

Concerto: States of Being (2009). The programmatic thread of three distinct attitudes toward life as one progresses through it inform the overall thrust of the work. “Wonder” explores the state of mind where everything is fresh and new, and a brightness and excitement abound with each new discovery. “Attainment” symbolizes the strong, mature vibrations of a mindset that involves lifepaths entered and challenges met. “Tranquility” symbolizes acceptance and peace that accompanies the final stage. The opening thematic fragment is heard throughout all three movements in various disguises.

All heady stuff, and all of which is unnecessary to grasp the work’s musical content. Although “*States of Being*” adopts many of the stylistic and performance aspects of the typical concerto model (virtuosity, cadenza, textural aspects), and it in fact SOUNDS like a concerto, I performed it under electronic studio multitrack conditions. I found this to be necessary since the piano is often extended into unknown and heretofore unheard realms, such as the “ghost” material often accompanying it sounding as softer delays in quasi-randomly controlled pitch areas. At this point in my creative life I need to fix my musical ideas much as a painter fixes the paint directly on his canvas.

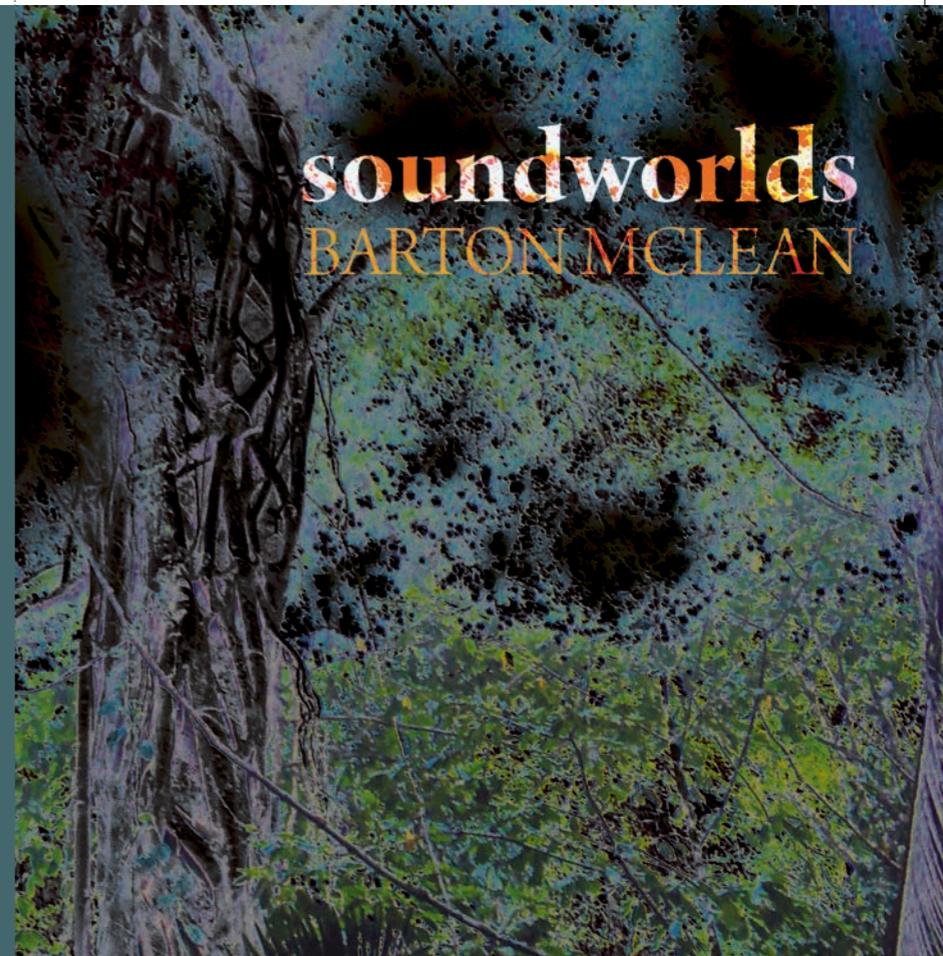
The “*Concerto: States of Being*” was composed using a standard music sequencer program with two Korg Wavestation and two Alesis QS 6.2 keyboards as sound generators all under MIDI control, as I performed live with the luxury of repeated takes.

Ritual of the Dawn (1984, rev. 1998), a chamber work for six players, was originally written at the MacDowell Colony, and extensively revised and premiered in its new version by the Syracuse Society of New Music in 1998. Its philosophical idea is the distillation of a ritualistic ceremony depicting the dawn of the new millennium, inspired by my research into ancient Nahuatl (pre Columbian Central American) poetry.

The unique feature of *Ritual of the Dawn* is its atmosphere, which is both rhythmically pulsed and evocative. Although tightly-written in the sense that it will sound the same at each performance, it is also extraordinarily free in its notational procedures, which often include bits of phrases in boxes, the performer to choose the specific order at each performance. It is the last major work of mine using modern or traditional notation. The evocative yet rhythmically-pulsative nature of *Ritual of the Dawn* is largely produced through the rhythmic technique of several performers playing pulsed material simultaneously but not coordinating beats in any way -- as if several tape recorders were playing at the same time but not in sync. The harmonic structure is chosen carefully to accommodate this technique. This means that each sonority must be neutral enough to withstand infinite variations of the order of the short melodic phrases that are randomly played together by the ensemble, but at the same time be imaginative enough to evoke the special atmosphere of the work. At important structural points in the work, such as the beginning

The album title, *soundworlds*, refers to various areas of the world in which McLean has resided, composed, recorded, or researched. From the earliest work (“Ritual of the Dawn,” composed in 1982) influenced by ancient Nahuatl (Central American) culture, to “Demons of the Night” (1988-9), depicting the wildness and darkness of nature in a rural New York summer’s evening, to “Rainforest Images II,” (1993) utilizing natural sounds recorded by McLean in the lush rainforests of the Amazon and Australia, to the austere and crystalline sounds of the Muir Glacier in British Columbia (“Ice Canyons”), a literal world music connotation can be ascribed. Similarly, the Xanadu tone poem inspired by Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s fantasy poem “Kubla Khan,” and the “Concerto: States of Being,” depict the no less real world of the dreamer, who conjures up at will his own inner worlds of sound.

On a more significant compositional level, the album title refers to the breadth of McLean’s sound palette, as he moves effortlessly from traditional live ensemble “Ritual of the Dawn” to live performance processed electronically (“Concerto: State of Being” and “Rainforest Images II”) to his own software-enhanced performance on synthesizers (“Magic at Xanadu” and “Ice Canyons”) to studio-generated electronic means of sound production (“Rainforest Images II and Demons of the Night”). Like many composers of our time, McLean delights in moving effortlessly between diverse means of sound production and compositional strategies. But McLean’s ends are always consistent, with an unmistakable personality that fuses the natural world, gestural expression, and timbral idea into a spiritual whole. With many previous orchestral, vocal, and chamber works under his belt before 1985, McLean has subsequently eschewed traditional or non-traditional notation (in the sense that someone who never worked with him could perform the composition from the notation), the reason being that he considers these scribal means of communication inadequate for transmitting his ideas, which often combine timbral/gestural expressions outside the traditional grid of notation as is commonly understood.



and ending of sections, the conductor does provide hand cues to coordinate the ensemble.

Demons of the Night (1988-9) is the fourth in a set of five electronic tone poems entitled *Visions of a Summer Night* depicting various esthetic qualities of a typical sultry summer night in the Northeast U.S. To understand *Demons of the Night* is to come to terms with the subconscious primitive fears we all have buried deeply within us. While directing the Electronic Music Center at the University of Texas in Austin, I was privileged to work with saxophone virtuoso Albert Regni, who recorded the various saxophone "terror" licks. Other recognizable samples were derived from my double bass and soprano recorder performances. This was produced on an early version of Opcode Vision software using MIDI synthesizers such as the Yamaha TX 81 Z and the Prophet 2000 sampler. The constant fluctuation between extreme tension and release was a powerful process in this short but drama-packed work.

Magic at Xanadu (MAX) (2008)

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree;
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

So begins the famous poem "Kubla Khan: Or A Vision in a Dream" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Inspired by this poem, the sensuous *ostinati* possess a somewhat oriental flavor, evoking a dreamlike

vision that reaches toward that special paradise of ecstatic wonder always beckoning but out of reach. The "Composers Playpen," a computer music program written by me in MAX (hence the title) in 2005 is the software vehicle for this work and the one following as well. Central to the "Playpen" concept is the idea of initiating and changing melodic/harmonic/rhythmic loops in real time. In "MAX," most of these loops are prerecorded, while a few are recorded and modified as the work is playing. In addition, a third stream of music is produced live on the keyboards. Although not always evident, the live performance is very difficult, as I must modify up to fourteen separate musical ideas all playing at once! The MIDI instruments used are two Alesis QS6.2 synthesizers, and two Korg Wavestations.

Ice Canyons (2010). The title "Ice Canyons" seeks to capture the crystalline beauty of sound encapsulated within an austere and grandiose landscape, inspired while reading John Muir's descriptions of wonder as he discovered the primeval glaciers of British Columbia.

Ice Canyons is performed live, utilizing my "Composer's Playpen" software, along with my own live performance on a MIDI keyboard. One brief example of the power of this software may suffice; at the very end, the work dissolves in what I call "collapsed rhythm," where the melodic line which was c. ten seconds collapses into one containing only a few seconds at differing and changing time intervals, causing a quasi-improvisatory and ever-changing

vertical (harmonic) metamorphosis of what had been a horizontal (melodic) one. A unifying element is the recurrent ground bass, which is heard throughout, finally collapsing at the end as glaciers ultimately do when they reach the sea.

Rainforest Images II (1993). My composer/performer wife (and soulmate) Priscilla and I began the *Rainforest* project as an installation in 1989, premiering at the University of Wyoming, involving walk-in performance by the audience at any of our five music stations, using synthesizers, amplified bicycle wheel, and microphones, plus the evocative drones and rainforest sounds we had recorded in the field and arranged on our composed drone tape.

After dozens of installations and our Australian-New Zealand-Hawaii tour in 1990, we began thinking of an actual composition involving voices from around the world raised in song to the beauty of the rainforest. This epic (48 minutes) work was a true mixture of styles, evoking the inner ambience one experiences when walking through a rainforest, yet becoming a unified musical sound-world on its own. After choosing the different taped improvisations, we recorded and integrated them with sampled and synthesized music. Each of us would compose a section of the piece for a few days, then turn the reins over to the other, working seven days a week for six months. This may be the first example in history of a true integrated composition by husband and wife working together!

Rainforest II is a modified distillation from this larger *Rainforest Images* recording, using sections composed by me alone (although Priscilla certainly had an important role in this, as she has in all of my work, as critic and advisor, and in this instance, as performer as well on voice and violin). The beginning, after a sultry introductory invitation by the Musician Wren and other Amazon birds, is primal and rawly pulsed, with Priscilla and I performing on soprano recorders and me also performing on a clariflute (soprano recorder with a clarinet mouthpiece). After a quiet interlude where the birds are prominent, the last powerfully reflective section closes with singing by Priscilla and chants by Panaiotis, vocalist and sound technician, who also provided much of the sound processing, realized in the Oliveros Foundation studio with its "Expanded Instrument System." The source sounds were recorded by Priscilla and myself in the Amazon jungle and throughout Australia. In this work, I have tried very hard to strike a balance between keeping the beauty and integrity of the natural sounds intact, while at the same time incorporating them in an actual compositional framework in the same sense that any motivic material would be used, progressing as it does beyond soundscape, perhaps even antithetical to the soundscape esthetic, which tends to leave the environmental sounds intact. This may be a bit unsettling at first to the listener, who, with repeated hearings, will hopefully hear less and less the individual nature sounds and more and more the integrity of the composition as a whole.

Barton McLean

Having been taught and mentored by Henry Cowell and having studied electronic music techniques in studios under the direction of Ianis Xenakis, Barton McLean has experienced both the academic and the professional worlds of the composer, having undertaken a 20-year career as a pioneering director of major university electronic/computer music programs. In 1983 he and Priscilla left academia to develop a full time career with their electroacoustic duo The McLean Mix, which has proven itself in hundreds of concerts and installations throughout the Americas, Europe, and the Pacific Rim. His major interests have been the integration of natural sounds into the web of traditional and non-traditional structures, the use of technology to articulate ideas based on environmental and cultural concerns, and the development of new instruments such as the "Composers Playpen" and the recent sound/light project the "Sparkling Light Console." The McLeans can still be seen driving along the I 80, I 90, I 5, or I 95 corridors in their once-new Toyota Matrix, as fresh concerts and installations are developed and new and old venues welcome them.

McLean's work, along with that of the McLean Mix duo, can be observed at its web site:
<http://members.cisbec.net/mclmix/index.html>.

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