peal or blow, to make the air vibrate for others to dance or to make offerings or to gladden the heart. Coloniality is reproduced in concentric circles: from the North to the South; and in the South, from the metropolis to the countryside; and in the countryside, from men to women; and so on. But, in addition, there are Souths in the North, and Norths in the South; there are fields in the cities, and there are gender sub-alterities everywhere: South, North, cities, and communities. The presumption of superiority of some over the supposed inferiority of others is imbricated in a multiplicity of domains, relationships, and human relations. Coloniality ramifies itself and is installed into all cultural, social, political, and economic levels of the globalized world, and consequently, is installed in structures of thought. Anyone could embody the double role of colonizer and colonized in their daily lives, depending on the sphere of relations and the place they occupy in them. By choice or by condemnation, it is all the same. That is the dramatic state of the times.

To travel is to change perspective. It is to see/hear/feel the same thing from another place and with other senses, or with the same ones, well-baited and well-incited. To travel is to cease to be yourself in order to see/hear/feel other things without moving from the place of origin. To add to the tendency. To oppose the tendency. It is to arrive by choice of journey, to remember and to forget freely. To travel is to set off for exile, leaving land and skin, and never forgetting them; it is to be “those who play, those who listen.”²³

May we all make/take the instruments, empty the innards into them, be still at the beck and call of all that sounds, watch the passage of the banished, bear the inheritance, scatter it, reap the fruits, embed its seed, plow furrow, rain oneself, and wait, wait, wait for the susurrus of the snails, the roar of the sprigs, the rumor of the entrails, the prayer of the minerals, and the song of dawn when it is still dusk.

La Paz, January 24, 2022

- 1 “It is necessary to remember”, in Aymara. “Amtaña. v. tr. to remember. To bring something to memory. To determine. || 2. To commemorate. To remember an event. To celebrate, exalt, praise.” (Aymara-Spanish dictionary; Teófilo Layme, Virginia Lucero, Mabel Arteaga. UMSA / Plural Editores)
- 2 “Dilo,” alludes to a typical expression (shout) of Dámaso Pérez Prado, a popular Cuban composer and arranger.
- 3 “Our great loss has been those millions of years without historical record: a vast space of time that probes toward infinity. This is the space that art approaches and is where it is born.” (Nicomedes Suarez, “Manifiesto amnesia”, Editorial La Hoguera, 2010).
- 4 “Sikuri. n. (...) Set of ‘siku’ players.” (Op. Cit.)
- 5 “Siku. s. Zampoña (Panpipes). Musical wind instrument made of several reeds. (...)” (Op. Cit.) Altiplanic Pan flute.
- 6 “Ajayu. s. Spirit. In-material substance of a person. Soul. (...)” (Op. Cit.).
- 7 Sirinu, the giver of music.” They are dangerous beings that can drive whoever listens to their beautiful music mad (...) (Usandizaga, H., “El mundo oscuro y la música en los mitos andinos,” 2011, Bulletin of Hispanic Studies) The wayñuaspuri call on the waterfalls and springs to receive the tune of the Sirinu.
- 8 “Manqha pacha. s. Abyss. Time and space of the depths below the earth, imposing and dangerous (...)” (Op. Cit.).
- 9 “Luriri. s. Author. One who has made or created something.” (Op. Cit.) Sikuluriri, one who makes sikus.
- 10 “Wayñu. s. Joyful music and singing (...)”. “Apsuri. adj. & n. Sacador. One who takes something out.” (Op. Cit.) Wayñuapsuri, “composer” in Aymara; literally, the one who takes out wayñu.
- 11 “Akapacha. s. Actuality. Current time.” (Op. Cit.)
- 12 “Ch’alla. s. (...) | 2. Libation. Action of pouring a drink or liquor to mother Earth asking for help and protection.” (Op. Cit.)
- 13 “Because we cannot remember, we create. Our fictions may be the product of the gaps in our memory.” (Nicomedes Suárez, Op. Cit.)
- 14 “Libres en el sonido” (1997); composition by Graciela Paraskevaídis for cello, clarinet, flute, and violin.
- 15 “Apthapi. s. Compilation. (...) 2. Food collected for Community lunch.” (Op. Cit.)
- 16 OEIN (Experimental Orchestra of Native Instruments) was co-founded by Cergio Prudencio in 1980, who was its director until 2016.
- 17 “Taki Onqoy, [singing disease], was a religious movement (...) in the Peruvian Andes circa 1564. More than a disease, it was a movement of anti-colonial resistance, whose main characteristic was the abandonment of everything that had been brought by the conqueror.” (“Taqi Onkoy. Indigenous resistance in the Central Andes (1565)”); The Thousand-Headed Hydra. “The Taki Unquy was based on the belief that the huacas, abandoned by the expansion of Christianity, could take possession of the indigenous people through the initiatory ecstasy generated by dance and ritual fasting. A ceremony such as this defeated the European god and annulled baptism for them. Thus, the aim of this movement was to defeat the Catholic God, retrieve the baptized indigenous peoples and expel the Spaniards.” (Wikipedia)
- 18 “The vocable huaca, waca or guaca (...) designated all fundamental Inca sacralities: shrines, idols, temples, tombs, mummies, sacred places, animals, those stars from which the aillus, or clans, believed they were descended, the very ancestors, including the main deities, the Sun and the moon (...)” (Wikipedia)
- 19 José Lezama Lima, “Esferaimagen.” Editorial Tusquets, 1969. Translation: www.ingentaconnect.com/content/routledg/rrev/2013/00000046/00000001/art00026
- 20 “Tarqa. n. Musical wind instrument made of wood in one piece.” (Op. Cit.) Vertical flute with wind pipe and six finger holes, always played in troupe or ensemble made up of different sizes, in constant interaction.
- 21 Kurawara de Carangas; population of the department of Oruro, Bolivia, capital of the Sajama province, located almost 4000 meters above sea level.
- 22 Pacha Kuti, time of change. “The kuti consists of the cyclical alternation of opposites, which exchange their respective spatial and hierarchical positions in turns (...)” (Fernando Montes, “La máscara de piedra,” Editorial Armonía, 1999).
- 23 Poem by Jaime Sáenz. (“los que tocan, los que escuchan”). *ECO Magazine* 269, Bogotá, 1983

LIQUID VOICES

Marcioz and Jocy de Oliveira in conversation

Translated from the Portuguese
by Paulo Sartori

This is an interview in conversational format between two artists from the same city, in totally different moments in their personal careers and lives. The conversation is between Marcioz (25) and Jocy de Oliveira (85). Marcioz prepared thirteen questions and Jocy answered them.

Jocy de Oliveira is one of South America's most renowned contemporary music composers. Working with opera, installations, multimedia pieces, theater, and even cinema, Jocy is a pioneer in working with mixed media, looking to rethink the conventional formats in opera. She was highly regarded by legends of the 20th century like Igor Stravinsky, Iannis Xenakis, and John Cage, whom she played with and for. She also exchanged many letters with Cage, available in her book, "Diálogo com Cartas."¹

Jocy has a long discography and career, which would need an article triple the size of this to cover. She was the first composer in Brazil to work with electronic music, in her iconic piece "Apague Meu Spot Light" (1961).² Her work is critical, dense, and sophisticated, diving into many different political topics in a very confrontational manner. I often describe it as "musically unapologetic." I see her work as very clear and complex, willing to defy and expand notions of music.

The voice who you are reading right now is from me, Marcioz. I was born in Curitiba,³ like Jocy, and also work in the field of innovative electronic music. I'm a big fan of Jocy's work, and she's quite an idol to me. I think, despite our very different sonic endeavors and/or sonic beliefs, we somehow have similar principles. I don't like talking about myself and what I have "accomplished" because I don't like the idea of functionalizing my "credibility." What is most important for you to know is that I make music, and I try to use it to expand social signals. I deeply believe in the sophisticated and practical knowledge of lower-income people. I believe we only move forward when accepting race and colonization as the main factor of conversation. I believe the archive is more powerful than any GDP area and academic discourse. I believe time is cruel.

Eu acredito é na rapaziada.

Que segue em frente e segura o rojão.

Eu ponho fé é na fé da moçada.

Que não foge da fera e enfrenta o leão

- Gonzaguinha,⁴ "E Vamos à Luta" (1981)⁵

M Hi, Jocy. I wanted to begin this conversation by introducing myself to you as well as to those reading—I imagine you don't know me yet. My name is Marcioz; I'm 25 years old; and, like you, I'm from Curitiba. I grew up in the Caiuá neighborhood, in CIC,⁶ near Fazendinha.⁷ I played a lot of

soccer there before wanting to make music. I'm the son of a black ballerina who was godmother of the drumming section in samba school *Embaixadores da Alegria*⁸ and of a Polish violinist who used to play on *XV de Novembro* street. I'm a mulatto with kinky hair; I make experimental music and currently live in Berlin. My music is rather harsh, but I like it. (Can I show you a piece of mine?) There are even those who say it's innovative. (Can you believe it?!) And I think that is why I'm here talking to you. I'm not sure whether you would like it, or what you would think of this "new" music, but above all I am a great fan of yours, and I think a lot about your work. I'm very impacted by your material, and it inspires me a lot to keep going. In the end, I think I'm only in the game because you, Arrigo Barnabé, and Waltel Branco endured. I wanted to ask you: How are you doing? How are things? How are you feeling today? Thank you a lot for making the time to talk to us.

JdO Hello. This geographical question is very relative. We carry with us our origins, our life; mine was around the world. I lived in different countries, but I always think of Rio de Janeiro's sea. Curitiba was incidental in my life. I was born in Aquibadan Street, in my great grandparents' place, but I didn't live there, and I don't carry bonds besides the memory of the sad passage rite of my father's and my grandmother's death. They no longer lived there, but happened to be in Curitiba in those days of their deaths.

I like Berlin. I've been there many times and presented five of my operas, including the premiere of *Kseni – Di Fremde* at Berliner Festpiele.

M Jocy, when I was invited to talk to you, I kept thinking how interesting all of this is because *Sound American* is from the United States—from New York (so fancy!)—and we are from the same cities—both CWB and RJ.⁹ (I spent a lot of time in Rio as well; I think I've become partially *carioca*.¹⁰) What do you think about this meeting of ours? After all, a first-world institution was necessary so that we could meet; do you think this means something?

JdO I lived in New York for 20 years. The meeting could have happened there or in any other place. Besides, everything is mixed up in [the] virtual [world], nowadays.

M Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood in Curitiba? You left there pretty young. Is there something in the city that caught your attention at that time? I've seen some interviews with you, and it's quite common for people to ask you strictly about your work, but I am curious about what you think of things.

JdO It's the first time someone asks me this much about the place I was born. Since this seems relevant to you, here it is:

We lived in Batel in a futurist house with Art Deco furniture, a very big yard, and a German Shepherd dog that belonged to my mother. One morning, out of jealousy of her, [it] bit my leg, leaving a scar. I was less than three years old when we moved to São Paulo, and there I was raised and studied. The scar remained.

M I was reading an interview you gave to *Gazeta do Povo*¹¹ where you stated the following:

"In comparative terms, Curitiba is a city with much more potential than Florianópolis (SC), for example, which is smaller. But I've had events there and here, nothing," laments the composer. "It's a pity, no doubts [*sic*], but I don't know the reasons. It's a mystery." (*Gazeta do Povo*, 2013)¹²

I found it curious because I went through a very similar situation. I've never had many opportunities in Curitiba, and that's why I ended up leaving. My experience of recognition always came from outside of Brazil, particularly from Europe and the USA. People from other cities of Brazil—and from around the world—approach me and show interest, but in Curitiba not so much. Could you comment a little about your relation to Curitiba? Do you think this is symptomatic of the city or just a coincidence?

JdO Yes, this reflects a provincial mentality. Many states in Brazil support and value their artists. Paraná, on the contrary, ignores.

M You have said you feel very distant from your first LP, *A Música Século XX de Jocy*,¹³ and that your trajectory followed another direction. I also feel quite distant from my first official work; listening to it today feels like listening to a different person. Could you comment on this transition to the position you find yourself in as a vanguard composer, be it with mixed electroacoustic music, multimedia work, or opera? What advice would you give to a young composer who also decided to take a different path? Did you experience any stress from a possible public insistence in the "old" Jocy?

JdO It wasn't a transition. I believe we keep making the same thing, but we find different ways of expressing ourselves—sometimes more complex, sometimes simpler (which is quite difficult). But I can't say I've changed radically, despite hopefully having matured, and therefore perfected, my creative process. In different stages of my life, my pieces were considered pioneers for different reasons. I always pursued invention instead of routine, and I continue in the same search. At the time of *Música Século XX*,¹⁴ I was twenty years old, and my destiny in music was already writ-

ten as a pianist performing concerts as soloist of great orchestras in Europe, USA, and Brazil. In the Sixties, I played a lot of contemporary music and many composers wrote for me, such as Luciano Berio, Xenakis, Cage, Cláudio Santoro, in addition to having been two times soloist under Stravinsky's conduction. At the same time, I was beginning to conceive an electronic drama *Apague meu spot light* (in partnership with Berio) that premiered in Rio and São Paulo's city theaters during the *VI Bienal de Arte*, in 1961. The exceptional cast included Fernanda Montenegro, Sérgio Britto, Ítalo Rossi, and scenic direction of Gianni Ratto. This piece caused great impact, and it is still remembered as the first time electronic music was made in Brazil.

As for the *Música Século XX* vinyl, it was a unique event. Advice? Follow your intuition and work hard.

M Looking from a distance, it seems there is a moment when you make a clear step of breaking up with “mpb.”¹⁵ I often think about the division proposed and accepted in large scale between “popular music” and “classical music.” Maybe it could be said that we classify “concert music” as the music played by an orchestra, perhaps with a visiting soloist, while “popular music” is any other music that have ever existed—a quick example would be that both jazz and techno are considered genres of popular music. I always wonder why Theodor Adorno was so eager to start this affirmation. Here in Germany, there are terms for two types of funding: *Ernst Musik* and *Unterhaltungsmusik*. The fund received depends directly on the category classified in the project. It's funny that, in Brazil, “serious music” became “classical” and “light/entertainment music” became “popular music.” We even have the habit of saying poorer, “messier” things are “people's” things, but the truth is that in “popular music” we know more about who plays, listens to, and funds the music. How do you see yourself in this division? It seems we made some progress in trying to abandon that, but the structure upon which it is built remains quite strong. How do you see Brazilian music within the vanguard spectrum?

JdO This “divisional” question of popular music and classical music is something that exists in the whole world. In France they go even further as to calling it *musique serieuse*, *musique savant*; *musique classique* versus *musique populaire*. In Germany there is also *klassik muzik*. In English, “classic” and “pop” music. But cases where things get crossed—more difficult to tag—do exist. I don't really expect this division to be abandoned. Each day more we're living in bubbles—tribes—few are the exceptions that cross different fields and exceed barriers.

M I guess I'm interested in the history of the history of music because it is very connected to what we believe to be innovation. Sometimes it seems to me that this narrative of gradual complexification of music, or even of “sonic spicing,” is full of little lies, of “scam,” of “gibberish”¹⁶ as my mom used to say. One time, I was watching an online talk of Saloma Salomão to IMS in the series *1922—Modernisms in Debate*. He briefly commented about the Banda Linda ethnicity from Central Africa that makes “concrete music using flutes and horns.” As soon as I heard this, I began considering Schaeffer's “discovery” to be slightly nonsense. When he made this parallel, I couldn't help but thinking about Steve Reich's “Clapping music,” about Semba, or even about flamenco and *Fundo de Quintal*¹⁷ group. This whole situation of being always *them* to tell what happened, and what will happen, makes me think about the ways music is being described. Sometimes I wonder if the whole thing of positioning oneself as the writer of everything isn't what made atonalism and serialism happen. I question if it was a demand or a necessity or a feeling of “if it comes from these people, it's not music, it isn't taken into account.” I can't help but ask: *Who is writing the 21st century?*

Jocelyne, what I want to know is: what is new in music to you? How do we know what is new? Who says something is new? Can new be my friends and myself as well? Will they let Mano Brown¹⁸ make it into history as an innovator? And DJ Gui da ZO?¹⁹ And Naná Vasconcelos?²⁰ Are they going to allow in a guy that wrote an album named *Africadeus*?²¹

JdO I think invention is a lot like in science. We all contribute a little until someone suddenly finds a new path. In my case, for many years I've been focusing on an investigation in multiple fields—through music, theater, video, text, [and] installations—with the conviction that the sonic expression is inherent to all forms of life. [I've been] trying to reach an organic development of composition/performance with no borders between life and art.

In general, my work—the choice of the sonic material—encompasses elements from both my musical and my life experiences. That way, my impression of a *sadhu* (holy man) singing a *raga* to Shiva in a temple in Delhi is as important as the reminiscence of a Renaissance counterpoint, a *cantilena*, the use of sounds generated by computer, or the heritage of years and years playing Messiaen's piano works and living his new notion of time.

This sonic tissue can be developed from multiple series: sound clouds in constant textural transformation, a *tala*, a European *post-serial* tradition, the Eastern non-periodicity, nature's

timelessness, chance, or our anthropophagic cultural roots. It's the integration of all those elements with a view of the world shaped as more than thirty years of life in different countries, and of sharing with some of the 20th century's masters.

Sometimes it can happen that music from other cultures—many of them deemed as “primitive cultures” in the West—are more innovative to our ears than just the formality inherited from Eurocentrism. The world isn't only the Western Northern hemisphere!

But I was lucky to have lived the discoveries from the late 1950s and 1960s up until the 1970s. At twenty years old, I had the opportunity of working and collaborating with Cage, Berio, Xenakis, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Olivier Messiaen, Lukas Foss, and mainly Stravinsky.²² In those decades, I lived in the USA and Europe. They were extremely innovative and instigating years; for me, [they were] watersheds in the cultural and political fields. Even at that impactful time, the “vanguard” was already questioned—maybe vanguard only ever existed with Dadaism in the beginning of the 20th century.

M Do you think it's possible for us to dictate a narrative about ourselves? About our music? Our way of being? Our food?

You talked in an interview about how the ones bringing attention and making a kind of rescue of your work (whether through mentioning it or studying it) are “the techno people.” I thought it was cool when you mentioned that because the community of experimental electronic music in Brazil has been taking control of its own narratives lately. I feel like we need to review a lot of stuff, but mainly we need to begin to study, to give us access to ourselves. When I discovered your work, it reminded me a lot of the shock I felt when I found out about Luís Gama²³ or José do Patrocínio²⁴ or Olly Wilson.²⁵ It even looks like a hidden history, a counterproposal stuck in the throat.

Your work has always resonated and survived really well against the ephemeral and the passing of time. But now it seems as if there's a different look and narrative about it; I feel that people are rescuing and finding themselves in it. I think that, little by little, your name is going through a personification process, almost like an accentuation in the timeline of music. How do you feel about that?

JdO I don't know. You all see this from outside; you are capable of formulating this narrative. I immerse; I work and don't think much about what it is that will survive. But it makes me glad that some have this perception and anticipate such dimension.

M Jocy, your oeuvre is full of moments that catch my attention for having an “unapologetic” character. For me, it looks as if it is clear what you want to say in a piece while working on it. *Nenhuma Mulher Civilizada* Faria Issa²⁶ or *Inori à prostituta sagrada*²⁷ immediately come to mind. How did you deal—and how do you deal—with the audience expectations in these moments?

JdO I don't worry about the market, about the public. I managed to trail a long path with no concessions, and I wish to remain like so.

As for the segments of *Kseni – A estrangeira* or *Inori à prostituta sagrada*, they are multimedia operas. For decades, I have explored the timelessness of myths in my multimedia operas. I search for a moment of poetic intuition, a moment of true complicity between artists and audience, a moment in which our perception of time and space expands and dives into our interior. Absorbing time in its unstructured essence becomes one of the primordial issues in my music.

This leads me to work with the timeless vision of myths in matriarchal societies from classical antiquity such as the “holy prostitute” from fairy tales, the “Diva” as the character deemed to die or the victim in conventional operas. In *Kseni – A estrangeira*, I bring back the myth of Medea, transported to contemporaneity as a transgressor woman—discriminated [against], heroic—and all those myths connected to the woman figure and their values, [are] contained in excerpts of my texts to many of my multimedia operas.

M I once heard you mention that a woman researcher was compiling your work and advocating that your discography/oeuvre should be studied in a non-linear way. Can you comment on that? I sometimes think that, despite the way the clock ticks, we are much less linear than we think.

JdO Yes, there is a research in that sense, of approaching my oeuvre as a stellar constellation where it all integrates, interconnects, and follows simultaneous paths; where there isn't preoccupation about linearity. Since the beginning, I've never had this preoccupation in my works—approaching intuitive time or the circular form with no beginning or end or the quantic time state, if I may put it like that.

M Throughout your trajectory, you have experimented a lot with the possibilities that “mixed media” has to offer. A few months ago, I was commissioned to write a piece for a festival and the question wasn't if it would have a visual aspect to it, but rather which it would be. Nowadays, the means of media consumption are somehow undetachable from some sort of visual experience. What was your understanding of “mixed arts” in the past century in comparison to now?

JdO Yes, we live in a visual-oriented society where listening is being lost, but I don't think the artist needs to be guided by the market's demand. If your artistic conception demands multimediality, that's what you should do; if not, I see no reason to.

M Jocy, you told us you are currently working in a new cinematic opera. Can you tell us a bit about your creative process and how this one is different from the first pieces you released?

JdO Once more, it regards the search for an intersemiosis between music and other art forms; better said, a multimediality in the molds of my successful and internationally awarded cinematic opera *Liquid Voices – A história de Mathilda Segalescu*, produced in 2017 at SESC in São Paulo and filmed as a feature film in the ruins of Cassino da Urca in Rio; exhibited and awarded in cinema festivals in London, Nice, Madrid, Antwerp, Warsaw, Israel, New York, and Santiago.

My new cinematic opera, also a feature film, entitled *Realejo de vida e morte*,²⁸ shows the solitude of two characters in magical-realism scenes in the desolated landscape of a planet in the process of extinction. I have finished the script and the music, but the work is only beginning. I hope to release it in 2023.

M I think a lot about my youth as a double-edged sword. On one hand, I feel enthusiasm and anger to explore in my work. On the other, I feel like a genuine ignorant who needs to see so much more before affirming anything. Is there something you know now that you would implement in your creative process from when you were 25 years old?

JdO I don't think so. Life is living each moment; we know that wanting to be Faust doesn't work.

M I wanted to thank you again for your time. It was a great honor being able to ask you these questions. It was very sincere.

JdO Pleasure was all mine; I wish you success in your trajectory throughout this world.

A version of this article may be found in its original Portuguese in the online version of this issue at soundamerican.org.

Translator's Notes

1 Published in Brazil by *SESI-SP*, 2014. Also published in France, under the title *Dialogues avec mes lettres* by *Honoré Champion*, 2015.

2 Translated as “switch off my spotlight,” this iconic multimedia work by Jocy de Oliveira is regarded as the first time electronic music was ever made in Brazil. Without access to the technology involved in creating such music, Jocy had the collaboration of Italian great Luciano Berio, who would mail tapes he worked on to Jocy, directly from the *Studio di Fonologia Musicale* in Milan.

3 Capital of Paraná state, South region of Brazil.

4 Brazilian singer-songwriter, son of legend Luiz Gonzaga, regarded as “the king of *baião*.”

5 Free translation: “What I do believe in is the gang / That keeps moving forward and holding it together / My faith is in the youth's faith / who don't run from the beast and face the lion.”

6 Abbreviation for “Industrial City of Curitiba,” the biggest neighborhood in Curitiba where the city's industrial district is located.

7 Another neighborhood in Curitiba; its name translates as “little farm.”

8 Translating as “Ambassadors of Joy.”

9 “CWB” is the technical abbreviation for Curitiba's airport, adopted as an equivalent to the city's name. “RJ” is the geopolitical abbreviation for Rio de Janeiro's state.

10 “Carioca” refers to those born in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

11 Renowned newspaper from Curitiba.

12 *Gazeta do Povo*, September 20th, 2013. Available at: <https://www.gazetadopovo.com.br/caderno-g/jocy-de-oliveira-traz-opera-a-curitiba-cfg0exes23dsm5gucugc-pdnwu/>

13 Jocy de Oliveira's record debut at 23 years old, *A Música Século XX de Jocy* was released by *Litoral Records*, in 1959.

14 *Ipsis litteris* as Jocy referred to the LP.

15 Abbreviation for “música popular brasileira,” meaning “Brazilian popular music,” designation for what became one of Brazil's most important music genres of the 20th century. Despite its generic character, the abbreviation gained some specificity overtime and it is still widely applied to this day.

16 Originally a popular saying, literally translated as: “talk to make the bull asleep.”

17 Roughly translating as “backyard group,” *Fundo de Quintal* is a traditional Samba band from Rio de Janeiro, formed in the late 1970s and still in activity.

18 One of the most important names in Brazilian rap music, Mano Brown is leader of the iconic rap group Racionais MC.

19 DJ in the *carioca funk* music scene.

20 Legendary Brazilian percussionist, Naná Vasconcelos (1944–2016) had a stellar career, accumulating collaborations with names such as Egberto Gismonti, Milton Nascimento, Pat Metheny, B.B. King, and David Byrne, among many others.

21 Naná's solo debut, from 1971; the record title translates as “Africagod.”

22 Jocy's book, *Diálogo com cartas*, compiles 120 letters written to her by some of these prominent creators of the 20th century—*Prêmio Jabuti de Literatura 2015*, also published in France by *Honoré Champion* under the title *Dialogue avec mes lettres*.

23 Luís Gama (1830–1882) was a Brazilian lawyer, poet, journalist and regarded as the major abolitionist in Brazil. Gama was one of the few black intellectuals in a time Brazil was yet to abolish slavery, having been a slave himself throughout his youth. Slavery was officially abolished in 1888, six years after Gama died of diabetes.

24 Black Brazilian pharmacist, journalist, and writer. José do Patrocínio (1853–1905) was co-founder of the *Brazilian Abolitionist Society*, along with Joaquim Nabuco (1849–1910), and wrote the “Manifest of the Abolitionist Confederation of Rio de Janeiro” (1883), among many other works.

25 Olly Wilson (1937–2018) was a black American composer and instrumentalist, renowned in the contemporary music scene. Wilson was responsible for the first ever conservatory program in electronic music, at Oberlin Conservatory.

26 Segment 4 from Jocy's opera *Kseni – a estrangeira* (2003–2006); its title translates as “no civilized woman would do that.”

27 Jocy's third opera, from 1993, it is the first work of a trilogy approaching questions of the feminine. In this one, Jocy explores the mythological figure of the “sacred prostitute.”

28 Translating as: “Barrel organ of life and death.”

MILFORD GRAVES AND BILL DIXON AT THE TOP OF THE GATE

Ben Hall

Milford Graves. Bill Dixon. Top of the Gate, as in above the Village Gate, Bleecker Street, 1984. The concert was arranged by Reggie Workman and was initially to be a presentation of Milford Graves solo, a performance in support of the Jesse Jackson presidential campaign. We ended up with Reagan. Dixon, recounting this to Ben Young: “Graves was going to do a drum solo, but I said, ‘I’ll be there, why don’t we do a duet?’” It was that casual in its genesis.

The outcome was a presentation of the oceanic and the particular. Both men are deeply and uniformly engaged in the ritual of holding spacetime together—the two of them here like surrounded gunfighters, back to back, trying to find a way, finding a way. Spacetime is often referred to as an explanation for how the universe appears: motion through space creating alterations in the flow of time. Most time, the flow of time continues uncaptured, unrecorded, and unmeasured. The Dixon/Graves Top of the Gate recording is one small moment—a field recording almost, or maybe a recording of the universe—of two beings identifying themselves as segments of spacetime and articulating their own shapes just enough so that we may distinguish them individually out of all the other things occurring in the cosmos in that moment of time, which of course is all the moments of time.

This recording is like overhearing a conversation wherein every word carries equal importance, density, and dimension. Milford and Bill were both talkers, lots of talking and lots of laughs, laughing, and laughter. You can see it with half the band on the back cover of *Bill Dixon Live in Italy Volume 1* (Soul Note, 1980). However, the brightness and fun that you would experience with Bill in person is not evident on any recording I’ve ever heard, excepting this one. Which, in this case, is not so much his joyousness as his playing and its relationship to Milford’s joy.

Bill was the epitome of serious, and seriousness pervaded “the work” or “the music,” as Stephen Haynes reminds us Bill called it. Seriousness is not a knock, not an indication of self-seriousness. He had seen the myriad ways in which Black expressivity was discounted and denigrated, so there was a high degree of “I’m taking this seriously. I have taken this seriously. I will continue to take this seriously, and consequently, you will need to take this seriously as well.” But taking one’s work and life seriously doesn’t mean that you can’t laugh and experience joy off-camera or off-stage. But again, this recording may be the only time we see Bill in close proximity to joy in “the work.”

It would be easy to classify each of them—by interview, by photo—Dixon as the pipe smoking academician, cardigans; and Milford as the vegetarian auto-didact rocking the dashiki. But they were both principally involved in an extremely finite and precise

pursuit: how to present their enormous, and enormously generative, intellectual property in such a way that they weren't uniformly discounted as humans in contemplation and execution of those tremendous gifts, not to mention the self-requirement to protect what they do from the most handsiest of stalker/assaulters (capital) which can glom on to any material—any being, whether commodifiable or not—and inhabit it fully, evacuating everything that makes a thing what it is, destroying its specific ontological being, and then leave behind an evacuated skin that is no longer a living thing. Capital as succubus. Both men realized this very early in their creative and expressive lives, and the result is the paucity of their recorded catalogs relative to their enormous creative output. They were enormously generous, but they weren't just giving it away for free because they understood capital is not a generative machine; it's a machine of negation, the negation of the individual and the negation of joy among other things.

That joyfulness that Milford Graves brought to many, if not all, of his performances (see the image of his face on the cover of *Bäbi* (IPS, 1977) for clarification) created a space of joy and thrill at The Top of the Gate that Bill takes to with such ease. Milford's framing totally recategorizes the way you hear Bill Dixon. The framework is the propulsion of joy as opposed to the propulsion of time, meter, and orchestration.

By the time I established a relationship with Bill and Milford—between 2000 and 2004—they had not been down with each other for many years. As a consequence, I couldn't get word one out of either of them about anything other than basic institutional candor. It's a bit like asking someone about their ex, like: "Tell me about all the good times you had. I want to know EVERYTHING." Obviously, they were mum; I received neither myth nor gossip from either of them. But you have to understand, they were the only Black people in the town of Bennington, Vermont. These two spheres of intelligence, knowledge, embodiment, and even the music library told no tales of their relationship. I was desperate, so so desperate, to obtain the knowledge they possessed and had been dispensing for 30+ years. But my timing was off. I arrived late, and by the end of my time in Vermont, it felt very much like being the child of divorced parents: "But, I love you both equally."

Their reticence to pull out the yearbook didn't stop me from asking, annoyingly asking: "Where are the recordings? How did it work? Was it ever in groups? If you played all the time, WHERE ARE THE RECORDINGS?" In my brain I said over and over: "Where the fuck is the recording that, as I imagine it, will be a map to my own future?" Top of the Gate is the map I was searching for.

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Bill and Milford both taught at Bennington College for 30+ years. In April 1974, Bill composed a letter to the administration of Bennington College titled, "Statement of Intents and Purposes With Regards To Being A Division among Divisions at Bennington College." At the beginning of the sixteen-page sermon, he states, "For those who would raise the old argument as to why it is not a part of the regular music situation here at Bennington College, the reasons are too numerous to go into, but it can be said that the necessity for there being two separate divisions rests with the structure and philosophy of the college and was not invented by the people currently teaching Black Music. The current music faculty, with two exceptions, has rationalized their position by declaring that (1) there is no such thing as Black Music, (2) if there were such a thing they themselves could not teach it because they don't know what it is."

I include this excerpt to elucidate the necessity and preoccupation with seriousness and protectionism. This isn't ruffled feathers and ego, peacocking and self-seriousness, this is the very close-quarter questioning of legitimacy and invisibilizing that both men were actively responding to in both art and career. Bill, as a consequence of constant restatement of the legitimacy and individuality of Black Music, was able to provide paychecks, pensions, vision, safety, and collaboration to Milford, Arthur Brooks, Nadi Qamar, Charles Gayle, Jimmy Garrison, and Raphe Malik, to name just a few of the people who found a temporary home at Bennington as a consequence of Dixon's relentless placemaking inside the institution. Bill and Milford were there, by far, the longest, and this place-making and collaboration was what they were tasked with ten years prior to the Top of the Gate recording. Administrative and institutional spacetime.

I was particularly stalky with Bill, seeing him at the Hanafords, the North Bennington post office, but not yet introducing myself. Listening to both *Intents and Purposes* (RCA Victor, 1967) and *November 1981* (Soul Note, 1982), I understood/you understand that Bill had a deep desire to add/use/utilize a certain sort of leaping, loping, academically angular boogaloo with which he could breathe his half-time floats and feints over. I thought I could be the leaper and loper, provide those surfaces for him to float on. He loved a deep, swirling rhythmic complexity. He often positioned himself as wind above a churning sea. I wanted to know how to do this. How to respond to this.

This duo with Milford is at the dead center, timewise, of Bill Dixon's research into the two-bassist-and-drummer-quartet architecture that is emblematic of perhaps his most engaging and expansive compositional research. Putting Milford in a position to occupy all three of those roles makes total sense: that's what he

wanted to do anyway—all the time—and the forward propulsion to the Top of the Gate is unparalleled in Milford's catalog.

They are spheres, planets, the concept of the worthy constituent personified. Neither of them looked back for a nostalgic kind of future that composed the present. They just kept articulating spacetime.

There is a quality of finding a part of the archive you didn't know existed that both completes the picture and makes said picture more arresting. It gathers and cinches the complexity. That cinching of complexity is like remastering a recording, bringing out the frequencies that you couldn't hear before or in this case hadn't ever heard before. This is a performance that all other Milford duos have to be measured against for total clarity. Bill is so far off into his own thing on this recording that the closest previous Milford duo to measure it against is with Min Tanaka (Bennington College, 1993). So independent is Bill's playing and compositional methodology that it's almost as if he's making a different type of art, different than what came before or after. Like Charlie Parker, Bill and Milford both played TONS but there is no chaff. The elimination of waste and filigree gives us the clearest of visions of both men's methodology and execution even with the Xerox audio blur of the recording.

YARN/WIRE'S *CURRENTS* SERIES

Peter Margasak

One of the most maddening, self-destructive tendencies in contemporary classical music—for lack of a better term—is that new compositions are frequently created to keep the funding cycle spinning. There's money available to ensembles to commission new music, but too often a new piece is performed once and then it molds until it is forgotten. Pieces that would clearly benefit from repeated performances are given one, less-than-surehanded, account to fulfill the requirements of a grant. This process often guarantees that the work of a composer will reach very few listeners and that the performers haven't spent enough time with the music to really get to its essence. There are exceptions, of course, even when funding isn't the driving force of a commission. When an ensemble gets to perform a specific work repeatedly, they usually play it with more authority and depth, and more people get to experience it. Sound recordings and video of such premieres are common, but most of the time they function as mere documentation never put out into the world.

As a music journalist, it's frustrating to preview a concert when there's no way to know what the pieces will sound like. That will always be the case with a premiere, but why does it often take years before a new composition will get recorded and released. That long process rarely does anyone any good, occasionally calcifying a piece of music prematurely and robbing it of its energy in the real world. Classical music clings to its sense of tradition, but that means it can be incredibly slow. That's something the members of New York's Yarn/Wire were thinking about a decade ago, when the young ensemble was named artists-in-residence at Issue Project Room (IPR). The unusual two-piano, two-percussion line-up of the quartet, which formed in 2005, limited its potential repertoire, so the group—originally comprised of percussionists Russell Greenberg and Ian Antonio and pianists Laura Barger and Daniel Schlosberg—turned to friends and close colleagues to write it music. The group's terrific 2010 debut album, *Tone Builders*, included music by fellow New Yorkers, including Sam Pluta, Kate Soper, Alex Mincek, and Eric Wubbels of Wet Ink Ensemble—to which Antonio also belonged—along with a handful of other composers the group had gone to school with.

By the time of the Issue Project Room residency, the quartet was looking to expand its repertoire. They began reaching out to composers outside of their immediate orbit, and that first year found them performing new work created by and in collaboration with Pete Swanson, Nathan Davis, Tristan Perich, Elizabeth Adams, Christopher Burns, Andrew Nathaniel McIntosh, Tyondai Braxton, and Peter Evans. People like Braxton, Swanson, and Perich existed on the periphery of new music, if they didn't dwell outside of it al-

together, and that eagerness to push beyond convention and tradition became a hallmark of Yarn/Wire.

The following year, the ensemble began thinking about the music it had developed and performed at IPR. “After seeing and hearing our documentation, it became clear that an outgrowth of the type of activity that we did at Issue [Project Room] could continue, but we wanted to expand its reach,” says Greenberg. “People could be into it. Here is where the *Currents* concept came into being.” He cites the ongoing series of documentation from Germany’s prestigious Donaueschingen Festival released by Col Legno as a key inspiration for disseminating Yarn/Wire’s work. “You could hear live premieres on CD of composers at various parts of their career,” he says, explaining that he first heard the music of future Y/W collaborator Enno Poppe through the series. “We wanted to get music out into the world quicker than the process would be if we searched for a label, went to a studio, pressed it, and distributed it.”

At the time, Bandcamp was beginning to gain traction as a significant platform for digital music, breaking down resistance to non-physical media for classical listeners. “It was the perfect platform for DIY audio distribution (like a virtual amoeba almost),” says Greenberg. “The goal was never to make money, so having streams be free was great. It served a dual purpose—getting the music out there and eliminating a paywall.” In 2013 the quartet—which by then included pianist Ning Yu following stints by Schlosberg and Jacob Rhodebeck—returned to IPR for the 2013–14 season, where it premiered a number of new commissions, all of which were recorded. “In the next few months as we were coming up with the next batch of commissions, it became clear to me that there could be some sort of framework that tied this sort of activity together. It was like: ‘Why are we doing these commissions, and do they live beyond the premiere moment since not many other groups can currently play them?’”

In March of 2015, all of that work and brainstorming yielded the first installment of the *Currents* series, featuring music by Thomas Meadowcroft, Marianthi Papalexandri, and Christopher Trapani which had been performed at Issue in 2013 and 2014. The three pieces were free to stream or download, and a CD-R with a simple but elegant cardboard slipcase was sold to those who preferred physical media. “The discs would be documents of our commissioning activities,” explains Greenberg. “With the exception of a few works, all of these pieces were funded by Yarn/Wire’s budget without external support.” Two more volumes followed that same year, featuring exciting work by Ann Cleare and Øyvind Torvund (Vol. 2) and David Bird, Sam Pluta, and Mark Fell (Vol. 3), with some of the material continuing to push against new music orthodoxy. In fact, the span of the project has seen a subtle erosion of

such lines throughout the contemporary music world, as musicians affiliated with experimental music have become increasingly involved in writing for new music ensembles, whether it’s Dev Hynes (Blood Orange) developing work for Third Coast Percussion or Jeff Parker writing for Ensemble Dal Niente.

Still, Y/W are committed to experimentation, focusing primarily on younger, lesser-known composers, even if an Alvin Lucier commission turned up on Vol. 4. Catherine Lamb, Michelle Lou, Olivia Block, Sarah Hennies, Klaus Lang, and Anthony Vine are the other composers whose music fills out the series, and in 2017 the group released three pieces on Vol. 0, retroactively sharing music they performed during that initial residency at IPR by Tyondai Braxton, Peter Evans, and Nathan Davis. More recently they’ve begun sharing video of some of those performances on its Bandcamp page. As with so many artists, the pandemic stifled and delayed planned work, and the series has been quiet since Vol. 6 was released in March of 2020. (The group launched its online series “Feedback” during this period, creating an ongoing series of video interviews with composers and fellow musicians.) Still, not only have recordings of the past work made their way into the world quickly, but many of the works have been performed multiple times. Greenberg also adds that many of the pieces have forced the group—which now includes percussionist Sae Hashimoto replacing Antonio and pianist Julia den Boer joining the fold for the current season—to adapt and grow.

“I remember Ann Cleare’s piece was a total new world that it took us a while to conquer,” he says, “Not only musically, but aesthetically and technically.” The group is in the planning stages with the next two volumes of the series, which includes new commissions from Zeno Baldi, DM R, Victoria Cheah, Paul Pinto, Sarah Davachi, and Kelley Sheehan. Of course, the *Currents* series is just one thread of Yarn/Wire’s work, which has recently included recordings of commissions by Annea Lockwood, Enno Poppe, and in January the ensemble saw the release of *Parallel Prints*, a daring work by Swiss composer Marcel Zaes. This spring the group will share more of its ongoing collaborations with Andrew McIntosh.

Greenberg remains enthusiastic about *Currents*, with a host of performances optimistically slated for 2022. But there are bigger ramifications to the work. “I think the fact that the project is entirely self-driven means we don’t have anyone to blame but ourselves for who we commission. There’s a danger in that, to be sure, but what’s the fun of playing music that people tell you to play? Also, while not explicitly stated in the past, this is a vehicle that we can use to have conversations about what contemporary music is, who is ‘allowed’ in, and all those kinds of issues.”

THOUSAND YEAR DREAMING

A continuing conversation
between Annea Lockwood and
Nate Wooley

I have been working with the composer Annea Lockwood for five years. We collaborated on the solo trumpet work, *Becoming Air*, for the second edition of my For/With Festival. (A recording came out alongside her work with Yarn/Wire called *Into The Vanishing Point* on Black Truffle in 2021.) The preparation of that piece is ongoing, and we regularly get together to take part in the process of nurturing its sound together.

During this time, we have also Talked—that capital “T” is intentional. Talking deeply, comparing ideas, chatting, catching up, shooting the breeze: these are points on a spectrum of our working together. And after multiple performances of *Becoming Air*, we still somehow find a reason to be on the phone together about once a month. The conversations range from the breezy (How was that festival?) to things more difficult (I’m so sorry. That must be so tough.) These are treasured and personal moments, but the joy we take in speaking is not limited to phone calls or in-person lunches. We have been lucky enough to be able to have some of our chats in front of audiences as well: public discussions at Café Oto in London and Chicago’s Frequency Festival and a printed conversation for the most recent volume of John Zorn’s *Arcana* series.

Annea and I had been talking about a recent performance of her 1974 piece *Spirit Catchers* on the phone, and it prompted me to dig a little deeper into different eras of her work. During one of our monthly calls, I brought up the idea of another public discussion, this time in *Sound American*. Annea happily agreed, and we went right back to talking about what we’d been reading lately. And when we met a week later via Zoom for this interview, we started right where we had left off on the phone, doing what we do best: Talking.

- Nate Wooley

AL I can tell you—in terms of jumping right in—that I just ordered Nan Shepherd’s *The Living Mountain*.

NW You did? Had you read it before?

AL No. I hadn’t even heard of her. You’re my Library of Alexandria.

NW Ha! Well, that’s actually perfect way for us to start, and I’ll tell you why. I found a CD of *Thousand Year Dreaming*¹ at work and had it on while I was making dinner last night. I was reading some bits that I particularly love from *The Living Mountain* while waiting for something to boil. There’s this passage where she describes the different ways that snow plays with ice and wind.² It struck me that what you had made sonically was a perfect representation of that exact scene Shepherd was describing in “floating in mid-air.”

AL Oh, that's the movement with the very floaty gong rolls.
 NW Yes, and it exemplified the feeling of environment in your work. There are "ecological" composers that consciously aim to recreate an image of nature, but your work has a different, more abstracted but deeper, quality to it, and I want to talk about that. Around the same time, I was rereading this essay by Charles Olson about projective verse. Essentially, he's proposing a practice where you build a field of all the things that you're interested in, and then you proceed in the form of an energetic exhale built upon the material you've amassed. It's the human aspect of making the thing that makes it exciting opposed to music having a theme and variations architecture that you're going to fit your melodies and harmonies into.

AL Do you think people who are any good ever really did it that way? Those forms are not cookie cutters.

NW No, but I think in listening to *Thousand Year Dreaming* I found it to have the same projective exhale, so I wondered if we can talk about the process of making that piece.

AL So maybe the easier place for me conceptually to start would be to talk about the history of *Thousand Year Dreaming* and then go on into talking about fields, which is a vague concept to me but will become less so as we keep talking.

First of all, did you get the two horses [from photos of Lascaux cave paintings]?

NW I did.



AL The most exquisite horses—absolutely beautiful. I wanted you to have those fresh in mind. I mean, one can say to somebody: "Oh, you know those Lascaux cave paintings," and the person you're talking to has some sort of residual memory of having seen some, but I wanted you to see how alive they are, how beautiful they are as we talk about the piece.

So, *Dreaming*. I have to work my way into it, so it'll be a bit pedestrian to begin with. I think it started with me and [trombonist] Art Baron and [percussionist] N. Scott Robinson sitting in a car coming back from Staten Island after having worked together on *Nautilus*. We were adding up how many people we knew in New York who played didgeridu in one fashion or another. I'd heard a couple of Indigenous Australian players in London years before, playing together, and what a rich sound that was. The didgeridu has long felt to me like the sound of the core of the planet somehow; one could say it's the way it pulses, just the way magma pulses, for example, but nothing that literal. It just feels like the core-sound for the whole planet.

Then, Charles Wood and John Kennedy asked if I'd like to take on a commission for the presenting organization they were running at the time [Essential Music]. I said yes, of course [laughs] and started thinking about who I'd like to add to the didgeridus. I don't know how I got to those instruments; they seemed obvious somehow. I needed percussionists. I always need gongs. [laughs] And I knew that [multi-reedist] JD Parran would be super. I love contrabass clarinet, just love it. And I love oboe. I wasn't initially thinking of [oboist] Libby Van Cleve because I didn't know her. I initially was talking to another oboist, but it wasn't quite gelling. Somebody mentioned Libby, we met, and she's very much my sort of person—and a superb musician. Libby got into it, and [trombonist] Peter Zummo, John Snyder brought a waterphone to the mix, Charles Wood, N. Scott Robinson and Eric Kivnick on percussion, John Gibson on didgeridu, and the band sort of, well, assembled.

Art and Scott both played conch [shell] with real inventiveness, so the call-and-response opening just fell into place for me, for example. The next thing I remember was creating the sort of interactive solo lines in the second movement ["the CHI stirs"] for JD and Libby. In the third movement ["floating in mid-air"], I wanted a feeling of suspension. I think the titles for the movements were very clear by then; it was obvious that the second movement was the beginning

of fundamental, core motion stirring. I recall a strong, generating image of a great snake beginning to move. And that for me, at the time, was the Chi. I wanted that sense of suspension. The lovely experience of watching two large birds circling, slowly riding thermals in Glacier Park led to the trombone canon for Art and Peter which ends “floating in mid-air”. Yes, building a field—that’s it exactly.

I had met [*komungo* virtuoso and composer] Jin Hi Kim quite a few years before at one of the Telluride Composer-to-Composer events that composer Charles Amirkhanian and artist John Lifton programmed. I asked her to talk to me about how duration and periodicity were used in Korean court music—I listened to that music in London in the Sixties and thought it was exquisite, really interesting—so we talked a lot about extended durational and overlapping cycles. I started working with what she told me to create the beginning of “floating in mid-air,” and then the piece sort of moved from all those beginnings to assemble itself.

We worked for three months on *Thousand Year Dreaming*, putting it together, making it, rehearsing it. And nobody was getting paid for that—such generosity from these superb musicians. We were all rehearsing in John Snyder’s³ office—he had a day job—appalling acoustics, of course, but we didn’t have to pay for rehearsal space. So, for something like three months, we all got together on a fairly regular basis and gradually made the piece happen.

NW How did it come together in rehearsal?

AL It’s a fully scored piece, so I was bringing sketches to the rehearsals, as I recall, and pinning the scoring down as we worked. I’d have to look back through my notes.

NW That’s interesting because it doesn’t sound fully scored to me, but it also sounds like it could be. It could be *exasperatingly* scored, or it could just be a series of direction, and the musicians are asked to make good musical choices.

AL There are those passages—passages for improvisation. Scott’s improvising on frame drums for a significant part of one of the movements, and the four didgeridu players were improvising. There’s a whole section in performance where they move around the audience and place the end of the instrument up against somebody’s shoulder or leg or something. If you’d like a little sonic massage, you just indicate where, and they put the end of the instrument up against that body part, and you get a massage. That goes on for about ten minutes.

NW It’s difficult to pull off that balance of improvisation and composition, especially with a massage element!

Listening to you talk about how the piece was made brings me back to the idea of working from a field, whether we choose to use that term or not. It’s like that piece came out of a group of, not coincidences, but moments of action—moments of people coming together, exploring the sketches and possibilities. And even though it was then scored in a way that it could be reproduced by another group of people, it doesn’t feel like it was created merely for that reproducibility. That’s what triggered the connection to Olson and his idea of field. To me, that’s what he’s really talking about: ideas pop up; you follow one; it becomes something new and everything changes; and you follow a new idea. In the end you have a piece.

AL And that is my preferred way of working. It doesn’t apply to every piece, and there are pieces I’ve composed straight through, but the preponderance of my pieces are based on exactly what you’re saying.

There’s one more thing to say about *Thousand Year Dreaming*. I was interested to work with instruments which feel very old: primordial or original instruments. And the Lascaux images, like those I sent you, became attached, as invocations, to the piece very early on. In performance, they’re projected very large—two at a time—on the wall behind the players, so the musicians are seen *within* the images. It’s done in a very specific sequence, and the relationship between the two sets of projections is quite worked out. But still, I think the way you are defining field feels very natural to me.

NW I don’t mean to try and shoehorn what you’re doing into someone else’s idea. It struck me this week because that essay was on my mind, and I thought your music—all that I’ve heard and the piece that we’ve done together—is very much like that. For example, our piece *Becoming Air* continues to be a field from which we develop that specific music with each performance. And it also got me thinking about how your music tends to develop over longer stretches of time. You told me recently that you’re going back and performing *Spirit Catchers* again, for example, which reminds me that you have built work that can be revisited without becoming . . . what’s the word I’m looking for . . . repertoire. I’m not sure that’s quite right, but hopefully it makes sense: if you say we’re going to do *Spirit Catchers*—which is from 1974 if I remember right—that’s a much different feeling to me than playing an Elliott Carter piece from the same year.

AL Or somebody playing *Red Mesa*, which is a scored piano piece of mine from the late 80s.

NW So, what do you think the difference is?

AL I’m tempted to say that one is a process, and the other is a thing—a sonic object in a way—and I find process more

interesting than object. It's not a hard and fast thing, but it's a very definite preference. *Spirit Catchers* came out of my all-enveloping fascination with ancient sounds that came from studying trance music and ritual in the late 60s in London and goes back to *Tiger Balm*. In a way, I'm speculating that we have residual atavistic memories of rituals that may be triggered by hearing certain sounds—possible sounds. While I was looking into trance—which all comes out of my preoccupation with how sound affects our bodies and paying attention to that—I kept coming across these references to “spirit catchers.” *Spirit Catchers* comes right out of that. As does *Tiger Balm*. As do a whole slew of pieces from around that time. And, ultimately, *Thousand Year Dreaming* comes out of it, too, for sure. There was a lovely and powerful moment in which, just before the musicians all went out into the space at St. Peter's Church [NYC] for the first performance, Peter Zummo held up for us one of the Lascaux bull images—an invocation.

NW What was behind the decision to start performing *Spirit Catchers* again?

AL Oh, Ilan Volkov.

NW He's behind many good decisions. [both laugh]

AL He's a lot of things! I think back when he did Tectonics with the BBC Scottish Orchestra in Glasgow, I suggested *Spirit Catchers*. I knew he wasn't going to be able to give us much rehearsal time, and that is a piece that dies if you rehearse it too much. Basically, you get used to the mic placement, hearing your voice, and ignoring everyone else, and that's it. Then you perform it. It didn't fit his programming then, but he remembered it. And so, when he asked me to come to the Athens Tectonics this year, he asked if I'd like to do *Spirit Catchers*, and it seemed like it would be really fun to revive it. I learned a lot from redoing it.

NW What did you learn?

AL The most mundane of things. He asked me to be a participant, which I had never done before—I'd always done the mixing—so I learned that, even as a participant, one has to get up, stop participating, go over to the mixing board where the mixer is working, and listen to the levels! Oh, man, after all these years! [laughs]

A curious thing tends to happen with *Spirit Catchers*, which I did frequently in the 70s. What people are recalling, the imagery that they're bringing up and so on, tends to converge. They're not specifically listening to each other—that would pull them out of their personal memory space—but

I presume that they're hearing enough to naturally come together. Maybe not. In any case, it's a magical thing to observe when it happens.

There are these wonderful rhythms involved, which is the other thing that got me doing *Spirit Catchers* in the first place. I call them “rhythms of memory.” As one's memory begins to operate, and you're searching for an image or searching for a connection or just searching for a memory, the voice moves slowly. Right? And when what you're searching for is suddenly coherent in your mind, then the voice accelerates. You naturally get this lovely sort of rhythm of slow pace-accelerating pace-dreaminess-vitality-back to slow pace.

NW I think it's as close as we get to being naturally poetic. It takes a lot of energy to stay within the rhythmic structure of a poem. They say even within the ancient epics that were spoken, many of the epithets and lines were ubiquitous phrases that the speaker would insert to make the rhythm fall in line. But there is something about that kind of memory-speech you're talking about that gets one close to a naturally rhythmic poetic flow. Whether that puts you in iambic pentameter doesn't matter; you're creating a speed and a rhythm and a flow that has a natural poetry to it.

AL And it's lovely to hear it happening. We should do *Spirit Catchers* together.

NW I would love to experience it from the inside as a participant or the outside as an audience member! I'm fascinated by that piece. Did you find that people had a different relationship to objects in 2021 than they did in the 70s when you wrote that piece?

AL It's not the sort of comparison I could make. If you're wondering whether there was more interest in spiritual traditions back then, that's probably true, but I don't know that it fed through into the piece. But is that what you were getting at?

NW In a way, but I was thinking more about the objects themselves: the spirit catchers. I, for example, have noticed that my attachment to certain objects—books for sure—has gotten deeper than it has been in the past. My experience is not as deep as you're asking of participants in *Spirit Catchers*, but I wondered if there was a similar effect in the way that people were viewing the objects they chose for *Spirit Catchers* now.

AL I can't predict that, but I don't think so.

NW It's a lot to ask, but it's just something that came to me.

AL It's an intriguing thought.

NW I noticed that I'm more attached to certain things in the house. Two years ago, I would take a book with me to read on tour

and just leave it at a hotel, or on the seat of a train, for someone else to read. Now, I really hoard books because my experience with them has become such a profound part of daily life.

AL I'm taking books to the local library's little store by the bundles, but there are many books I couldn't imagine parting with. And then that picture is a little complicated for me because I'm surrounding myself with—and have for the last two years—objects connected to my life with Ruth⁴ for the most obvious of reasons: I can feel that she's still there in some form or another. So it's not such a straightforward question. But anyway, for that reason, among others, I'm doing just the same thing.

NW I think we probably all do it to one degree or another. Even if we get rid of those things, we're engaged in some sort of practice of recognizing them as having an important part of our lives. The choice to get rid of them is still just as heavy.

1 Annea Lockwood, *Thousand Year Dreaming/floating world*, Pogus Productions, 2017.

2 "Loose snow blown in the sun looks like the ripples running through corn. Small snow on a furious gale freezes on the sheltered side of stones on a hilltop in long crystals; I have seen these converge slightly as the wind blows round both sides of the stones . . . Or the wind lifts the surface of loose snow but before it has detached it from the rest of the snow, frost has petrified the delicate shavings in flounces of transparent muslin." Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain* (p. 33)

3 Snyder plays didgeridu and waterphone on the recording.

4 Ruth Anderson. A pioneering electronic artist in her own right, Ruth and Annea were partners since the 70s. Annea wrote a beautiful and intimate remembrance for New Music Box in 2019, the year Ruth passed away. <https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/hearing-a-person-remembering-ruth-anderson-1928-2019/>

2021 PART TWO

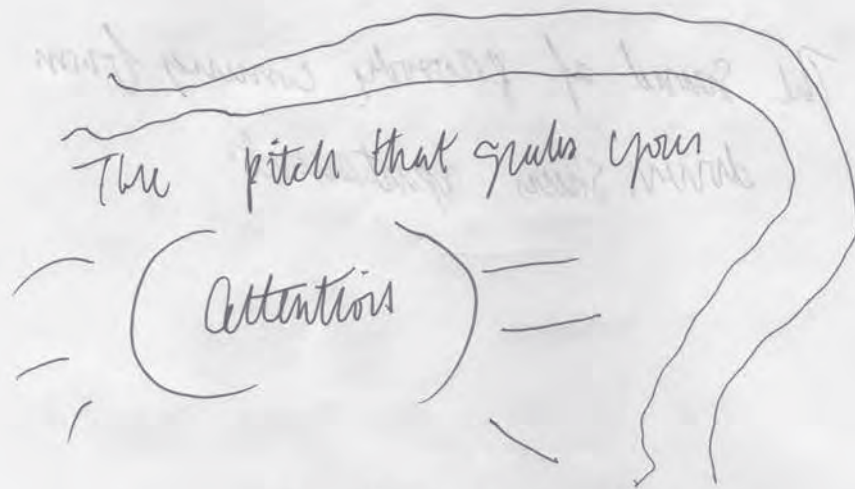
Composer: Jules Gimbrone

Originally based on the parlor game *Consequences*, in which texts were assembled by guests without seeing (due to creative folding) what previously was written, *exquisite corpse* has become an important source of collaboration and creative experimentation for surrealist writers and artists such as André Breton, Joan Miró, Tristan Tzara, and Marcel Duchamp. These artists used a form of the game as a way of assembling visual and textual ideas into a form that they could not have foreseen and, therefore, had very little control over. Some of the results were astounding, others less so. Every result, however, was something new.


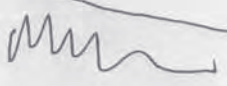
Sound American's version of *exquisite corpse* adds a few twists in keeping with our milieu and mission. Each cycle, three composers will collaborate on a short work specifically for SA, to be published in that cycle's journals. One artist will go first, passing on a set of information to the next who, in turn, will add, subtract, and change that information to create a new version of the piece before passing it on to the third, who will create a "final" take on the composition. The readers of *Sound American* will get to watch the whole process as it occurs as each version will be reproduced in subsequent issues.

We're very pleased to have Jules Gimbrone as our second composer for this round of *exquisite corpse*. Their work, *An Attention Equation*, brings Ka Baird's original concept back from the outdoors and into an intimate and inner space.

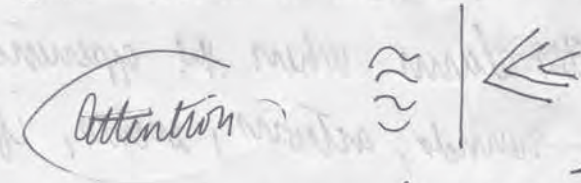
AN ATTENTION EQUATION



Sound as warning

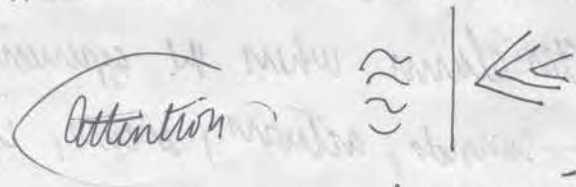
Baby crying, Screams 
Siren, Tapping, Horn 

Imagine being in this open space where you are confronted with a sound that oscillates between warning and soothing. This shift between a sound that soothes + a sound that alarms is the best way to sustain



This experience is dictated by proximity to the sound, expectation, and perceptual appetite. → a concept of
The pitch being sung is very different than the pitch being played through loudspeakers.

Imagine being in this open space
where you are confronted with a
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This experience is dictated by proximity
to the sound, expectation, and
perceptual appetite. → a concept of
The pitch being sung is very different
than the pitch being played through
loudspeakers.

With tolerance

The alarm stops being an
alarm

This can create a cycle of ~~alarm~~
of accepting
anything

We are animals that adapt. Like all the
most prolific creatures of this earth.
And such, this ability to adapt has
been an evolutionary advantage.

"I just stopped hearing it"

Alarm!!!!

Soothing

Alarm!!!

Soothing

Alarm!!

Soothing
alarm!

soothing

alarm

soothing
alarm

soothing

alarm

soothing

alarm

soothing

alarm

soothing

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soothing

alarm

soothing

alarm

soothing

alarm

soothing

alarm

soothing

alarm

soothing

alarm

soothing

- There are a series of "rooms"

- These rooms can be physical spaces, or can be sonic rooms.

- The listener will walk from one room to the next.

- In each room there will be a source that will be the same for the next room.

- While the source will stay the same, the sounds emanating from this source will change between 1st + 2nd room.

- This change is between "alarm" and "soothing" the

- As the listener walks through the rooms there will be increasingly "blended" where alarm + soothing combine

Source = lion

Room 1 (Alarm)

Room 2 (Soothing)

Audio playing
the sound of
many lions

"GROWLING"

audio playing
the sound of
many lions
"PURRING"

Source

Alarm

Soothing

Bulky

Crying / Wailing

Cooing / Laughing

Proximity of
human

Yelling at someone

Laughing w/
someone

Adult

Congruent / Choking

Lightning

Boat

Weather

Lightning
Crack

Light
Rain

Singing

ensemble

loud +
distorted +
staccato

long
tones

These are only examples!
Could be developed with
space / ensemble

- Louis Armstrong: *The Complete Hot Five & Seven Recordings* (Sony, 2000)
- Ben LaMar Gay: *Open Arms to Open Us* (International Anthem, 2021)
- Ben LaMar Gay: *Downtown Castles Can Never Block The Sun* (International Anthem, 2018)
- Lou Harrison: *Four Strict Songs* performed by the Louisville Orchestra and the Choir of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Davis Bingham, soloist (First Edition, 1958)
- Matthew Welch: *The Favrite Opalescence* (Kotekan, 2020)
- Matthew Welch: *A New Com-pleat Theory For The Highland Bagpipes* (Kotekan, 2020)
- Eva Salina Primack: *LEMA LEMA: Eva Salina sings Šaban Bajramović* (Vogiton Records, 2016)
- Eva Salina Primack: *SUDBINA: A Portrait of Vida Pavlović* (Vogiton Records, 2018)
- Shabaka Hutchings: *Black To The Future* (Sons of Kemet) (Impulse!, 2021)
- Shabaka Hutchings: *Trust In The Lifeforce Of The Deep Mystery* (The Comet Is Coming) (Impulse!, 2019)
- Poetra Asantewa: *The Anatomy Of A Paradox* (Self-Released, 2019)
- Poetra Asantewa: *Motherfuckitude EP* (Self-Released, 2015)
- UMLILO: *Mpumi* (Future Kwaai, May 2022)
- Other music of UMLILO's can be found on their Spotify channel: <https://open.spotify.com/artist/14oq8TIMDzq12ttQldKoow>
- Peni Candra Rini: *Sekar* (Self-Released, 2014)
- Peni Candra Rini: *Bramera* (Self-Released, 2010)
- Cergio Prudencio: *6 Electro-acoustic Compositions* (CANTVS, 2007)
- Cergio Prudencio: *Hay que caminar sonando* (with OEIN) (Fundación Otro Arte, 2010)
- Marcioz: *DE/COLONIAL WRITING\$* (jovendeu\$, 2020)
- Marcioz: *MULATO TRAGIDY* (jovendeu\$/Nurtured Ideas, 2019)
- Jocy de Oliveira: *A Música Século XX de Jocy* (Discos Nada, 2021)
- Jocy de Oliveira: *Estórias para voz, instrumentos acústicos e eletrônicos* (Soundohm, 2017)
- Bill Dixon and Milford Graves: *Top of the Gate, 1984* (YouTube)
- Ben Hall: *Weight/Counterweight* (with Bill Dixon and Aaron Siegel) (Broken-research, 2009)
- Ben Hall: *The New Favorite Thing Called Breathing* (Relative Pitch, 2018)
- Yarn/Wire: *Currents, Vols. 0–6* (Self-Released, 2015–2020)
- Annea Lockwood: *Becoming Air/Into the Vanishing Point* (Black Truffle, 2021)
- Annea Lockwood: *Thousand Year Dreaming/Floating World* (Pogus Productions, 2007)
- Jules Gimbrone: *Wrest* (Pack Projects, 2012)

POETRA ASANTEWA

Poetra Asantewa is a poet, writer, performer and designer. She's a storyteller who is committed to community. She is the founder of *Tampered Press*, a literary and arts journal for Ghanaians and Africans, and Black Girls Glow, a feminist nonprofit that fosters collaboration among black women creatives. She is the author of *you too will know me* and *Woman, eat me whole*.

PENI CANDRA RINI

Peni Candra Rini is the daughter of a master puppeteer from East Java Indonesia, and one of few female contemporary composers, songwriters, poets, and vocalists who performs *sinden*, a soloist-female style of gamelan singing.

JOCY DE OLIVEIRA

Jocy de Oliveira is a pioneer in the development of multimedia work in Brazil involving music, theater, installations, text, and video. She is the first among national composers to compose and direct her operas seeking to reformulate the conventional operatic format.

BEN LAMAR GAY

Ben LaMar Gay is a composer, cornetist, and improviser. His musical influences derive from his collection of experiences in all of the Americas and the gathered data channeled by technology and its amplifying accessibility. He is based in Chicago.

JULES GIMBRONE

Jules Gimbrone creates fragile corporeal sound and sculptural ensembles that highlight the differentiations between modes of perceptual acquisition—specifically visual and sonic—within complex and precarious arrangements of subjects and objects.

BEN HALL

Ben Hall is a composer, writer, and organizer. He was profiled by Fred Moten in the book *Black and Blur*. He is currently working on a feature length documentary on the drummer Roy Brooks.

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SHABAKA HUTCHINGS

Shabaka Hutchings is a multi-instrumentalist and composer based in London. His current touring/recording ensembles include Sons Of Kemet, The Comet Is Coming and Shabaka And The Ancestors. He has had commissioned works performed by BBC Concert Orchestra and London Sinfonietta and the Ligeti Quartet.

ANNEA LOCKWOOD

Annea Lockwood's compositions range from sound art and environmental sound installations to concert music. She is a recipient of the SEAMUS (Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States) Lifetime Achievement Award 2020, and was the honoree at the Issue Project Room Benefit in 2021.

PETER MARGASAK

Peter Margasak is a veteran music journalist who served as a staff writer for the Chicago Reader for more than two decades. He's currently writing a book about the cross-fertilization of Chicago's underground music scene in the 90s.

MARCIOZ

Marcioz is a composer and artist working in the field of electronic experimental music. Since 2015 he has been releasing multiple kinds of musical projects. He is also the founder of micro label, jovemdeu\$, and currently resides in Berlin.

ELENA MOON PARK

Elena Moon Park is a musician, educator, and producer living in Brooklyn, NY. She is a freelance violinist and multi-instrumentalist in NYC, specializing in contemporary classical and family music. She is also co-Artistic Director of the Brooklyn-based arts organization Found Sound Nation, which uses collaborative music creation to connect people across cultural divides.

CERGIO PRUDENCIO

Cergio Prudencio, composer, conductor, researcher, educator, and poet. His work is inextricably linked to the Orquesta Experimental de Instrumentos Nativos (OEIN) as founder and Director for 36 years. Guggenheim Foundation Fellow, President of Fundación Cultural del Banco Central de Bolivia, and Viceminister of Culture.

EVA SALINA PRIMACK

Eva Salina Primack is a mother, singer and teacher of traditional songs, cook, and aspiring gardener living in New York's Hudson Valley.

PAULO SARTORI

Paulo Sartori is a Brazilian composer, arranger, and multi-instrumentalist. He has worked with a wide range of acclaimed Brazilian artists whilst also maintaining an active participation in the independent music scene. Paulo is co-founder of Kriol, an ensemble that works at the fusion between Cape Verdean and Brazilian musical cultures. Sartori also writes and produces original music for television, cinema, and circus.

KYLA-ROSE SMITH

Kyla-Rose Smith is an acclaimed performer, violinist, and multimedia artist. She is also the programs director for the celebrated cultural exchange program OneBeat, where she programs and curates a yearly residency and tour for 25 global musicians, that takes place in various locations around the United States.

UMLILO

Intergalactic shape-shifting kwaai diva, Umlilo, is a genre and gender-bending multi-disciplinary artist in music, media, fashion, visual art, and performance. Umlilo is based in Johannesburg, South Africa.

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