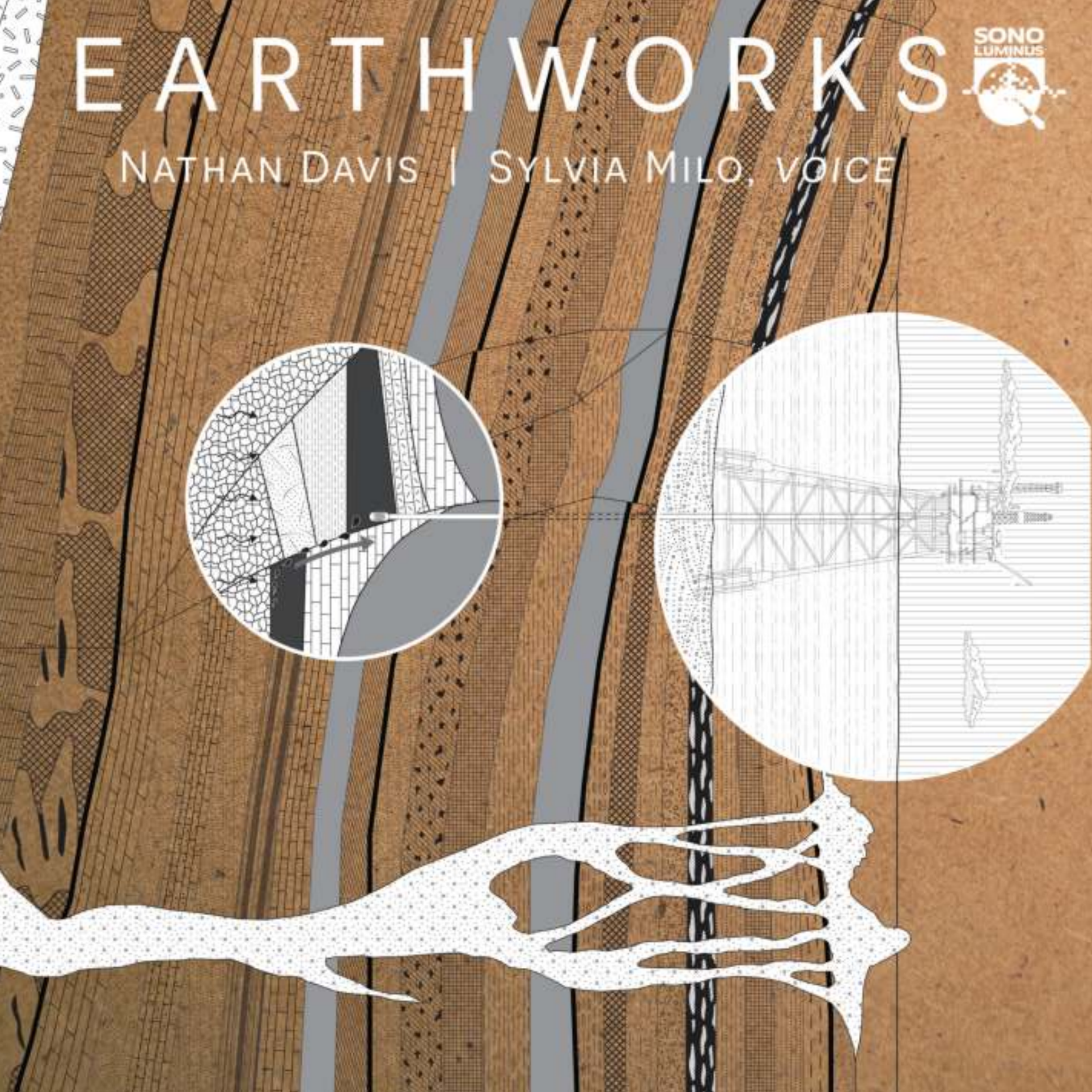
EARTHWORKS

SONO LUMINUS

NATHAN DAVIS | SYLVIA MILO, VOICE



Earthworks - Nathan Davis

Sylvia Milo, *voice*

1 Exposition	1:45
2 Circulation	8:42
3 Weathering	8:35
4 Erosion	5:50
5 Extraction	4:37
6 Installation	6:47
7 Regeneration	3:46
Total Time:	40:08

Composed in 2021

E A R T H W O R K S

Look around at the place you are right now — yes, now. Apartment, house, subway car, tool shed, office, wherever. Now imagine this place, with all its material elements and constituent parts, intertwined as they are, as *living*, with a circulatory system and a pulse. With an inner life, a memory, experiences and a story of itself to tell. Now listen.

Nathan Davis's *Earthworks* is a unique acousmatic piece, a 40-minute conceptual and musical love child of land art, environmental activism and music concrete in which the composer orchestrates the sonic outcome of the extraction, processing and use of common commercial materials of our contemporary built environment. It is an audio tapestry of drilling, fracking, stirring, slurring, scraping, cracking, popping and hammering, with the bright thread of one very intimate human voice woven through it.

This particular iteration of *Earthworks*, originally produced as a sound installation for the exhibit "*Planetary Home Improvement: From Just-in-time to Geological Time*", is immersive in nature — both a recording and a full-body experience, primordial and post-industrial. Davis collected field recordings of the raw materials and created a multi-channel sound environment using the materials themselves as speakers, soundboards, and resonators. It is *musique concrète* as composed through a big box store, and the effect it had on me was mysterious — compelling and even dreamy. A few times I pictured Morton Feldman walking through the enormous back aisles of a Home Depot — the "modern quarry" from which this work is drawn — with an *Earthworks*-like soundtrack running through his celestial head.

In experiencing Davis's work I often find that in addition to composing in the traditional sense, he is also coaxing and conjuring, often in nature, and often with the most basic elements — minerals, metals, stones, water, air. Much of the power of *Earthworks* derives from what the exhibition artists describe as "collapsing the ancient and the instant." Of its audience *Earthworks* demands close attention and attunement to the elements from which it arises.

I fully understand that there is a conceptual sophistication and technological mastery at work in pieces like this — it is experimental music for grown ups — but I think I'd do *Earthworks* a disservice by overintellectualizing the pleasures inherent in it. By this I mean that there is something childlike about the work. At least, this is least one of the responses it summoned in me.

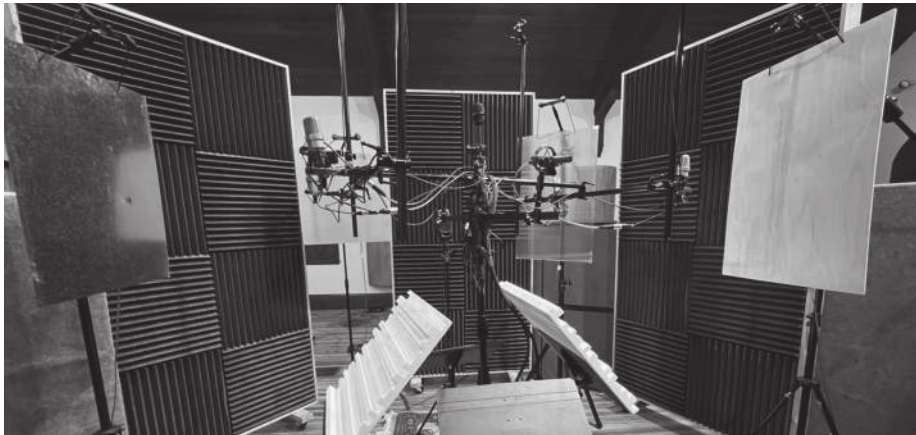
I experience these "lifeless" materials both talking amongst themselves and speaking to me. When Sylvia Milo begins the piece by intoning the names of these orchestral instruments — *Galvanized steel sheet. Foam insulation. Polycarbonate panel….* — each one followed by the sounding of its characteristic voice, I'm transported back to my early listening to *Peter and the Wolf*, when I first heard Boris Karloff introducing the cast of the tale by way of their instrumental voices.

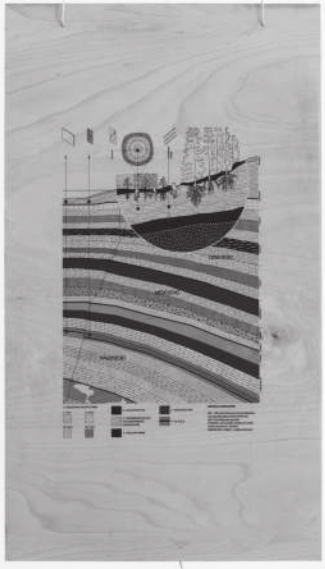
As a percussionist Davis possesses a deep attunement to materials and their sonic characteristics. But there are non-material aspects embedded here as well. In this case the political context of the work: it is a response to the industrial plunder of the planet. The experience of listening to these materials speak, hearing their breath and pulses, move us closer to an understanding of this, and to a relationship of awareness and reciprocity with the Earth, whose body we tear apart in order to achieve shelter or convenience, and whose riches we violently transmute into material for use.

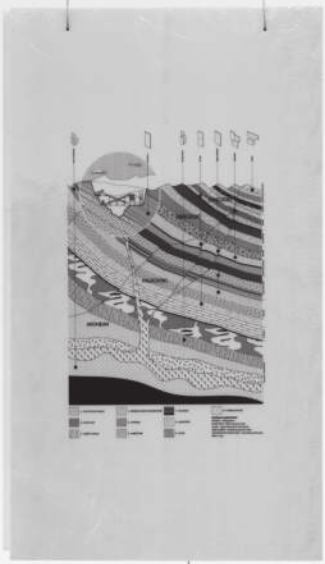
Ever since the story of Adam and Eve's ejection from the Garden, and certainly before, our human alienation from Nature has been the source of existential grief. Part of the task of poets, artists, philosophers, filmmakers, musicians is to restore us to this Edenic state, in which we are again in peaceful harmony with the Earth and its elements.

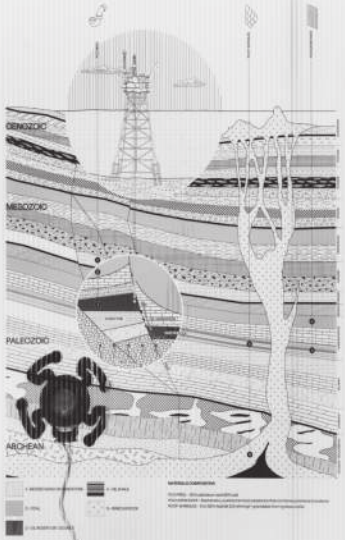
I hear *Earthworks* in this restorative tradition, inviting attention to the hidden, the buried, the sonic and subsonic. In turning this all into a sort of music, Davis has created a work that is not merely mournful or unsettling, but also ecstatic.

- *Peter Catapano*








CENOZOIC
MESOZOIC
PALEOZOIC
ARCHEAN

Nathan Davis (b. 1973) "writes music that deals deftly and poetically with timbre and sonority" (*NY Times*). His opera/ballet "Hagoromo" was produced by American Opera Projects and premiered at the BAM Next Wave Festival with the International Contemporary Ensemble, the Brooklyn Youth Chorus, choreographer David Neumann, and dancers Wendy Whelan, and Jock Soto. Lincoln Center presented the premiere of "Bells", a site-specific work for ensemble, multi-channel audio, and live broadcast to audience members' mobile phones.

Nathan received other commissions from GMEM and Ensemble CBarré (Marseille), FringeArts and the Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, Donaueschinger Musiktage (Germany), Yarn/Wire, Claire Chase, Ekmeles, Miller Theatre, Ojai Music Festival, the Calder Quartet, and Third Coast Percussion, with premieres at Tanglewood, Park Avenue Armory, Guggenheim Museum, and Carnegie Hall. His music has been released on Starkland, Infrequent Seams, Tundra, New Focus, and Bridge.

An Aaron Copland Fellow at the Bogliasco Foundation, Davis received awards and fellowships from the Camargo Foundation, New Music USA, NYSCA, Meet The Composer, Fromm Foundation, Jerome Foundation, American Music Center, MATA, and ASCAP. He and Phyllis Chen won an NY Innovative Theater Award for their score to Sylvia Milo's play "The Other Mozart", for which Nathan also received a Drama Desk nomination.

Also an active percussionist, Nathan has premiered hundreds of works by luminaries and by emerging composers, and he appeared as a concerto soloist on hammered dulcimer with the Seattle Symphony, Tokyo Symphony, and Nagoya Philharmonic. Davis holds degrees in composition and in percussion from Rice, Yale, and the Rotterdams Conservatorium on a Fulbright Fellowship.

NATHAN DAVIS

Originally created for the exhibition "Planetary Home Improvement: From Just-in-time to Geological Time", conceived by Christine Giorgio, Amelyn Ng, Gabriel Vergara, with Nathan Davis, commissioned by and installed at the VI PER GALLERY, Prague, December 2021 through February 2022.

Voiced by Sylvia Milo.

Text adapted by Christine Giorgio from instructional videos for DIY home improvement projects.

Instrumental samples were played by Nathan Davis.

Additional samples were played by Katinka Kleijn (cello): tracks 2, 3, 6, 7; Levy Lorenzo (percussion): 2, 3, 7; Josh Modney (violin): 2, 3, 7, and Joshua Rubin (clarinet): 2, 3, 7; all from the International Contemporary Ensemble and recorded at Target Margin (Brooklyn) by Maciej Lewandowski.

Field recordings were made in New York (NY), Woodstock (NY), the Calanques (France), and near Cascais (Portugal), except for extraction samples, which were sourced from www.soundsofchanges.eu and used in compliance with Creative Commons license 4.0.

All processing, editing, and spatialization by Nathan Davis.

Producers: Nathan Davis & Daniel Shores

Recording, Mixing, & Mastering Engineer: Daniel Shores

Artwork: "Planetary Home Improvement: From Just-in-time to Geological Time" - Gabriel Vergara

Photography: p.5 - Nathan Davis; pp.6/7 - Planetary Home Improvement: From Just-in-time to Geological Time; p.9 - Charlotte Dobre; Illustrations by Gabriel Vergara, mounted to speaker panels designed by Nathan Davis, photographed by Zdeněk Porcal (Studio Flusser), used by permission from VI PER Gallery (Prague)

Liner Notes: Peter Catapano

Layout: Joshua Frey

Executive Producer: Collin J. Rae

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