

Gamelan Alligator Joy

P e n u m b r a



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Total Time: 79:59

Recorded & mixed in 24/96

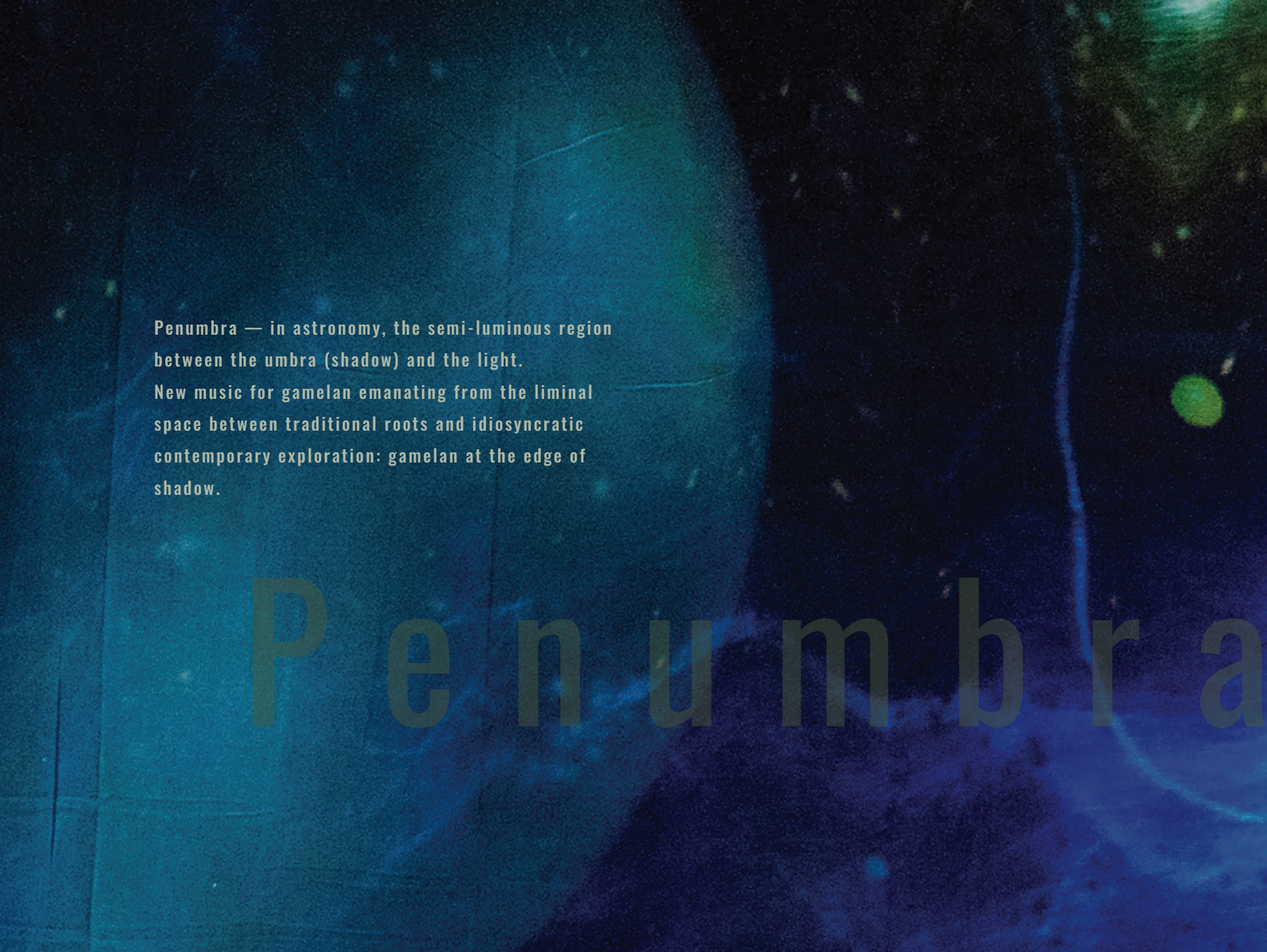
Compositions by Michael O'Neill, Mark Parlett, Sutrisno Hartana, Andreas Kahre & Sam Salmon.

Vancouver's Gamelan Alligator Joy continues in the tradition of its predecessor Gamelan Madu Sari with this program of new works for Javanese gamelan by members of the group. Ranging from purely instrumental pieces and a concerto for retuned piano to ventriloquial puppet theatre and a spoken-word meditation on death and transience, this program reaffirms the expressive potential of gamelan when East meets West in a whole-world context.



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Penumbra — in astronomy, the semi-luminous region between the umbra (shadow) and the light.

New music for gamelan emanating from the liminal space between traditional roots and idiosyncratic contemporary exploration: gamelan at the edge of shadow.

P e n u m b r a

All compositions SOCAN

Produced by Tony Reif and Gamelan Alligator Joy

Recorded and mixed by John Raham at Afterlife Studios, Vancouver
Mastered by Chris Gestrin at Public Alley 421

Design by Chelsey Maher

Cover photo (Gamelan Alligator Joy): Mickaël Labré

Photo of Michael O'Neill and Seamus: Sheng Ho

Performance photos of Ventriloquial Investigations: Tony Tsai

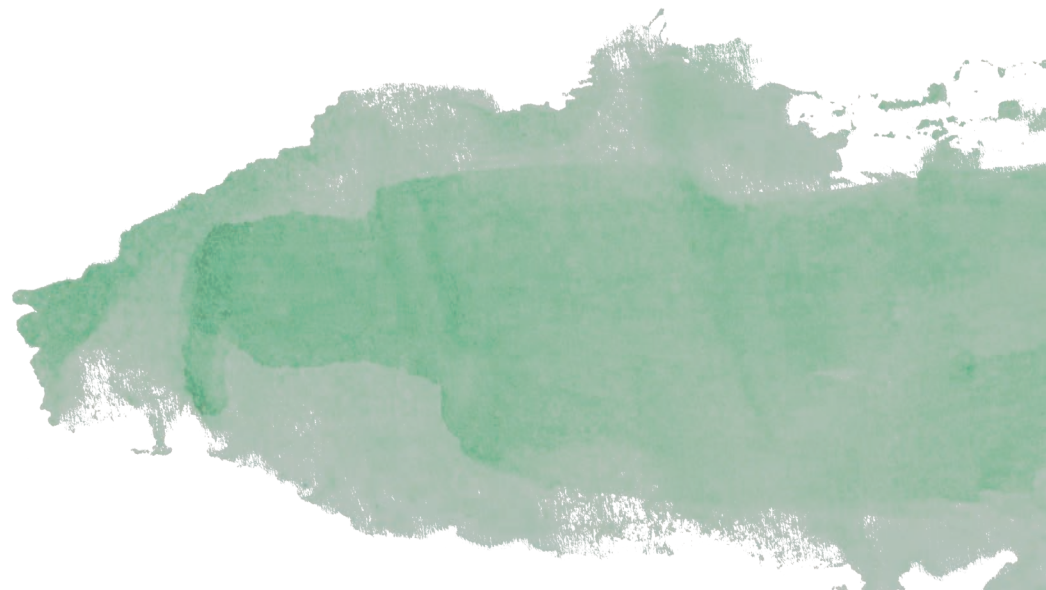
Thanks to John Raham for his dedication and great ears, and to the City of Vancouver for supporting the initial recording sessions.

Please visit gamelanmadusari.com for more info about the group and songlines.com for interviews with the composers.



Gamelan Alligator Joy (Gamelan Madu Sari reincarnate) is a Vancouver-based group of artists committed since 1987 to the study and performance of traditional and contemporary gamelan-based music, dance, theatre, shadow play and interdisciplinary works, including several collaborations with major artistic figures from Java and Bali. Seminal early performances included *The Gamelan Tempest* (music by British composer Alec Roth); Javanese *wayang kulit* (shadow theatre) with Blacius Subono, Sutrisno Hartana, and Midiyanto; and the first cross-Canada Gamelan summit in Toronto (1997). Two recordings of original compositions for Javanese gamelan, *New Nectar* (2004) and *Hive* (2010), were released on Songlines. In 2007-2008 we created *Semar in Lila Maya*, a cross-cultural interdisciplinary collaboration with the gamelan group Wargo Laras from Yogyakarta, featuring the legendary *dalang* (puppeteer) Ki Seno Nugroho; it toured in Canada and Central Java. In 2011 we produced Vancouver's first gamelan festival, *GONG! with Caravan World Music*, and between 2014 and 2018 the repertoire heard on this recording was workshoped and premiered.

Unlike Madu Sari, the full-sized Central Javanese gamelan heard on our previous recordings, Alligator Joy is basically a *gamelan gadon*, a type of ensemble with reduced instrumentation focusing on the elaborating instruments. Expertly smithed from high-quality bronze, it was commissioned and purchased by our group's first leader Martin Bartlett and arrived in Vancouver in 1990. It includes a single pair of *sarons* (loud-playing keyed metallophones), no *kempuls* (hanging gongs) or *kenongs* (individually racked pots), and in place of a *gong ageng* (large hanging gong) it has a *gong kemedong* (plate gong). Later we added *bonangs* (four sets of racked pots); other featured instruments include drums, *rebab* (fiddle), *gender* (soft-playing metallophone), *gambang* (wooden keyed instrument), *siter* (zither), and *sulings* (flutes). Several works also feature singing or spoken voice.



Bahureksa aka Kaili-Van-Java | Composer: Sutrisno Hartana (2018)

Bahureksa is a Javanese term, from *bahu* (shoulder) and *reksa* (to take care of things—spiritually and physically). According to the old religion of Java (and other parts of what is today Indonesia), many objects were considered to have soul and spirit, and these spirits needed to be taken care of, otherwise they could cause harmful imbalances and chaotic situations. In order to maintain *bahureksa*, everyone in the village made offerings and sacrifices, and this involved singing, dancing and performing music.

My composition is inspired by this spiritual work of maintaining *bahureksa* while exploring multiple layers of musical tradition, i.e. combining old and new, Eastern and Western musical practices in response to the current cultural hybridization in this globalization era. More specifically, I have added a new phrase, *Kaili-Van-Java*, which incorporates musical concepts from Palu, Central Sulawesi. Kaili is the name of a tribe in Palu who maintain their musical tradition using the *lalove* (long bamboo flute) for healing, as well as the *gimba* (drum), among other instruments. *Van-Java* refers to musical experimentation making use of our Javanese gamelan ensemble here in Vancouver. The piece features Javanese traditional song in the style of East Javanese *suluk*—mood-setting songs performed by a *dalang* (puppeteer) during a *wayang kulit* (shadow play)—as well as vocal chanting from Smiet Lalove, a descendant of the Kaili, in Central Sulawesi, and the interlocking of various instruments including percussion, drums, gongs, flutes, and *rebabs*.

Musicians: Ann Hepper (*bonang panerus*), Wendy Chen (*bonang barung*), Robe Dhewangga (*slentem, percussion, chorus*), Erica Regehr (*gambang, percussion*), Michael O'Neill (*gender barung, chorus*), Mark Parlett (*rebab, suling, kendang, chorus*), Peter Joon Park (*kenong, percussion*), Smiet Ilyas Abdul Hamid (*gimba, lalove, solo vocal*), Sutrisno Hartana (*kendang, gender, rebana, gambang, percussion, solo vocal*), Tegan Wahlgren (*gong, percussion*)

Sutrisno Hartana is an arts educator, ethnomusicologist, researcher of shadow puppet theatre in a global context, and Javanese performing artist—*dalang* (puppeteer), gamelan musician, and a composer who is deeply involved in creating new music for gamelan. He holds a doctoral degree in Interdisciplinary Studies (Art History and Visual Studies) from the University of Victoria, an MA in Ethnomusicology from the University of British Columbia, and a BA from the Indonesian Institute of Arts in Yogyakarta. In 2004 the King of Paku Alaman bestowed on him the title “Mas Lurah Lebda Swara,” making him a court musician at the Paku Alaman Palace in Yogyakarta. He first came to Vancouver in the mid-1990s, has toured and performed throughout Asia, Europe, and North America, and has taught gamelan at Simon Fraser University, UBC, and Ningbo University (China).

Guest instrumentalist and singer **Smiet Ilyas Abdul Hamid** (Smiet Lalove) is a well-

known musician/composer from Palu, Central Sulawesi who works to promote and sustain traditional culture and develop an international network of cultural activities. He performs internationally, collaborates with top composers/musicians from other parts of Indonesia, and was nominated best composer at the Indonesian National Performing Arts Festival held in Jakarta in 2016.

Dice Over Easy | Composer: Mark Parlett (2016)

Dice Over Easy quietly investigates the idea of musical options. As the title implies, an attempt at controlled chaos is in play: a notion of evolving surprise initiated by the performers who continually make small choices based around fixed figures, is featured prominently in the 3rd movement. This section features new variations on *imbak/sekaran* (a traditional Javanese type of hocketing) as well as the dice angle, which offers five options: a choice of a fixed figure, silence, variation on that set figure, the allowing of ‘dissonance’, and choosing a player to interact with in a free manner for a short duration. The function of the *suling* throughout the piece leans towards a call or a cry, as opposed to its usual role of ornamentation and filigree.

Utilizing traditional modes and transforming them into a unique harmonic language is a continuous exploration for me in my process. I have always been drawn to the ornate intricacy of batik patterning in the textiles of Java, as something one can gaze upon and constantly find new relationships there among fixed, repeating shapes. Rhythmically this piece frequently utilizes polyrhythmic layers and metres of odd lengths while hinting at middle eastern rhythms and lyricism.

I dedicate *Dice Over Easy* to all the amazing musicians, composers and innovators in the contemporary gamelan movement in Indonesia and throughout the world, who have been engaged for decades in the forging and creation of a new music genre which is now global with roots firmly planted in an ancient tradition.

Musicians: Michael O'Neill (*gender*), Wendy Chen & Peter Joon Park (*bonangs*), Ann Hepper (*slentem*), Sam Salmon (*gambang*), Mark Parlett (*sulings, kendangs, fretless bass*), Tony Reif (*saron*), Andreas Kahre (*electric cello*)

Mark Parlett is a composer/musician/performer involved in contemporary and traditional gamelan-based performance and a multi-instrumentalist (bass, percussion, flutes, strings) involved in contemporary jazz, improv, and interdisciplinary-based theatre. In 1986 he began his deep dive into the performing arts of Java and Bali, including studies at the Fine Arts Academy in Solo and many collaborations over the decades with top Indonesian performing artists there and in Vancouver. In particular he has had an ongoing engagement with *wayang* (shadow theatre) in its many manifestations. He has been with Gamelan Manu Sari/Gamelan Alligator Joy since the group's inception and was its artistic director from 1993 to 2008. He has

also performed and collaborated with international artists from various backgrounds and cultures. Mark currently resides on the west coast of BC on Gabriola Island.

96 Tiers | Composer: Sam Salmon (2014)

This piece pays homage to early minimalist composers. Each section or 'tier' (in reality there are only 12) has repeating phrases in factors totaling 96 beats. Tier 1 for example has a 6-note phrase repeated 16 times. The phrases become progressively longer, with tiers 5 and 6 being the longest: 24-beat phrases repeated 4 times. The exception is tier 9, which is in 5 and has 100 beats (a 20-beat phrase x 5). The final 3 tiers soon return to 6-note phrases, building to a dynamic finish. Quieter sections leave space for accompaniment on the ukelele, a bowed psaltery with zither strings introduced in the 1920s and meant to be a combination of violin and Hawaiian ukulele.

Musicians: Michael O'Neill (*bonang barung*), Peter Joon Park (*bonang panerus*), Ann Hepper & Tony Reif (*saron*), Sutrisno Hartana (*gender*), Mark Parlett (*slentem, rebab*), Sam Salmon (*gambang*), Wendy Chen (*gong, ketuk*), Andreas Kahre (*ukelin*)

Sam Salmon is a songwriter-instrumentalist who was part of the underground Vancouver rock scene in the 1980s and 90s. He has studied and performed Javanese gamelan since 1986, and is interested in sound sculpture and feedback systems performers can interact with. His previous gamelan piece *A Paisley Horse* was premiered by Gamelan Madu Sari in 2009.

Let N=N | Composer: Andreas Kahre (2014)

Let N=N is based on two lines of inquiry: What happens when players are working with a fixed rhythmic structure but are at liberty to choose pitches freely, and what are the timbral qualities of bronze gamelan instruments when played as hand percussion rather than with mallets? As for the latter, Javanese gamelan music often uses a layered approach to instrumental arrangements. For example, the *balungan* (main melody) is usually played rather loudly, while elaborating instruments play more quietly, but the use of mallets confines the overall dynamics to mostly a mezzo-piano to mezzo-forte range. In the effort to explore what lies beneath, I asked the players to use fingers only, and we discovered a world of difference in overtone ranges, damped versus open strokes and a different balance in the 'sonic hierarchy' of instruments. As to the former, I was curious what 'chords' would emerge when a score substitutes more and more pitches with a marker 'N' for 'aNy' pitch—not quite at random, not quite by design, and definitely outside of the conventional Javanese modal framework. This strategy also brought to mind Laurie Anderson's play on algorithmic parlance and epistolary convention, *Let X=X*, and suggested the title.

Musicians: Michael O'Neill (*gender*), Ann Hepper & Erica Regehr (*bonangs*), Sam Salmon (*gambang*), Mark Parlett (*rebab*), Tony Reif & Peter Joon Park (*sarons*), Wendy Chen (*gong, ketuk*), Andreas Kahre (*slentem*)

Andreas Kahre is a Vancouver-based interdisciplinary artist, musician and scenographer, whose work encompasses images, sound, and text in many different configurations. He studied visual art and art history at the University of British Columbia, and since the 1990s has collaborated on more than a hundred performance projects with theatre, dance and music ensembles across Canada, and presented work at festivals and exhibitions in Europe, Asia and the US. He is especially interested in sited installations and audio-based performance work, and he has created performances and installations that combine contemporary paper theatre, audio art and new media. Commissions have included scores for Gamelan Madu Sari, Standing Wave, and Deutschlandradio Kultur.

Mode of Attunement | Composer: Michael O'Neill (2018)

Mode of Attunement is an amalgamation of memories, recurring dreams, and radio transmissions perceived at the threshold of hearing and filtered by hypnagogic consciousness (especially CBC Ideas—Carlo Ginzberg, *The Cosmos of a 16th Century Miller: The Night Battles*), evoking a nocturnal journey in eleven sections: Gentle Fall into a Mysterious Lethargy, Caught Mid-Fall by an Updraught of Loneliness, Mode of Attunement, Ember Nights, Elevation by Concentration, Nocturnal Band, Drawback of Time Travel, Hovering at Uncanny Valley, Vantage Point of Rising Spirits, Flight over Jumpingpound, and Ember Days.

Acknowledgements: Canada Council for the Arts, Rory Cowal, Douglas Flemons (*Caught Mid-Fall...*), Carlo Ginzberg **Musicians:** Ann Hepper (*bonang barung*), Wendy Chen (*bonang panerus*), Michelle Cormier (*slentem*), Tegan Wahlgren (*saron*), Michael O'Neill (*ketuk, saron, slentem, gong*), Mark Parlett (*suling, rebab, kendang*), Erica Regehr (*gambang*), Peter Joon Park (*gender*) **Guest musicians:** Rory Cowal (*piano and tuning*), Deirdre Morgan (*jaw harp*)

Michael O'Neill is a Vancouver-based composer/performer, originally from Spruce Cliff, Alberta. Following Western classical music studies with Gilles Tremblay, Martin Bartlett, and Rudolf Komorous, Michael relocated to Vancouver. Owing to Vancouver's rich cultural milieu, much of his subsequent work is intercultural and/or intermedia. Witnessing a performance of Balinese *wayang tantri* (shadowplay) by I Wayan Wija led to studies of various gamelan forms with K. R. T. Wasitodiningrat (Pak Cokro), I Nyoman Wenten, Agus Partha, I Made Gerindem, and Kenneth Newby. Michael is a founding member of Gamelan Madu Sari, Alligator Joy, and Turtle Bliss.

Michael has also written works for bass clarinetist/composer Lori Freedman, poet

Sheri-D Wilson, Simon Fraser University Pipe Band, Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan, Karen Jamieson Dance Co., choreographer Crystal Pite, Uzume Taiko, and Vancouver Chinese Music Ensemble. In 2012 he created Beledrone, an eclectic ensemble of Scottish highland bagpipes, Balinese gamelan *baleganjur*, Ukrainian *bilij holos* singing, chorus (when the instrumentalists sing), and viola. Recent intermedia works include **Ventriloquial Investigations**, with Sammy Chien, projections; and **Show on Earth: Wallace Line and Deep Time**, a *wayang* (shadowplay) for Gamelan Turtle Bliss, with string trio, and projections.

Peregrinations in Palindromnia | Composer: Mark Parlett (2018)

A wander with no particular purpose. Focusing attention on the visual landscape and the soundscape going towards, and returning. Minimal words spoken on the way out, spoken in reverse on the way in. Fixed rhythmic motifs played forward and backward. Tempos slow, time stretches. Players make choices around 'perfect time' and 'felt time'. Be surprised, surprise yourself. Choice within rules over a framework. Newness arriving out of sameness.

Peregrinations in Palindromnia is a meditation on the presence and inspiration of death which looms in our lives. Living on Gabriola Island, one of the many Gulf Islands off the coast of BC, the largesse and constancy of the natural world can humble our monkey mind for moments, if we are tuned to what is around us. The opportunity is in us to transform – at all times, if one is quiet. Space. Recharging the senses and shifts in perspective can happen out of the blue. A regular day, a regular trek. It also can be so much more, if we are attentive. *"So it seems – uncertainty – of this waking world – is not. Lost in object – nothing we do – nothing we think, feel, have – solidity. All the somethings – in and around us – occupying us – morning till night – will be nothing – in death. All dissolves in our grasp – forgotten from our minds."*

Musicians: Wendy Chen & Peter Joon Park (*bonangs*), Ann Hepper (*slentem*), Michelle Cormier (*saron*), Michael O'Neill (*gender*), Mark Parlett (*suling Jawa, suling gambuh, kendang*), Sutrisno Hartana (*rebab*), Db Boyko (*vocals*), Robe Dhewangga (*gong*), Erika Regehr (*ketuk*)

Grotto: Ventriloquial Investigations | Composer: Michael O'Neill Myskow (2016)

Appearing here in a condensed version, this is the last in a series of works for gamelan, collectively called **Lessons of the Garden**. The series is based on Canadian artist Glenn Lewis' proposal of eight conceptual aspects of a garden (gate, path, waterway, forest, field, maze, mound, grotto), which he interprets as a journey from birth to death.

To Lewis, the garden "reveals itself as a kind of language to assist humans' comprehension of their origins, their life, and death." Other works in the series have been for Javanese gamelan, Sundanese gamelan and Balinese *gender wayang*.

Ventriloquial Investigations (V.I.) returns to Javanese gamelan (Alligator Joy), and is written in memory of Martin Bartlett, the composer, educator, Western Front co-founder, and gamelan music lover who brought Alligator Joy to Vancouver. This final stage of the 'journey' involves Seamus (1993), a ventriloquial puppet made by sculptor Lionel Doucette, and live interactive projections by interdisciplinary artist Sammy Chien.

Inspired by Indonesian shadowplay, *V.I.* incorporates a Western form of puppetry initially suggested by a story told by Jean Houston, philosopher, psychologist and cultural historian. As a child, Jean accompanied her father, a comedy writer for the ventriloquist Edgar Bergen, to deliver a script. As they entered Bergen's hotel room, they found him seated on the bed, engaged in conversation with Charlie McCarthy, his chief puppet. Surprisingly, Bergen was asking Charlie for answers to the ultimate questions, and Charlie was answering "...with the wisdom of millenia."

Texts: Michael O'Neill, Chuang Tzu, Isapo-Muxika (Blackfoot Chief Crowfoot), Ludwig Wittgenstein, and John Lennon

Acknowledgements: Canada Council for the Arts, Glenn Lewis, Lionel Doucette, Tom Flemons, David Garfinkle, Nicolai Korndorf, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Salvatore Phillip (Sonny) Bono, Isapo-Muxika (Blackfoot Chief Crowfoot), Ann Hepper, Andreas Kahre, Sammy Chien, Chuang Tzu, Martin Bartlett, John Lennon, Mark Parlett, Sascha O'Neill, Robert Ashley, I Wayan Wija, Dennis Oppenheim, and Gamelan Alligator Joy

Special thanks to Nioksskaistamik (Chief) Ouray Crowfoot (Siksika Nation) and the Crowfoot Family for permission to include Isapo-Muxika's (Blackfoot Chief Crowfoot's) words, *"What is Life?..."* Special thanks also to Galina Averina for permission to include elements of Nikolai Korndorf's work **Lullaby** (following the *"What is Life?..."* section)

Musicians: Ann Hepper (*bonang barung*), Candy Lam (*bonang panerus*), Wendy Chen (*slentem*), Tony Reif (*saron*), Michael O'Neill (*ketuk, saron, slentem, gong*), Mark Parlett (*suling, rebab, kendang*), Andreas Kahre (*electric cello*), Sam Salmon (*gambang, saron*), Peter Joon Park (*gender*), Chris Blaber (*gong, kethuk, kelenang*)

Ventriloquial Investigations was premiered in its full-length form at Western Front, Vancouver, May 21, 2016.



