1. DULUTH HARBOR SERENADE

Duluth, Minnesota, on the Lake Superior shore, and just across the bridge from Superior, Wisconsin, was a major international shipping hub (second only to New York a hundred years ago). Although some of that industry has dried up, much still remains, and the urban-maritime soundmarks are still part of everyday life there: the alarm bell of the aerial lift bridge that raises to allow ships to pass beneath, and lowers to allow cars to drive across; the ships' salutes (long-short-short) that thank the operator; the steam train whistle of the Empire Builder from the nearby Lake Superior Railroad Museum; the Japanese Peace Bell at Enger Tower; the Christ Lutheran Church Carillon (that curiously plays a selection including *The Ash Grove* and the *Old Hundredth*); and the assorted buoys, school clock chimes, and truck brakes as they descend the steep hills. The place resounds with messages and signals, communication codes, and noises with meaning.

On Labor Day Weekend, 2011, during DS Pride celebrations at Bayfront Festival Park, operators of any of these sounds within earshot were given permission to go crazy at 3pm for eight minutes while a flash-mob of community musicians was recruited to move through the area of 5,000 milling people, playing complementary phrases, and distilling the soundscape into musically concentrated form. The resulting soundscape composition served to remind locals of the sonic signatures they tune out every day, and visitors of the unique acoustic ecology of the area.

Music (and language) evolved outdoors in harmony with the environment. The *Serenade* is a pre-Post-Industrial celebration of that fact and a clarion call for celebrating an audible sense of place. The proximity and direction of the sounds are as significant as the sounds themselves; the way they reflect from the hills or are carried over open water depending on the wind direction.

Live performers included: Elias Mokole, Justin Rubin, Waabi Furo, Ben Tryton, Jason Ratajek, Isaac Enyard, William Chen, Ryan Kaiser, Justin Leroux, Shannon Midbrod, Philip Blackburn, Preston Wright, Florence Wright, Julie Conroy, John Conroy. Instruments included a chain saw duet, trombones, French horn, balloon bassoons, semi-submerged chimes, peripatetic tam-tam, oil-drum gongs, and Tibetan horn.

GHOSTLY PSALMS (1982-2010)

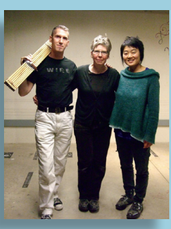
Ghostly Psalms sprang from the recurring anxiety dreams of an ex-chorister. But not the usual ones of being left behind on tour, singing a spectacular false entry, or holding the music upside down in front of a paying audience. This memorable one, from 1982, was about crawling uphill through a rocky desert with a crystalline trickle of clear water flowing uphill, entering a fortified mediaeval village (like Conques, perhaps) on the hilltop through a culvert, and walking into the abbey while voices played all around. The ceremony highlighted several ways of parsing the universe and making sense of how it all worked: through pure harmonic number ratios, dynamic ecosystems, vibration, brain activity, memory, order, and chaos: organic, mechanical, mystical.

Ghostly Psalms and Spiritual Songs (1539), by fellow Cantabrigian, Myles Coverdale, was the first printed collection of metrical psalms in the vernacular. My own effort is more ghostly than psalmy, and is a concatenation of nearly three decades worth of compositional approaches to spiritual metaphors. Charles Ives had his *Universe Symphony*, my *Ghostly Psalms* might be dubbed a "Universe Cantata" or at least an "Ode to the Mysteries."

Why are ruined abbeys and temples generally more evocative than intact ones? As architectural structures return to the living earth whence we forced them, we witness the merging of hierarchical and dynamic systems, the piles of carved debris suspended between decay and becoming. Imagine *Ghostly Psalms* at Rievaulx, or Fountains abbeys, Tikal or anywhere that the roof is open to the sky and moss grows underfoot. Listen to it loud and immersively. Squint your ears from time to time.

Multifarious strings are featured throughout: recordings of my wind-powered fishing-line harps, Ellen's 80'-long Long-String Instrument, Vietnamese Dan Bau, bowed cello harmonics... Each vibrates in different modes and adds up to a whole world of string theories.

Voices come and go, in chorus and solos, always articulating text – some intelligible, some not: compositional linguistics — language as music and music as language. The human voice, carrying with it the persona of an individual, means something different when singing, speaking, in unison, clusters, or spatially separated (here around 40 performers standing around the audience). How each vocalist relates to the whole group — with private thoughts in a public setting, inward and outward, in an ever-changing crowd — is a social dynamic emblematic of many human interactions.



Handbells play a cantus firmus — the *Old Hundredth*, "All People That on Earth Do Dwell" — stretched over nearly an hour, displaced beyond recognition; eviscerated so each bell is an event unto itself, loosely but inevitably tethered to the next.

Organ duets form three tropes, reflective interludes. The organ was once a machine to make noise and excite the resonance of a large sacred space. Liberated organ pipes also appear, one per nun, playing in Rhythmicon style (where the harmonic series determines not only the tones but their relative speed: low/slow, high/fast, proportionately). The Chinese Sheng and Thai Khaen mouth organs complete the tribute to all things organic.

2 JUNGLE LITANY

(Featuring conch shell trumpet, magnetic snake eggs, balloon flute, dismembered qeej, turtle shell, chorus, soprano-Maria Jette, speakers-Donald Engstrom, Carrie Henneman Shaw)

The jungle (a living, breathing architecture if ever there was one) is a pharmacy, a supermarket, and a home improvement center, depending on what you are looking for. There are no weeds in this ecosystem, everything affects the growth of everything else. Everything has its niche, a harmony developed over evolutionary timescales. A living lesson in orchestration.

Names speak volumes. They describe the namer as much as the named. You can infer a thousand stories in their everyday poetry. *Jungle Litany* brings together five naming systems or languages (English, Spanish, Creole, Mayan, and Latin) for the 'same' list of 95 Belizean vascular plants. Are they really the same? What do they tell us about why different people go to the wilderness and what they do there? While we are jabbering away in different tongues, what is happening to our forest home? What is the sound of an ethnobotanical requiem? Sung in the language of plants? An herbal tonic. The conch calls us to order and the invocation begins.

3 DRAW ON, SWEET NIGHT

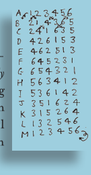
(brainwave triggered vocal samples)

May Week on the Backs, sitting in punts by Trinity's Wren Library. The jungle is far away; we are in Capability Brown's improved version of nature. It is a balmy June evening, but we are singing madrigals on the Cam (is that water flowing uphill?), drifting away into the Cambridge night, transitioning into the enveloping gloom where dreams go to listen.

Draw on, sweet night, best friend unto those cares
That do arise from painful melancholy.
My life so ill through want of comfort fares,
That unto thee I consecrate it wholly.
Sweet night, draw on! My griefs when they be told
To shades and darkness find some ease from paining.
And while thou all in silence dost enfold,
I then shall have best time for my complaining.
- John Wilbye, 1609

This, and other recorded fragments from Hildegard of Bingen and Compline chants to Tallis's 40-part *Spem in Alium*, appear as though you are falling asleep and notice another distant narrative about to take over. We descend into a period of Rapid Ear Movement as the brain unwinds and tidies its reliquary, mixing memory and desire, polishing its trophies for the next day. The musical samples are triggered in performance by wearing an EEG/EKG sensor connected to a Max/MSP patch that responds to brainwave activity and muscle movement.

4 Roots of a Magic Square
(organ duet 1: Gary Verkade and Lars Sjöstedt)



Some find comfort in numbers, especially ones laid out in a matrix that embodies exquisite internal relationships and irrefutable logic. The three organ tropes of *Ghostly Psalms* use bell-change patterns to reinterpret the same six-line sequence according to different schemes that determine the number of notes, their duration, and pitch (both overtones and undertones). The permutations never repeat exactly until the final phrase. The tropes present as it were different facets of the same crystal. Total serialism and campanology: truly a nerd's paradise.

5 The Shadow of my Shadow
(dan bau, cello, strings).
Stretched strings somehow seem connected to the sinews of the human body — muscle, tendons, and voice. Tension and relaxation through sensitive touch and vibrations that rattle the bones. Here is a 3D trio for bent, bowed and rubbed strings: one, a monochord that mimics the Vietnamese tonal language by means of plucked harmonics and a buffalo horn whammy bar; the next, bowed natural harmonics of the cello; and lastly, rosined fingertips exciting the longitudinal vibrations of the Long String Instrument. String theory meets string practice: the shadow of my shadow is my light.

6 Non Judgment Day is Nigh
(shengs, organ duet 2, choir cluster begins).
Air pressure passing between reeds causes them to vibrate thanks to the Bernoulli Effect. Here breath animates them: a trio for mouth organs, pipe organ, and vocal cords. Time is measured in breath cycles and lung capacity; we breathe deeply in sleep. The imaginary battles are within; peace is looming, the lack of force is assembling on all fronts. It could be a long night (but try not to grind your teeth).

7 Now, More or Less Than Ever
(beatbox, choir)
Kepler, Kircher, and Fludd would have had a field day: multiple measures of time and space; periods of the heart, breath, and machine. Stasis and motion are cousins; you can only be stillness as long as the world is turning. Now is forever if you don't get snagged. Logic Schlogic.

8 Beyond and Above
(solo voice, choir, strings, virtual rhythmicon)
The lotus grows in muddy waters, white and straight. A still, small voice within, but where is the mud?

Night — but five stars shine: joy-moaning, do glide over Buttermilk Way; eyes data-full of dust, bust horizons — time.

9 Scratch I-Ching
(human rhythmicon)
If we each had only one note to play in life, living as a social machine would be easy; this human organ has a place for everyone if you mind your Ps and Qs. It's a cog's life. Beginner's mind. Beginners don't mind. But life under this system offers limited fulfillment; a phantom harvest. A chance hexagram reveals another viewpoint. The weeds still make their home among the ruins while the scared cow looks over the fence.

10 Hymn to the Solar System
(virtual rhythmicon, organ duet 3, bells)
All people that on earth do dwell, drowning in numbers, surfing the standing waves — hang ten! — awash in the grandeur of the space between spaces, bounded by arcades of columns and tendrils and roots, who dance spinning on pyramid platforms to mark the calendar, and raise your arms to take flight or to plummet: retract the roof, remove the floor, open the sanctuary as high as it will go. Cosmography period is over, Thule. Yes. Yes. Yes.

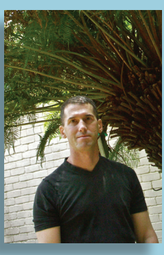
Featured participants (in order of appearance):
Philip Blackburn, conch, balloon flute, brainwave-controlled chorus
(recordings of Clare College Choir), dan bau, sheng, khaen, virtual rhythmicon, windharps
Wild Music Chorus
Maria Jette, soprano solo
Donald Engstrom, Carrie Henneman Shaw, speaking voices
Ellen Fullman, long string instrument
Theresa Wong, cello, sheng
Andy Lo, handbells
Sisters of Notre Dame convent, Mankato, human organ, voices
Gary Verkade, Lars Sjöstedt, organ

11. GOSPEL JIHAD (2010)
The Choir of Clare College, Cambridge. Tim Brown, director.

With a family ancestry that includes venerable hymn writers Isaac Watts and George Stebbins, what's an apostate 21st century composer to do? In a world animated by holy wars, is peaceful, engaged equilibrium — let alone resolution — possible? *Gospel Jihad*, for two choirs, presents the problem in musical and psychological terms. I am often surprised at how much sacred music is blatantly pro-religious; it seems to me that any gods worth their salt would welcome a little critique and skepticism.

I started by selecting some well-known hymn texts — the most bellicose I could find, such as "Onward, Christian Soldiers," "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood," "The Fight is On," and "The Son of God goes Forth to War." One choir articulates these zealously, in various outwardly-focused, fire-and-brimstone ways, while the other singers are asked to choose their own personal favorite hymns (melody and all). This latter choir, however, sings to themselves, super slow, while processing, stripping the texts of intelligibility and leaving nothing but a dense holy glow behind. The two groups — extravert and introvert respectively, poised in harmonious stand-off — model some of the possible positions one might take regarding the multiple theo-militias that have been making news around the world for so long now.

BIO



Philip Blackburn likes the acoustic coupling of sound and space. Born in Cambridge and attending Abingdon School near Oxford, he recalls going weak at the knees at 11 with the opening crash of *Carmina Burana*, trying to play King Alfred's Blowing Stone and make the Berkshire Downs echo, and walking into a San Diego roomful of the Harry Partch instruments at 16. He attended Clare College as a choral exhibitioner and studied composition with Kenneth Gaburo in California and Iowa City, where he earned a PhD and directed the Lynceus Consort, an experimental/early music choir. He has published the *Enclosure* series of Harry Partch archives, made field recordings in Vietnam, Cuba, and Belize, and produced nearly 400 albums as director of the American Composers Forum's innova label. Apart from Partch and Gaburo, his pantheon includes Pauline Oliveros, Henry Brant, and the Eton Choirbook. His work as an environmental sound artist has made plants, sewer-, and ecosystems audible, and has animated harbors, science museums, children's festivals, parks, parking lots, and deserts with extra opportunities for community listening.

Philipblackburn.com

CREDITS

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Gospel Jihad's unconducted premiere was recorded at St. Thomas Aquinas Chapel, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, September 25, 2010 on the occasion of director Tim Brown's retirement from the choir, after 31 years.

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Philip Blackburn, director, design
Chris Campbell, operations manager
www.innova.mu

Also by Philip Blackburn on innova: *P.P.S.* (524); *Habanera* (204); *Stuck* (799); *Henry and Mimi at the Y* (120); *Requiem for a Requiem* (244)