

# BEYOND PERFORMANCE: THE RITUAL FRAME

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## **Abstract**

In this article I will introduce and discuss the concept of the ritual frame that is inherent in all performance. Then I shall illustrate from a historical perspective how a consciousness of ritual has influenced, and in some cases shaped music and in general, performance in western culture, with emphasis on works in this century. My primary focus will be to discuss my own pieces with regard to ritual consciousness. This will encompass examples of eight compositions dating back to 1969 with the cantata, How to Invoke a Garden/How to Invoke the Same Garden and ending with Sleepless in the Shadow a multimedia performance piece begun in 1994 and still in progress. In some cases I shall discuss in general terms, ways in which I utilize ritual elements. At other times I will give very specific examples of how I have woven such elements into the very structure of a work. In still other cases I will show how the structure of a work may entirely depend upon a ritual format.

**Key Words** ritual frame, dynamics, interdependency, initiate, repetition, and relationship.

## **Introduction**

Ritual is likely the most ancient aspect of the performing arts, yet, like many contemporary composers, and performance artists, I continue to find it the most intriguing and compelling. Ritual is fundamental to that which defines performance. This can be understood by observing an unmistakable series of activities carried out virtually every time a performance has taken place since the early days of human history. I speak of three essential phases that are always present regardless of the specific content in an event. These are: people coming together gathering, the intended activity performing, and the going away, leaving-dispersing. The enactment of this framework is in itself the most elemental ritual underlying all performance. This format may be completely obvious, but even in its long history, unlike many of the more specific aspects of performance, the very essence of performance, the ritual frame has not lost its charge; for it is not stylistic, nor ethnic, nor designated to some region of the world. It is, quite innocently, a function of our being human, something we need to do. In his paper on the origin of performance, *Towards a Poetics of Performance*, Richard Schechner describes ritual as an event shared by neighboring Paleolithic hunting bands that met seasonally in the caves adjacent to their respective territories. He states that the function of these meetings was "To maintain friendly relations; to exchange goods,

mates, trophies, techniques; and to show and exchange dances, songs and drama."(1). As members of a species largely defined by social interdependence, we are drawn to one another/together with one primary purpose; to gain insight and nourishment in order to move forward in our lives, both individually and collectively, as best we can, given the present circumstances.

It is in the acknowledgement of our need for interrelatedness that I find the most compelling reason for continued exploration of performance media. Reclaiming and drawing attention to the ritual frame, as the most fundamentally vital aspect of performance, has given rise to a whole new genre: "performance art" as we have come to know the kind of inter-arts which emerged out of the 1970's and is still being explored in the present. Performance art has thrived on the truth of our insatiable desire for the *ritual act* of performance: the social coming together, partaking with, or watching others enact anything (from the most pedestrian, to the most sublime, bringing to mind John Cage's concept of art is life), then privately or publicly acknowledging that the experience was indeed shared, and dispersing back into *ordinary* reality. The ritual frame prevails as a gleeful bubble (or at least a notable satisfaction) in the collective psyche. We leave the event with a sense of accomplishment; that we humans once again remembered to draw together for the spectacle, of ourselves, and each other. We were curious and we brought forward our aliveness.

## **Background**

As we are reclaiming the importance of the ritual function of performance, we are also loosening the *proscenium* both literally and figuratively; as well as changing the traditional role of the artist/performer. Choreographer, Anna Halprin has stated " the professional artist is no longer the solitary hero figure, but rather a special guide who works to evoke the art within us all."(2). There is absolutely nothing new, nor for that matter old, about her prescribed view of the artist, even in Western culture. Rather this role comes from a time or place where, as a matter of course, ordinary daily activities are intermingled with the extraordinary; where there is full recognition of the need for the mundane to be regularly visited by the sacred. In of itself, acting upon this recognition could be thought of as ritual; but in addition, the actual sacred activities carried out might also be ritualized (ie. daily prayers, chanting, sacrifices). "The elements of ritual include recitation, chanting, staging, prayer and invocation; dancing, movement or postures; costumes or special dress; incense smoke, candles, or fire, offerings or sacrifices; consumption of food and drink, purifications; use of sacred objects, relics, tools, images and symbols. These elements create physical and psychological changes intended to help achieve the goal of the ritual."(3).

The British Druids carried out ritual blessings as a course of necessity. "The three choirs were at three locations equidistant on an arc, at Glastonburg, Stonehenge and Llantwit Major in Glamorgan. At each location 2,400 saints maintained a tag-chant, a hundred

for each 24 hours. The chants guided the ritual order of life on earth, invoked spiritual blessings for the perfecting of society, and were verbal formulas which are said to have varied with hours, seasons, and years.”(4) We also know that there was a time in Western Civilization when people made 'daily visits to Hades' (figuratively speaking); a specially designated time each day, to be with their psychological complexity, their evil thoughts as well as their sense of goodness. This was before we, as a culture relinquished (wholesale) our personal responsibility, handed it over to some naive linear idea of God and designated all darkness to 'Hell', a place too dreaded, and to be avoided at all cost. When we did this we also traded in our resonance with "eros", banished it from its fullest potential. With the darkness we also paradoxically, gave up our creative potency (for all life is germinated and held in the darkness of Mother Earth until it reaches the light of the Sun).

Native American philosopher, Jamake Highwater in his book the *Primal Mind* speaks of the "repressive domination of reason from the time of Plato onward" ... logos-bound minds (characterized as "objective, invariant, constant, harmonious, comprehensive") tend to deprive music of any relationship with nature (sound). He attributes the dehumanizing and devitalizing of Western society with the degradation of Eros (possessing the "power of immediacy, relatedness, subjectivity, and aesthetics"). "The schism does not exist among primal peoples." There is a reason for the current intensified interest (on the part of westerners) in the musics of tribal, more primal peoples of Native America, Indonesia, Tibet, other parts of Asia and Africa. We are seeking to re-learn, be reminded of our *human* nature, which we have lost sight of and desperately need to relocate in the West. We are searching for a re-connecting of the light with the dark, logos with eros, masculine with feminine. Highwater further states: "It is among contemporary Western artists and intellectuals who are attempting to reunify the intrinsic dualism of their cultures that we discover the most insightful descriptions of the ruptured mentality of the West as it contrasts with the holistic worldview of primal peoples.”(5)

I strongly believe that bringing a renewed consciousness of ritual to the concert hall or the theater is timely and useful. Ritual brings a heightened sense of necessity, and at this moment there is a great necessity for us to see more clearly, interdependency of all beings in the universe, the dynamics of relationship. "America is a culture who is starved of ritual which can enable people to come to terms with the central crises of their lives.”(6) The social crisis in our culture is inspiring many artists to look for ways to re-invest performance with a cultural usefulness, yes, still including self expression, but with a renewed desire to contribute to the conscious connectedness of all of us humans. To repeat, there is nothing new about this awareness on the part of artists, just another waking up. Carl Jung speaks of rituals as "an answer and reaction to the action of God upon man, and perhaps they are not only that, but are also intended to be "activation" a form of magic coercion.”(7) Just a few weeks ago in my hometown of Seattle, Washington, a compelling bell-ringing ritual was carried out to commemorate the loss of

5,000 people in the earthquake of Kobe, Japan, Seattle's sister city. (The Japanese traditional bronze bell was a gift from Kobe to Seattle in 1963 when we hosted the World's Fair.) Over a five-day period of time the large bell was rung once for each of those who perished. The magnitude of the human disaster was captured in the sheer repetition of the bell honoring the dead. There was a symbolic, magical quality, as certainly the people of Kobe could not actually hear the bell being rung, but could perhaps psychically appreciate the empathy we were experiencing here in Seattle. There is, I believe, a DNA blueprint, an insistence upon the need for ritual in human activity. But, must it take a killer-earthquake for us to be moved to reach beyond mundane daily life, to honor and feed our own souls or the collective soul?

Charles Ives, in my opinion, is the god-parent of the current revitalization of the ritual frame as it pertains to concert music in American culture. In his transcendental *Unanswered Question*, he breaks with tradition and in the spatial sense plays with the frame. He does this by putting the audience in the middle of the sound, and having the trumpet (instrument which continues to "ask the question") played outside (of reach, so to speak) of the designated performance space. His *Third Symphony* derives its meaning through the layering of familiar musics which are each socially charged: hymns, patriotic tunes, marching bands and folk songs. All of this together gives new meaning to each, as part of a collective, and once again placing the audience in the middle of the space, with chorus, and secondary orchestras in the balconies and at the back of the hall. In this work there is a *nostalgia*, not a simple one, but rather a disturbing one. In the density of layers we get a message of "lost-ness" or the goodness of a nation on trial or gone astray. Perhaps the most striking example of Ives' contribution to the new paradigm of riding the ritual frame is in his *Universe Symphony*. This was intended to be a "religious work" in which there were to be several orchestras on mountaintops with choruses all around the countryside. He worked on the score of the piece for years, and left many sketches for "anybody else who could add to it if they felt like it." "He told me that anybody else could add to it if they felt like it... 'It was going to be something! Maybe some day they'll do it, with orchestras here and there on the hills, and different choruses all around the countryside.'" Was the *Universe Symphony* the beginning of "conceptual performance art?"(8) Was it a process ritual, one of passing the torch of genius from one generation to the next? As a Bicentennial project (1976), American composer John Harbison accepted Ives' invitation to use his sketches, when he evolved the *Universe Symphony* into an extensive work for brass ensemble. Or was this Ives, the transcendentalist in the grandest sense? Composer Lucia Dlugoszewski description of music may apply here: "(It) is a ritual whose function is to help imperfect man become identical with perfect nature. Such music is neither egocentric Romantic-self expression, nor artificial common sense, nor selfish pleasure, nor artificial Classical order... Such music is not expressing man instead of nature, nor nature instead of man--but man identical with perfect nature, bringing us to our very best...real, alive, free." (9)

In his *Universe Symphony* Ives definitely revisited the ritual frame; he brought forth questions of the role of artist/audience (in the Halprin sense), he placed music in nature, he challenged the one-upmanship of the orchestral domain by having "several" of them all play together. Since Ives there have been many composers who have broken from the traditional concert music frame, bringing renewed meaning, relevant to the present situation. The *Sonic Meditations* (1973) of Pauline Oliveros come to mind, as a series of music-making rituals reflecting the shrinking of the "global village", and the growing fascination with primalism which pervaded West Coast performance art in the 1970s. These pieces along with the work of John Cage's and David Tudor's "happenings" (or "events" as Anna Halprin preferred to call them) in the 1960s gave permission for a whole generation of boundary breakers, and the explosive proliferation of alternative performance "galleries", warehouse spaces, lofts, and street performance.

### **Ritual Theme in My Work**

In my own creative work I have been drawn, instinctively, toward fundamental, and as well, more elaborate uses of ritual. This has been true for me since my student days in the 1960's. It is my aim here to demonstrate the particular ways in which I have used elements of ritual as a prevailing theme in my work. My endeavor has been charged. My creative purpose twofold: to discover ways to join the mundane with the sacred: and to explore music/performance as a tool for personal, social, and spiritual growth and possibly transformation. I was fortunate to begin my work as a young composer in an environment of great experimentation in the San Francisco Bay Area in the mid 1960's. As a student at Mills College I was present at the inauguration of the Center for Contemporary Music with Morton Sobotnick, as its first director; and teaching residencies with John Cage and David Tudor, Pauline Oliveros, Luciano Berio (who had just produced his ritual opera *Passaggio* at the Julliard School) Karlheinz Stockhausen, and choreographers Merce Cunningham, Yvonne Rainer, Martha Graham, and Jose Limon. I often attended the ongoing offerings at San Francisco's The Dancers' Workshop, Anna Halprin, Director; and Fillmore West (both noted locales for performance art collaboration in that era).

My primary teacher was Darius Milhaud, an *enfant terrible* in his own day often testing the edges of the concert music frame. His work covered a huge territory of musical and multi-media exploration, spanning the use of elements of ancient Greek Drama to avant-garde pieces such his collaboration with Erik Satie: *Musique d'Ambulment* or *Furniture Music* - to be performed during the intermission of a concert. Milhaud, even in his seventies, when I was his student, was always encouraging us to look "over the edge".

He was the youngest - hearted "grown-up" I have ever known.

My purpose here will be to trace the ritual theme in eight of my pieces composed during the period of the past twenty-five years. In some cases I will speak in very general terms

and in others, quite specific, depending on the nature of how I used ritual aspects within each of the works. As early as 1969, in a work entitled *How to Invoke a Garden/How to Invoke the Same Garden*, (based on a poem by Jeanetta Jones) I was experimenting with ritualized cyclical-variation, primarily through incantation. Scored for mixed vocal ensemble and sixteen instruments, this concert piece, fifteen minutes long, is a one-movement procession of alternative ways of seeing ourselves as "cultivators." The sections are delineated largely through the text, that includes actual prescriptions of gardening techniques, prayers for helping plants to grow, historical allegories, and erotic allusions. The ritualized unfolding of the text is complimented by cyclical use of rhythms, as well as formalized pacing of musical material. I have also stretched the expected performance frame by using simultaneously, great extremes in amplitude with different levels of sound organization. This layering includes sounds as primitive as a low-pitched cluster, loud drone on a pipe organ, to the refined quotations from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and Bach's St. Matthew Passion (garden fertilizer, if you will). In 1969 *San Francisco Examiner* critic Alexander Freid wrote: "But a strange avant-garde work called "*How to Invoke a Garden/How to Invoke the Same Garden*" itself was enough to make the evening worthwhile...relating its message in a peculiar mixture of cantillation, group and solo declamation, garden instructions and ritual." In a varied clatter of eccentric sound (four singers, sixteen instrumentalists and conductor Jean-Louis LeRoux) the music was cohesive and fascinating." (10)

*A 'Agita - A Ceremonial Opera (1975-76)* was the first large scale multi-media work in which I layered and wove several ritual elements together. It is based on the harvest ceremonies of the Pima and Papago Indians of southern Arizona. Created for the American Bi-Centennial (1976), it was a collaboration with Ron Giteck, anthropologist (cousin), and Suzanne Schwartzman, fiber artist; and the Port Costa Players, a new music/theater ensemble of the San Francisco Bay Area. The piece was made for the occasion of a tour of a dozen performances at theaters and universities along the West Coast and down to the Temple of Music and Art in Tucson, where the Pima and Papago tribes live. This evening-long event is a pageant of versions of the tribe's harvest ceremony (Wi'igita), set within a party atmosphere (tribally stylized) in which the audience intermingles with the performers. From the moment the audience enters the event space (ideally a black-box with seating in the three-quarter round) they experience a decidedly different frame than that of a usual concert or opera. There is a "Chicken Scratch Band" playing popular music of the Pima and Papago. There are greeting events, games, and finally a processional of the Players, twelve in all.

The performance part of the event is scored for three singing actors, one dancing actor, and a "tribe" of eight instrumentalists who also act, sing, dance and are "on stage" throughout the event. The Pima and Papago had a traditional harvest celebration once every four years, which they carried out for nearly three centuries until the 1920's. Though it is true that "a ritual which has evolved from a particular need does not necessarily have to be repeated", there can be both artistic and historical value in the

telling about the ritual within a new context, such as in *A'Agita*. The Bi-Centennial of the formation of the United States seemed like a good occasion to remind us all of the long and wondrous history/mythology of some of the first Americans. The ritual ceremonies once included music, dance, storytelling and drinking of Saguaro cactus wine. The details of the rituals differed from year to year (depending upon the quality of the harvest), yet always involved four basic characters or archetypes: Corn Man-bringer of seed, Old Man Tobacco-keeper of rain and spiritual leader of the tribe, a Young Woman-Tobacco Man's Daughter and bearer of fruit, and I'toi-the traditional god, narrator/protagonist. Many versions of the ceremony were recorded by word of mouth, on stick drawings, and through the modern written language of the tribe. The concept of a multi-versioned history/mythology became the focus of *A'Agita*, as we combined a total of twelve different tellings of the harvest celebration. This nonlinear recollection provided many unique possibilities for simultaneity and juxtaposition of elements in a context involving music. The motivic variations from one version of the celebration to the next are treated developmentally in the music as well as textually. The performance part of the event begins with a storytelling prologue - "Fourth World", which is really a capsulation of the entire work. I'toi describes the state of his world and we witness Corn and Tobacco at a game of Ginskoot (a parcheesi-like game played with fiat sticks as dice). Corn beats Tobacco by cheating but the tribe cheers anyway. Tobacco Man leaves the village humiliated.

The body of the opera unfolds a "series of beginnings" to the relationship between the Young Woman and Corn Man. The Young Woman is "good and beautiful and from all directions young men came who wanted to marry her but she never liked any of them and they wound up just sitting there holding out." The various experiences the Young Woman has with these "young men" are uniquely different: In one version she marries "Skull", in another "Cloud" comes down and "lets one drop of rain fall onto her womb", and in another she is visited by a stranger who "rides her all night long." Throughout these visitations I have used identifiable, strong musical motives, particularly in the vocal writing for the Young Woman. As the alternative versions unfold, this musical material takes many different shapes - tonally, rhythmically, texturally.

A: (60-♩)  
 f La-- p La... f La... ya--

B: (76-♩)  
 mf Ma-- Ma-Da-- Ma-- Da-- ya-- Ma--

C: (90-♩)  
 f you have made a woman out of me you have made a carrying bas-- ket

(50-♩)  
 mf I-- put you in here my cac-tus-- I-- put you here so that you will

D: (50-♩)  
 mf I put you here my cac-tus so that you will cook well so that from somewhere a young

Figure 1: from the Young Woman's vocal lines: a) Ginskoot Match, p. 20; b) The Black Bobcat is Crying (Tobacco's exit), p. 41; d) Young Woman's Song, p. 79&71; e) series of endings-III, p. 124

Eventually Corn Man comes to the Young Woman as she is cooking Cholla (cactus) buds for the hungry people of "Rabbit Farm" (the village). The two are immediately attracted to one another and soon there is a rain of corn and squash, an abundance of this new food. As the scene develops there is general celebration of the tribe and a development of the music from the Ginskoot Match, as an ominous reminder that Corn originally beat Tobacco by cheating. Next comes Coyote, the trickster (trombonist who plays, dances, sings all at once). He always manages to survive, even though he never sings the "right songs". There are alternative endings to the relationship between Corn and his Young Woman (all derived from still other versions of the Pima and Papago mythology). These versions are told by I'itoi in an intimate storytelling manner with chanting and rhythmic punctuation from the "tribe". All of this musically derived from the "series of beginnings".

The whole performance part of the piece reaches a climax and is tied together in the final version, which depicts a poetic solution to the initial flaw, the cheating. Here, after much glory, Corn pays his debt by losing not his "Corn Woman", but their baby, "Bitter-

Crooked Neck Squash, Dog Pumpkin Baby". Corn leaves the village chanting-wailing as Tobacco did earlier (when he lost the Ginskoot Match and was rejected by the tribe). The people of Rabbit Farm are angry; they do not understand what has happened. I'toi explains that things just were not right and he gives them melons - "sweetness to take away anger". There is a tribal party with music, dancing and drinking of Saguaro wine. Everyone gets drunk including I'toi, who tells us that "Later as a young child I went to sit someplace by the sea shore. I will collect salt. The salt will bring rain". The storytelling ends with an acknowledgement of both the imperfections in the world of reality, and the inherent hope of humankind. All of this is complimented by a fading of the party music, the dimming of the lights and a nostalgic alto saxophone solo. The audience is then invited to pop-corn, beer or cider, and the party which the evening began with continues, now accompanied by field recordings of "Chicken Scratch" polkas and waltzes. Unlike the entry party, when the performers were "on", they are now free to engage directly, "out of character" with the audience. This acts as a vehicle to move everyone out of the ritual frame, and back to ordinary reality. "The musical conception makes (the ritual and myth) all seem rather real and haunting because it is based on a genuine feeling for the drama and the tribal ethos rather than on some theory about folk materials...the music (*A'agita*) is as inventive and theatrical as it is perceptive and sensitive to the ritual issues. The writing is unselfconscious, her style free and eclectic, changing, versatile, rhythmically subtle."(11)



Figure 2: *The Young Woman, and tribe members at the death of Bitter Crooked Neck*

## *Squash Dog Pumpkin Baby*

Directly after the completion of *A'Agita*, I continued my work in music/theater with a series of chamber pieces exploring mythological relationships between humans and animals, or more specifically, the primitive aspects of being human (which bring to mind the book by anthropologist, Levi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*). The first of these vocal-instrumental mini-operas was *Thunder, Like a White Bear Dancing (1977)* a ritual-performance event based on the 'Mide' Picture Songs of the Ojibwa Indians of Minnesota. It is a concert piece scored for soprano, flute, piano, hand percussion (played by the three) and slide projections. "Thunder is a kind of up-to-date shamanistic ritual for voice, speakers, and instruments, which, as performed by soprano Thomasa Eekert, is weirdly convincing spiritually as well as startling and beautiful to listen to ..... you can almost smell the wood smoke."(12) For this composition, I freely adapted the text and pictograph materials from the initiation rituals of the Midewiwin (Grand Medicine Society). In essence, Thunder is a performance of a contemporary interpretation of a Mide ritual. The piece came from an activation of my own desire to learn from the wisdom of the materials. Within the tribe itself, ritual exactness is not obligatory in the Mide. This fact helped me to ethically justify utilizing materials from a culture other than my own. In her book, *Chippewa Music*, published in 1910, ethnomusicologist Frances Densmore states: "Its ceremony of initiation has a general outline which is universally followed, but the details vary in different localities." Both men and women being eligible for membership into the Midewiwin, I chose to cast the role of the "initiate" in *Thunder*, as a woman. This was congruent with the text, which is completely androgynous in nature. The use of music in relation to "medicine" is the aspect of the Mide materials that interested me the most. The power of the Mide religion is expressed through the combination of these two interactive media - music and medicine. So strong is the function and power of music for these aboriginals, that the Ojibwas, as with many tribal people believe that in order for healing to take place, music must accompany the administering of the "medicine". This was the case whether it was a treatment using one of many hundred native herbs gathered and cultivated by the Indians of North America, or a ceremonial shamanic calling of specific deities. As well, the syllable "ho-ho-ho-ho" must be repeatedly chanted at the close of a healing song.

W. J. Hoffman in the Seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology (1891) stated: " In a Mide song, the melody and the idea expressed are the essential parts, with the actual words being forced into conformation with the melody. To achieve this, it is customary in the Mide tradition, to add meaningless syllables either between parts of the word or between the words. Accents are misplaced or a word is sometimes accented differently in various parts of a song. The vowels are also given different sounds, or completely altered. Any of these various changes of text are permissible. A Mide song is repeated for as long as the singer chooses. It is believed that greater the number of repetitions, the greater is felt to be the amount of inspiration and power of the performance." I have made much use, creatively, of these historical accounts of

repetition, fragmentation of words, the use of meaningless syllables, which are often more important in expressing the idea of the words than the words themselves. As for the pictographs, Densmore states, "All the songs (several hundred) are recorded in mnemonics on strips of birch bark. This record serves as a reminder of the essential idea of the song and is different in its nature from our system of printing, The Indian picture preserves the idea of the song, while our printed page preserves the words which are supposed to express the idea but which often express it very imperfectly." In my piece I have used both: a verbal representation of the pictographs, which serves as the text, and slides of the pictographs themselves, blown up many hundreds of times and serving as a backdrop for the performers.

In *Thunder*, the singer is clearly the "*initiate*" into the great Medicine Society. The instrumentalists provide a variety of musical/dramatic illusions. At times they are the initiators or witnesses. At other times they simply sound as poetic spatial atmosphere. The piece is in three large sections following the delineation of the three sets of pictographs (a total of 33 in all). The state of the *initiate* evolves dramatically. In the beginning she projects great uncertainty, lack of direction, limited perception of the role she is about to undertake as medicine person. By the end she is a human being who possesses the necessary wisdom and preparedness to serve the tribe as healer. In the first section beginning with the words, "I swing the spirit like a child" the *initiate* displays the novice. This is portrayed by the stuttering of many nonsense syllables, before the first line of text is clearly stated.

The pitch material is dissonant, and the instrumental texture supports the expression of uncertainty, at first with chords clanging and disjunct rhythms, then very static with the use of rhythmically eccentric repetitions of short melodic motives.

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, starting with a melodic phrase and then a chant with lyrics: "ya ah ye da ha - m ah - m ca P (ta/ba) o.". The middle staff is the piano accompaniment, featuring arpeggiated chords and a steady rhythm. The bottom staff is the bass line, providing harmonic support. Performance markings include "ped" (pedal) and "8" (octave) in the piano part.

Figure 3: from opening section of Thunder, Like a White Bear Dancing

Later into the section the initiate makes her first claim of power with the words "I am using my heart". Her many repetitions of this simple chant are heard clearly and then are gradually overtaken by the swelling of piano and flute improvisation on much flashier material than her four-tone chant.

This musical score illustrates a transition in a piece. The top staff shows a vocal line with a four-tone chant: "other vil-lage y other vil-lage y". This is followed by a piano and flute improvisation section. The piano part features a wavy line indicating a swelling or tremolo effect, with dynamics markings "mf", "cresc", and "ff". The flute part has a similar wavy line. The lyrics "The Thun-der is Heav-y ? (resolved) we are talking to each other" are written below the piano part. Above the score, there are two circular diagrams: one showing a bird (labeled "13") and another showing hands (labeled "14") with the instruction "(fade out in silence)".

Figure 4: End of first section of Thunder

Towards the end of the first section there is a full development of the opening instrumental material, both the rhythmically clanging dissonance of the piano, and the melodically disjunct chirping of the flute, here used to depict the intensity of elemental power the initiate must struggle with in "making medicine". She imposes her own pulse both in a clear metric chant and with foot stamping with ankle bells, and ending with the words "the thunder is heavy, we are talking to each other".

(cross fade)

(in a hance)

(repeat this phrase 12 times inhaling on some words, moving closer in pitch as it crescendos)

(fade away more loudly as it diminishes)

*ff*

*pp*

*ped*

*sustain throughout*

*I am using my heart*

*I am using my heart*

*I am using my heart*

(Improvisation on this material until singer has repeated "I am using my heart" 12 times. Nature of Depression: gradually increase in range - downward - growing in intensity until it gives the illusion of having swallowed the singers lines as she diminishes.)

Figure 5: from first section of Thunder: "I am using my heart"

In the second section, beginning with the text "Let us be a spirit," the *initiate* begins to gain power and shows confidence in becoming a healer, although she remains vulnerable. This vulnerability is musically depicted by the vocal sounds of the flutist. The pitch material is more "comfortable" (expressive of the gaining of power) full of modality rather than the atonal pull of the first section, less fragmented longer melodic lines.

Figure 6: Opening of second section of Thunder

It is in the third and last section that the ritual frame of the concert medium is played with. I chose to do this for the sake of potential empowerment of all present. By the end of the piece, there is truly a question as to who has been initiated. The audience, as witness, is elicited directly as the *initiate* begins with a simple repeated melodic chant on the text "A spirit, a spirit, you who sit there, who sit there." Then, in contrasting *sprechstimme* she reflects on her near readiness to take the charge as medicine woman. She returns to the simple chant, moving down stage toward the audience. The pianist and flutist join in coming down stage with bells and rattles in hand, chanting the little tune and beckoning the audience to join in. As they do (truly in varying degrees depending upon the nature and mood of the audience), the soprano takes off with an improvised vocalize over the top. The concert audience is actually elicited to give blessing for an initiation, (for who?, a mythical medicine woman, a historically documented Ojibwa traditional doctor, a concert-singing soprano who has put her heart in the hands of the audience as she risks to invite them to join her in song?). When she feels that the song has reached its climax, she joins back in on the simple chant and motions for a diminuendo. When all is quiet, she simply sings on one pitch "the sound of the thunder is the white bear of fire" and the necessary "ho,ho, ho,ho", encoded in the Ojibwa healing tradition. "The initiate crosses over the threshold from one stage of life to another, and once she/he has crossed she can never return. The concluding stage of such an initiation ritual is one of incorporation, enabling the individual to re-enter society on a new basis."(13)

*Breathing Songs from a Turning Sky (Ten Meditations on the Sefirot as a Wheel of Light) 1980-84*, is an example of an instrumental performance piece (flutes, clarinets, bassoon, cello, piano and percussion) in which I weave together aspects of meditation, movement, numerology, mysticism, tribalism, and theater lighting. The twenty-five minute chamber piece takes its general structure from the 17th Century Kabbalist poem. The Sefirot as a Wheel of Light, by Naftali Bacharach. (14) In effect, the overall piece is a series of ten (non-verbal, non-vocal) meditations on particular states of enlightenment: *Crown, Wisdom, Understanding, Greatness, Power, Beauty, Majesty, Victory, Foundation, Kingdom*. These meditations are undertaken by the performers, and along the way I have infused signals of invitation for the audience to join the meditation aspect of the event. My intention was to supersede the ritual frame, inherent in attending a performance, with a heightened, ritualized series of framed meditations. To support this I utilized extra-musical elements such as: specified changes of location in the performance space (from one movement to another), measured uses of silence, and specific lighting. In some movements, the performers sit in a typical chamber ensemble semicircle arrangement with the piano and percussion upstage. In a few, such as 3. *Understanding*, and 10. *Kingdom* the performers move to different "stations". Musically speaking, some sections are entirely scored out in conventional notation, others are instructions or diagrams for structured improvisations.

For each movement (except for number 7. *Majesty*, which is entirely silent), I derive all the pitch material by utilizing a pair of pentatonic scales, with one tone of each scale present within the other scale of the pair. My choice of scales for each movement came from my own response/interpretation to the particular state of enlightenment at hand, as well as the treatment of the Kabbalah by the poet, Bacharach. The unique modal qualities of each chosen scale (and in turn each pair of scales) provide a particular sound/color appropriate for each section or meditation. The relationship of the pair of scales in each movement is developed from either a vertical or linear perspective. In the former, with superimpositions, creating harmonies between the two pentatonic tonalities. And in the latter, evolving melodically, through modulation from one pentatonic scale to the next and back again in some cases. In some sections there is also oscillation between elements of the two scales as in the following example.

The image displays a musical score for a section of a piece. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes staves for Bb Clarinet (measures 15-17), Cello (measures 15-17), Piano (measures 15-17), and Vibes (measures 15-17). The second system includes staves for Piccolo (measures 16-18), Bb Clarinet (measures 16-18), Cello (measures 16-18), Piano (measures 16-18), and Vibes (measures 16-18). The music is written in a complex, rhythmic style with various note values and rests.

Figure 7: from the middle of 1. Crown which, is built on two pentatonic scales: C, E, F, G, B $\flat$  and F, A $\flat$ , A, D, E $\flat$ .

From beginning to end, *Breathing Songs from a Turning Sky* hovers in a ritualized zone, both amongst the performers and including the audience as well. There are some organizational elements lying just under the obvious structural surface, which feed the ritual flame. Numerology is one such element; for example the number ten is used in the pairing of two pentatonic scales for each section. There are ten movements. There are many uses of ten repetitions of particular materials. Though the uses of “tens” are pervasive and undoubtedly experienced at least unconsciously by the audience, I have made no attempt to absolutely serialize anything: durations, scales nor number of repetitions.

As a ritual, *Breathing Songs* is very much enhanced by the lighting that underscores both the overall rhythm of a piece in many sections, as well as the unique qualities of the individual meditations. As the series of sections unfolds, the lighting score progresses with a new configuration of light for each movement and between movements. I will not go into describing the lighting for each movement. I will however,

point out some features of how I have organized the lighting as an element fused to the sound/silence element of the piece. For example, between each of the first seven, self-contained musical movement/meditations, the light fades to darkness.

These sequences of darkness/silence increase in length, a little longer each time. By the time we get to 7. *Majesty*, the darkness/silence is predominant and the entire movement is a silent meditation, performed in a totally "black house". Here the comfortable ritual frame of an audience simply attending a performance. is broken. The container has been gradually slipping away with the elongation of darkness/silence intervals between the musical statements. The desired effect is that the audience is induced or lured further into a meditative, self-reflective spaciousness. "All true rituals mark a transition from one mode of being to another, working a transformation within the individual or community, at a deep psychological, physical and spiritual level, resulting in an altered state of consciousness."(15) Once arriving at 7. *Majesty*, the "black house" and silence elicits a dramatic response precisely because of the stretch of the ritual frame: the departure from what has come to be expected by seven instrumentalists sitting in an auditorium performing chamber music. The length of *Majesty* varies with each performance (usually 1 1/2 to 3 minutes), and is determined by each performance situation, environment and the audience. The decision for this timing is governed by the lighting technician, who is an active performer throughout the piece. Meanwhile the musicians on stage sit in stillness and silence against deep blue back-lighting, the audience seeing only their silhouettes. After this point, meditations 8, 9 and 10 proceed with incidental blackout/silences between them.

In the Kabbalah, 10. Kingdom, is looked at as the most human or earthbound manifestation of Godliness. I have based this section on a Tlinget Indian rowing song, which is based on a pentatonic scale, and harmonized by another two identically transposed at a perfect fifth and major tenth above.

X. Kingdom (malxhut) Most precious precious  
Shining light is

*Tlinget Rowing Song*  
♩ = 60

1. Cello - top part, Bass Clarinet - middle part, Bassoon - bottom part  
all at *p* Percussion alternate amongst suspended cymbals thus:
2. Add Alto Flute to the top part  
all at *mp*
3. Bass Clarinet move to bottom part, add Piano to all three parts, blending  
all at *mf*. Instruments may begin embellishing the sound with greater dynamics, expansion of octaves, glissandi, melodic ornamentation.
4. After tune has begun, Percussionist interrupts with:  
played twice, *fff*, then continue with cymbals.
5. After tune has begun, Percussionist again interrupts  
with timpani pattern but continues playing it throughout piece.   
Once timpani pattern is solid, Bassoonist move to a tom-tom and play:
6. As soon as Bassoonists tom-tom pattern is solid, Alto flute move to tom-tom and play:   
When flutists pattern is solid clarinetist move to tom-toms and play:
7. Percussionist II begin tam-tam pattern, increasing in volume with each repetition, 6 times in all. Pianist move to suspended cymbal pattern.
8. Cellist plays tune full out, yet alone
9. Cellist moves to tom-tom and plays:

All players continue with patterns until sixth tam-tam roll is completed, then drop out one by one in the reverse order (first cellist, then pianist, clarinetist, flutist, bassoonist), fading out. After all players have finished, timpanist begins decrescendo of pattern to *ppp*, taking about 10-15 repetitions to do so.

*fine*

Figure 8: 10. Kingdom

This is one of the only harmonized Native American chants I have ever come across. The Tlingets live in the Sitka, Alaska area that was "settled" by the, Russians. The style of harmonization has the wonderful parallelisms of Russian folk music. I found myself at home with this cross-cultural gem (my own family origin being from Ukraine and Beliruse). I got permission to use the Tlinget chant under the condition that it appear in exactly the same key and range as on the Folkways field recording. (16) As noted in the instructions for this movement, the rowing song is played a total of ten times, with performers gradually leaving their sophisticated concert instruments for a circle of tomtoms. The entire piece ends with a tribal drumming based on interlocking rhythm cells, each distinct enough to be heard, yet simple enough for non-percussionist musicians to play with a mallet or two. All of this is done under lighting which shifts gradually from dark blue, to yellow, to intense red; a virtual heating up to match the group energy. The percussionist (on a pair of timpani and bass drum), as master

drummer, signals a tapering to the end.

Working on *Breathing Songs* took me on a path of rediscovery of my ties to Judaism. Paradoxically, the Kabbalah, an old, esoteric, mystical aspect of Judaism, (which I knew very little about before working on this piece) sparked something new and vital for me. "Every symbol may lose its power. Sometimes the symbol is simply worn out, used up, exhausted; and where this is the case then a new symbol must be born in that person; or it may be that the individual has to rediscover the life within the archetype."(17)

*Om Shanti* was originally composed in 1986 upon the request and commission of the Institute for Transformational Movement, a Seattle based center for body movement therapy. The organization had just lost their founder/director, Peter Guiler, to AIDS and they wanted a musical piece which would honor him and which could be used for benefit concerts for AIDS related charities. I found from the outset, that a ritual context could best portray and hold the extremely "big" feelings of sadness, and humility I was having while creating a concert piece to commemorate the passage of a community leader. To ritualize the very acceptance of the presence of AIDS, both in the personal and global sense, seemed the most natural course for me to take. "Rites reflect and express realities as they are experienced now, and the insight of our own times, not a regression to past ages"(18) *Om Shanti*, in its original version was scored for Seattle's *New Performance Group*, with Thomasa Eckert, soprano soloist, and chamber ensemble (*Pierrot* combination). The piece is my personal prayer for people living with the AIDS virus. It is in five separate movements, each addressing another aspect of facing and accepting AIDS: 1) Individual being connected to nature and to the greater motion of the universe. 2) Earthly human experience of the body, riding the life energy. 3) Relationship between humans, intertwining, a statement of how we need each other, deeply and passionately, and how deeply we suffer at the loss of loved ones. 4) Sound floats in space, in some way perhaps we draw comfort in acknowledging our own death while we are still alive. 5) *Om Shanti*, this chant is a ritual expression of passage. *Om* is the primordial human expression for all sounds in the universe according to yogic traditions; *Shanti* is peace.

I

*Slowly and Simply*

1) Begin in this order: A. Synthesizer - drone on lowest "D" (sustained string sound), B. Piano - Low and plucked <sup>slowly, in this order</sup>, C. Violin - Drone on open G#D, Cello - Drone on open D+A, softly *pp-mp*

2) add Alto Flute, <sup>slowly, in measures 1-5</sup> (played into piano) *pp-mp*

3) add Vibes, bowed or tramped <sup>single tones</sup> and Clarinet (same pitches as Vibes) single tones for the duration of one breath. *mp*

4) Voice, some synth. tones chosen from vocal line.

A - ham A - ha - m A - ha - m A - ham A - ha - m  
A - ha - m nir - vi - kal - po nir - a kar - a ru - o nir - a ka - ra ru -  
- po Nir - vi - kal - po nir - a ka - ra ru - po Nir - vi - kal - po  
nir - a ka - ra ru - po Vib - hut vac - ca Vibhut vac - ca  
Vib - hut vac - ca Vibhut vac - ca Sar - tra  
Sar - va - tra Sar - ven dri ya - nam Sarven dri ya -  
nam Na - ca - sa ga - tam ca sa ga - tam Na  
ca - sa ga - tam nai - va mukta na ma - jas nai - va mukta  
na ma - jas nai - va mukta na ma - jas nai - va mukta na ma - jas  
Cid - a - nanda ru - pah si - vo - ham si - vo - ha - m Cid - a - nanda ru - pah si - vo - ham  
si - vo - ha - m Cid - a - nanda ru - pah si - vo - ham si - vo - ha - m

5) Clarinet, Violin, + Cello enter occasionally "in unison" with voice (using harmonics), you choose where.

6) Synth. grows denser as it goes.

7) Vin. + Cel. thin out to just harmonics (long notes), Clar. to single tones, untramped. Synth. - sustain + dim., fewer tones

8) "Peel off" drone in this order:  
A. Flute  
B. Clarinet  
C. Vibes  
D. Violin + Cello  
E. Synth. - dim. to Low D only  
F. Piano - alone at end *al niente*

Figure 9: 1st movement of *Om Shanti*

The text is by Shankaracharya and is sung in Sanskrit. The translation reads: "I am without thought, without form. I am all-pervasive, I am everywhere, yet beyond all senses. I am neither detachment, nor salvation, nor anything that could be measured. I am consciousness and bliss. I am Shiva! I am Shiva!"

While attempting to achieve a non-intellectual, more physical appeal to the 'soul-place' that is universally associated with facing grief, I risked being seen as overly simplistic musically. The ritualization of the melody in the soprano is achieved through singing very similar, though never exact phrases extending for the duration of one full breath. The vocal line is complimented by an undulating drone of the instruments. Combined, these elements set up a spacious environment in which the listener can be induced inwardly toward their individual feelings and thoughts. "The soul is the world within and it is to this inner world that ritual relates."(19) As the five movements unfold, there are

times that require more active listening, a calling for greater thoughtfulness, or perhaps understanding. But the piece overall offers and delivers primarily a meditative experience. "Rituals, if performed with passion and devotion, will enhance our desire and strengthen our capacity, to live."(20)

Subsequent to its first performances in 1986, this version of *Om Shanti* has been performed for funerals, several Artists Against AIDS benefit concerts, an Earth Day Celebration. It is currently in the repertoire of several new music ensembles, and is featured on a *New Albion* compact disc, as performed by the *New Performance Group* of Seattle, which was released in late 1992. The original idea for *Om Shanti* to be useful in 'benefits,' inspired the compact disc. The initial request suggested a piece that was in itself a ritual, a rite of passage, into the reality of AIDS. Later versions have been performed by a counter tenor, mixed chorus with expanded chamber ensemble, for various smaller ensembles including the *Bermuda Triangle* at the *Bang on a Can Festival* AIDS benefit 1993, for the *Floating Opera* (performance piece on Puget Sound waterways) for soprano, chorus, and chamber orchestra. The changeability of the piece into many different versions is a perfect example of an aspect of some rituals, their evolution as needed to remain current and functional. "A ritual which has evolved from a particular need does not necessarily have to be repeated."(21)

My work on *Om Shanti* spawned a whole series of pieces, that I affectionately call 'music and healing series'. I have found that there is great appeal in concert pieces that can point the listener inward, toward a place of soulfulness. In these pieces I have worked with the intention of engaging the cognitive mind to function purposefully as a vehicle inward toward the heart. I am drawn over and over again to create works from this inner perspective as well, using all of my own morality, musical skills and knowledge of human nature as I make each choice in my work. I believe this has been true for me my whole life, but became more obvious during the late 1980's. Four of the 'music and healing series' are featured on the *New Albion* disc which is entitled *Home (revisited)*.

The piece bearing the title is for sixteen voice men's chorus and gamelan (*pelog* tuning) and was completed in 1991. This piece evolved from an earlier version (1989) for nine men's choruses and twenty-three western instruments, which had been commissioned particularly for a festival celebrating gay and lesbian choruses from around the U.S. and Canada. The commission specified that each of the choruses could perform the work independent of the others (in their respective cities) with some flexibility in instrumentation. Then the "full" performance was to be at the GALA Festival in Seattle's Meany Hall, (1,600 seat tiered concert hall). The entire audience was surrounded by over 430 performers, including singers, percussionists, brass, and strings.



frame, with something changed by the end of the piece. The entire piece is modal and built on the scale: F,G,A,B  $\flat$ , (B),C,D,(E  $\flat$ ),E; with only modal modulations. The

audience is encouraged in the program notes to join in with the drone. They sing on the word "home" any tone they might choose or hear around them, and in their own timing, based on their own breathing. The piece was designed as a ritual "chant-in", to induce, and send, (to the heavens) a message: we homosexuals are here, this is our home.

"Home is meditative and after a few minutes the theater itself seemed to breathe with the music."(23) The ritual here is expressed in the surrounding of an audience, full of homosexuals (and gay-friendly people) by nine choruses of homosexual musicians, all singing on the singular word "home". All are reminded that, in the face of humiliation by many parts of society, there is a place for these people, created by and celebrated by a shared community. "Ritual uses many forms of art but it is essentially performance, enactment. Its performance quality differs, however, from theater as we know it in the West, in that what is created is performed out of necessity. As such, it is essential to the life-being of the individual."(24)

For the compact disc, I revised *Home*, for *Philandros* (the chamber chorus of the *Seattle Men's Chorus*), and *Gamelan Pacifica*, an ensemble specializing in new music for traditional Javanese gamelan. The 'wraparound' magnitude effect of the original *Home* was replaced with the fullness of a fourteen-member ensemble including the traditional metalophones, gongs and complimented by *rebab* (violin) *suling* (flute), other Indonesian ornamental instruments and synthesizer. The tuning is *pelog* (seven tone scale), and just slightly torqued from a Western diatonic distribution, which automatically fit very well with the vocal writing of the first version. In the second version, the aural effect, became directional, by necessity, yet remained expansive and fulfilling in a way similar to that of the original version. The number of performers is much smaller, but the introduction of the Indonesian *pelog* scale and traditional layering of the gamelan added a lot of spatial depth and resonance. The outcome is still meditative, as in the original version, but a different, more pluralistic and less homogeneous embrace.

The last works I will discuss in this paper are *The Screamer* and *Sleepless in the Shadow* (1992-94) a pair of music/theater chamber collages in which I explore, unabashedly, the psychological material of sadism and evil, both personal and universal. I am filled with the reality that there can be no healing without claiming human darkness as well as the light. "The older you get the more you realize that happiness is losing your false sense of what you are, your false self."(25) I was also interested in working with the dynamic dance between spiritual and psychological realms of the mind. To best uncover and acknowledge the dimensions of these states, I found that I needed to ride the edges of fear and safety for myself in the composing of these pieces. This, in turn, created a need for heightened attention for the performers as well as the audience. Again, ritual supplied core concepts in structuring these pieces.

For ritual has, built into its very structure, the potential containment for something risky.

which can possibly transverse the various realms of the human mind, both individually and collectively. "New rituals, if they are to be efficacious, must well up from within the psyche of the individual or of a group. I have found, as have others working in this field, that when people are given the opportunity and the responsibility of creating their own rituals the results are often unexpected and surprising." (26)

The ritual meaning in *The Screamer* is engendered by a conscious and compelling desire to further my own psychological healing in an artistic context. "Ritual is a collective or individual attempt to conjure up or reawaken those deeper layers of the psyche which the light of reason and the power of the wilt can never reach, and to bring them back to life"(27) The piece, in essence is the ritualized journey of one woman to her most interior, most primitive psychic state, not withholding the more difficult emotions of raw terror and grief. I have brought this task to the very structure or bones of the piece, as I hope to illustrate in the following narrative "map". *The Screamer* is scored for female voice and six instrumentalists. It is about twenty-five minutes in six interdependent yet closed-form movements.

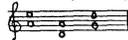
1) *I am the first and the last (before)*: The truth of our complexity is introduced by the listing of polarities, which in one form or another we (humans) all possess. For this section I have chosen several lines from *Thunder, Perfect Mind*, a gnostic poem, which the soprano chants in a simple, spoken voice while the ensemble quietly begins to heat up the sound space with a structured improvisation, of an ominous nature.

### I.

This piece is approximately two minutes in length: 30 seconds to establish instrumental texture, then the soprano enters, she continues to recite text for 1 minute, then the instrumental texture decays for another 30 seconds.

1. **Piano** - Continuous roll on low A string with Bass Drum mallet. Vary from pp-mp, always gradually shifting. End after Chimes and Soprano have completed their parts.

Once chimes have entered, occasionally play one of these diads or a sequence of two, as a "shadow" of chimes. Dynamics pp-mp.



**Bass Clarinet** - Choose from these tones, play each for the duration of one breath, then inhale and immediately go on to your next choice of tone. Dynamics chosen from: pp-mp-pp, pp-ff, sfp. Incorporate some use of grace-notes to the long tones (but these grace-notes must also be from the same pentatonic scale) Incorporate use of flutter tongue, and multiphonics (of your choice). Begin with Piano and end after everyone else.



2. **Violin** - Choosing from these tones, play melodic intervals in pairs followed by silences. Tremolo and glissando throughout. Each gesture (including silence) lasting 5-15 seconds. Dynamic level pp-mp with occasional sfp. Begin after Piano and Bass Clarinet have established their presences. End with Piano.



**Cello** - Pizzicato drone on low E. Repeat this tone in a non-patterned (spasmodic) fashion. Add grace-notes of major or minor 2nds from above or below low E. Also occasionally use wide vibrato. Create specific gestures, each gesture (including silence) lasting 4-8 seconds. Dynamic level pp-mp, with occasional sfp. Begin after Piano and Bass Clarinet have established their presences. End with Piano.

3. **Chimes** - Repeat this sequence of three diads a total of eleven times. Durations and silences between each repetition can vary. Dynamics pp-mp. Begin after Violin and Cello have entered. Your entire event to last no longer than one minute and fifteen seconds (including silence between).



**Alto Flute** - Choosing from these tones, create gestures of two kinds: 1) tongue stops in grace-note groupings of three to five notes long. 2) short, slow melodies only three to four notes long. Hum same melody simultaneously at major or minor second from played tones, can be flutter tongue as well. Begin after Violin and Cello have entered. End with Piano.



4. **Soprano** - Recite the following text in a very calm, even voice, in a moderate tempo, pausing after each duality expressed. This is a dramatic yet non-theatrical gesture. Use a microphone with enough amplification so that each word can be heard clearly over the instrumental texture without your having to speak any louder than you would to someone sitting four feet away.

I am the first and the last.  
 I am the honored one and the scorned one.  
 I am the whore, and the holy one.  
 I am the wife and the virgin.  
 I am the mother and the daughter....  
 I am she whose wedding is great, and I have not taken a husband....  
 I am knowledge and ignorance....  
 I am shameless; I am ashamed.  
 I am strength, and I am fear....  
 I am foolish, and I am wise....  
 I am goddess, and I am one whose God is great.

Figure 11: First movement (instructions for structured improvisation)

2) *Spider Grandmother (holding on)*: To the Hopi Indians, the universe was created or spun out by a female deity of a spider-like nature. The music in this section is purely instrumental, simply tonal, unfolding from short, rather naive melodic cells that are spun out like a translucent web in a gradual process. All of this, projecting an innocence, an offering from the pure, non-psychological universe, to hold the individual as she continues her descent toward the dangerous middle section of the piece.

3) *Invocation to Kali (going down)*: This is a prayer to the Hindu Goddess of Destruction/Creation, asking for blessings in unmasking necessary hatred, experienced during the healing journey. Using a poem of the same title by May Sarton, the soprano sings lyrically, punctuating phrases with a pair of *crotales* on the tonic and fifth. She is matched by a complimentary, independent, almost aloof cello line. The two remain in perfect balance with each other throughout the movement, hinting at moments at exchanging material, but always primarily separate. This is back-grounded by a drone of contrasting low pitched rough hewn long tones on the synthesizer and bass clarinet; with heaven bound luminous percussion, flute and violin harmonics.

4) *I am the Screamer (inside)*: "As all myths teach, it takes courage to plunge into the unknown, and on the way we must expect a series of trials or passages of the soul. A ritual is such a passage, and is tightly termed a rite of passage. The word "passage" carries several meanings. It is a corridor or tunnel, that links one place with another, and it also implies movement along such a space. Thus, in an initiation ritual the initiate will be moved from familiar to unfamiliar surroundings."(28) The musical language here, by contrast to the first three movements, is bizarrely theatrical, in the surreal operatic sense. The text is drawn from two sources: my own personal journal entries from the year while working on *The Screamer*, and from quotes of an interview with Ogotemeli, an elder from the Western Sudan. The experience spoken about, could be anything which changes our internal life - something we experience, in a very primitive sense, in this case a psychologically tormented early childhood. At times the "band" is empathetic with the singer's "experience", at other times the instrumental ensemble acts as the protagonist, at times it is a neutral atmosphere or witness. The entire piece moves toward a moment in this highly charged, central movement, when the ritual frame of performance is dramatically and completely torn. This comes when the soprano moves out beyond the specified re-iterations (thirteen) of the words "I, the screamer". The section builds up, as the vocal line unfolds dynamically, pitch-wise (she finishes on a high B), as well as an energetic hastening through the shortening of durations for each syllable. The drama of the vocal line is set over changing chords, clanging in the ensemble, which grow more chromatic. When she has reached the climax and the completion of written music, she repeats chanting/screaming as many times as she chooses, while the players sustain their "clanging" and follow her for the cut-off. At this moment the piece is no longer simply a performance of designated material, but enters into that ritual "corridor" of the unknown, the risk necessary for possible change or transformation.

\* Sing/scream this measure at least 3 times, getting lost in the fff of the TomTom roll.

Figure 12: Fourth movement, unleashed repetition of the phrase "I, the screamer".

The movement continues, now the music more fragmented than driven, ending with a distorted folksy nursery-rhyme repeated rather 'autistically' on the text "words addressed to nobody, words addressed to nobody, etc."

5) *Too Much Like Fire (oh God)*: This section depicts the admission of our reluctance to acknowledge to ourselves, let alone to others, that we can and are moved profoundly by some experience. In *The Screamer*, it is the coming to terms with the wounds of a difficult childhood, but it could be acknowledging other powerful things, - sex, war, a union with someone else, or God. The text taken from a poem by Conrad Aiken reads: "All the while, withholding what's most precious to ourselves. Some sinister depth of lust or fear or hatred: the somber note that gives the chord its power, or a white loveliness-if such we know. Too much like fire to speak of without shame." The musical setting in two parts, the first containing the text is lush, chamber music, self-revealing vocal lines, a kind of drama, antithetical to the previous movement. The second half takes on a more reflective interior tone, which signals the coming closure to the whole work. Here I have arranged the instruments to emulate the sound of a hymn played haltingly on a pipe organ, with the typical acoustic delay heard in large cathedrals. The singer, now without text, chants a slightly meandering line, complimented by an improvised alto flute line. This section is intentionally similar to 3) *Invocation to Kali* in its prayerfulness.

6) *I am the first and the last (after)*: This is the closing section, similar to the beginning that it is improvised with a specific set of instructions. Here, while the singer vocally

chants the text, all the performers as well, join in the "ceremony" by uttering the text. This signifies that we are all made of paradoxes and contradictions, and to embrace this is to become integrated at once as a whole being, both individually and collectively. The process of working on *The Screamer* was in itself a personal ritual for me. In composing it I had to fully complete all of the outer sections, in essence I had to create a fortified, fully formed and blessed container in which the middle movement could emerge from me. "Ritual works on two levels, that of the psychological and that of the spiritual, and sometimes both coincide. A ritual can resolve, at a deeper level than the intellect, some inner conflict, thereby releasing the individual from a psychological block."(29)

I will speak only briefly in this article about my most recent ensemble piece *Sleepless in the Shadow* that I consider still in-progress. In the simple definition *Sleepless* is a theater/collage (approx. 20 minutes), made up of composed music, quotations of past concert music, emulations as well as distortions of folk (Euro-American) musics, improvised music, text, choreographed movement and theater lighting. The ritual elements in this piece were ignited in the very process of making the work. It was created in residence with the *Relache Ensemble* of Philadelphia, as part of the new music project, *Music in Motion*. The eight instrumental performers contributed to the text, the raw musical materials and ultimately to the essential meaning upon which the composition was based. Its underlying theme is: perspectives on group dynamics with the continual question: How do we negotiate our individual needs in social contexts? What unfolds is a series of episodes, beginning with self-centered (blind) actions, then power struggles, attempts at negotiation, and ultimately conscious relating amongst the players.

Throughout the piece there is the sense of a true story unfolding amongst these players, a drama that they are really part of. In fact, they really were participating in something beyond performance, because what was finally presented as a composition was a playful mirroring of the process of creation. The drama unfolds in a weaving of the multi-media elements, with eclectic musical materials at the center. My endearing names for some of the sections: "Momma-blue, Intro-flect I and II, Hay-dance-Ukraine-series, Same-Name-Mantra", give a flavor of the musical ground covered. Complimenting the music are all of the other performance elements mentioned earlier, ie. text and movement. There are two moments in the piece where I chose to use very potent visual symbols to heighten the drama. "Unlike words, symbols speak to our whole personality, not just to our ears and intelligences, they create resonances and associations inaccessible to words, they appeal to intuition and experience as much as to understanding, And their power is incomparably greater than any words."(30) The first of these moments underscores the state of desperation of the group in trying to find unity. The instructions read: "Bassoon: Stand up (raising your instrument over your head like a rifle) and Everyone together shout "A simpler place." Bassoon leading, one by one all the others stand up and proceed to march slowly (like zombies) in high "goose-step" fashion, gathering as a group down stage..... In another moment, while suspended in

grief over the destructive nature of human beings, the players are instructed to: "tie a purple ribbon armband around the arm of another player. This gesture is a symbol of revelation that when someone in a group has been excluded, lost, or scapegoated, in reality everyone has lost. Healing can follow with the grieving by the entire group. Both of these images end up being outrageous in a chamber music setting, but that is fully my intention, because I wanted to express outrage. "The danger is that our society has largely lost touch with the art of thinking in images "Our thinking is largely discursive, verbal, linear" yet there is more reality in an image than in a word"(31)

Sleepless is a play within a play; the ritualization of group dynamics as the ensemble showed up for the residency project, with my interpretation of these dynamics. In effect, I acted as initiator, guide, chair-person in a process, which the ensemble later told me had considerably enhanced the ensembles relationship style. They were willing to explore, "real" issues of separateness and interdependency within the context of making a piece. The piece is the "story" of this exploration.

## **Conclusion**

This brings me to a closing statement. I would like to say that my greatest goal as a composer/artist is in continuing to make works that acknowledge the fierce and fragile interdependency of human beings; and humans with the rest of the universe - the dynamics of relationship. In my music I am concerned with articulating with the greatest clarity possible, my personal experience of the world in which I live, from both immediate and universal perspectives. At the same time, I want my music to give energy, to fuel, rather than exhaust the listener with heady, hard to understand aggregates of sound. I have believed for a long time that artists are the guardians of the very spirit of creativity. As the 'dream speakers', we enter a space in which we take what is suggested by our world experience and render a mirror. As 'lover-warriors', 'truth tellers', 'spinners', we make unspeakable messages audible, visible, embraceable. We put voice to common human longings, ecstasy and grief. Sometimes we challenge the collective moral conscience. Through our work we invite a group spirit; we nourish, celebrate, warn; we pray out loud. In my pieces, I am continually working to find new ways (though perhaps ancient) to stimulate the part of the mind that I call "soft brain", where we experience reality in other than linear, cognitive ways. Sound is experienced throughout the whole body, thus making it a very potent medium with which to communicate.

In my experience, people turn to music when they desire to be transported out of the ordinary. A consciousness of ritual helps me find ways to use sound as a vehicle for movement within the listening experience. This is possible because in all primary rituals, there is a doorway marking profane from sacred space/time/sound. Music itself is a portal, a physical entry into the psyche, where one can engage the deeper, inner life channel - my own, as well as the listeners'. My creative efforts as a composer are most

empowered by my perspective on ritual, both the ritual frame inherent in the very performance of a piece of work, as well as by incorporating more elaborate ritual elements. In addition I often structure the perspective of re-enacting a traditional ritual. I have found that to ritualize some event underscores, outlines certain elements within it.

This, in turn brings to greater focus the dynamics of the parts that ultimately make the whole greater. It is in the spirit of the relationship of the elements, that I find the most "juice" in a work of music or art. Thus, my work challenges the paradigm of hierarchy and projects a spirit of transformation through relationship. As an example, within a single piece, my music may encompass expressions of delight as well as of the abyss, thus recalling the beginning of this paper in which I spoke of Jamake Highwater's discourse on the essential bridging of dualism "light and dark", "male and female" etc.

Finally, as a creative musician/artist I consider it part of my work to protect a potential space for the expression of the human psyche. For the privilege of this role, I am compelled to continue to develop a depth of humility, and to evolve through self-reflection and refining. In addition, as a member of a political entity, a culture with a structure, I am charged to protect the role of the arts and bring further into light that music-making is a necessary and useful social tool, enhancing human meaning and dignity. I see the precarious environmental and spiritual edge we humans are walking along, I included. As I am filled with an urgency to do my share to protect life, I aim to project into all of my work my goodness of soul and humanity. I will close with one last statement from the wonderful book *Passages of the Soul, Ritual Today*, by British theater director and ordained Anglican priest, James Roose-Evans. He is quoting from Peter Brook, the experimental British theater director who has worked to re-vitalize performance through ritual consciousness: "...a true testing of a ritual is when a strong presence of performers and a strong presence of witnesses' can produce a circle of unique intensity in which barriers can be broken and the invisible becomes real', and it is when these two worlds meet that' there is a burning and fleeting taste of another world, in which our present world is integrated and transformed."(32)

## Notes

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