

Philip Blackburn was born in Cambridge, England (October 15, 1962), and studied there as a Choral Scholar at Clare College. He earned his Ph.D. in Composition from the University of Iowa where he studied with Kenneth Gaburo and began work on publishing the Harry Partch archives, now completed after 15 years. Blackburn's book, *Enclosure Three*, won an ASCAP Deems Taylor Award. He has been the Senior Program Director for the American Composers Forum since 1991 and continues to compose, build sound-sculptures, perform, and write about things like Partch, Vietnamese music, and the use of sound in public art. He runs the *innova* record label and the Sonic Circuits International Festival of Music and Art. He received a 2003 Bush Artist Fellowship to begin building a sound park in Belize.

ARTIST STATEMENT

For thousands of years, architecture has been described as "frozen music." I want to melt those edges and reinvigorate the use of sound in public art; to make *musique concrète* with a mixer and trowel; to further the practice of listening; to make a camera obscura for the mind's ear — by subtly activating the acoustic environment and building magical resonant spaces: chirping stairs, fluttering walls, singing wires, throbbing sewers... Music with some assembly required.

RESUME

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EDUCATION

- * Deep Listening Retreat Participant, Big Indian, NY, 2003
- * RSA/UCLES Certificate in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Bell School, Cambridge, 1991
- * Ph.D. (Music), The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, 1989.
- * M.A. (Music), University of Cambridge, England, 1989.
- * M.A. (Music), The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, 1987.
- * B.A. Hons. (Music) with Choral Exhibition, Clare College, University of Cambridge, 1985.

INTERESTS

* Experimental music composition, musicology, instrument building, vocal performance, choir directing, record production, book arts, sociology of music, research and teaching of Early-, World-, and 20th Century Music (esp. Harry Partch, Vietnam), meditational practices, graphic design, health/fitness.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- * Represented Minnesota Composers Forum as first US arts organization to set up links with Vietnam, 1993-94.
- * Senior Program Director, American Composers Forum, 1991-
- * Singer with the Dale Warland Singers (a professional new music choir), 1991-6, Ex Machina Baroque Opera, 1991-6 (an antique theatre ensemble), A Musical Summit (an early music duo), 1989-6, Rose Ensemble for Early Music, 1997-9.
- * National Advisory Board Member for the Dale Warland Singers, 1996-

* Teaching Assistant at the University of Iowa, devising curriculum for Fundamentals of Music, 1985-89 (during which time enrollment increased 200%), founder/director of the Lynceus Consort (an experimental performance ensemble), singer with the Center for New Music, 1988-90.

PUBLICATIONS AND RECORDINGS

* Composer, director, producer, or performer on over 50 recordings (e.g. with John Rutter's Cambridge Singers, director/ producer for Kenneth Gaburo's Enough...(Music and Arts 832), Stilling Time; Traditional Musics of Vietnam (innova 112), Sonic Circuits Electronic Music Festival; numerous broadcasts and appearances on international TV and radio (e.g. BBC 1, NPR, MPR, Voice of Vietnam, KTCA, Radio Albania, Gannett News Service).

* Author, editor, producer of internationally-acclaimed series: Enclosures: Harry Partch (innova Recordings, 1995-) and several interviews and articles in international music and art journals (e.g. Perspectives of New Music, The Ky XXI, Artpaper, Dirty Linen, Destination Vietnam, Rough Guide to Vietnam, Rough Guide to World Music, Grantmakers in the Arts, Gramophone Explorer Magazine, Songlines, LA Times).

* Listed in the International Dictionary of Biography, 27th Edition

AWARDS

* 2003 Bush Foundation Artist Fellowship in Music Composition

* 1999 Delire Actuel Award, CFLX, Quebec, for Enclosure Five: Harry Partch

* 1998 ASCAP Deems Taylor Special Citation Award for Enclosure Three: Harry Partch

* 1998 FORECAST Public Artworks R&D Stipend to develop prototype Sonic Playground

* 1995 Jerome Travel Study Grant to research sound-sculpture in Australia and Western Samoa for 7 weeks

* Winner of 8 awards for musical composition and performance.

* Recipient of a 1993 grant from the Asian Cultural Council to teach and conduct research in Vietnam for 16 weeks

* Arts Over AIDS grant for Spirit Maps Project, 1993 (with Donald Engstrom).

STATEMENT

It is hard to escape from music. We spend more time filtering out sounds than we do being aware of them. Result: more aural clutter, more environmental pollution, more insensitivity to others and ourselves. How can I help myself and others practice listening and reclaim our soundscape? When is "Composition" "Meditation?"

I compose to make us aware of our own composing: How we live, choose, arrange, experience, perform and develop our own sound world. This practice generally involves the public (rather than trained new-music professionals), takes place in non-arts venues (rather than the historically- and architecturally-loaded context of the concert hall), and seeks the simplest means of generating the most richly-complex polyphonies and group dynamics. I compose community directly (it is not a target of "outreach" for me). Passersby, virtuosos, children and adults participate in my musical world on a level footing.

Fun, seductive, subversive, interactive. These are the qualities I seek in my compositions (and they are indeed structured compositions rather than improvisations or sculptural objects). They may bypass conventional means but are nonetheless disciplined. This artistic direction also requires entrepreneurship, since I generally operate outside the musical industry.

How does experimental music, that most esoteric of art forms, go down with the uninitiated? My recent works have been witnessed by many thousands of people; some have personally

expressed their joyful astonishment, kids go out of their way to play my sound sculptures every day after school, a woman from Paris sat by my Nevada desert piece for three days, five people were in tears after a performance of my organ piece, a hushed crowd at the Minnesota State Fair gathered for a work celebrating junk food... Cerebral, sometimes silly, my works require no training to appreciate but I hope they elicit a direct response and provoke further inquiry.

I have long fantasized about creating musical experiences that are so fleeting and personal that they are essentially undocumentable and non-transportable: "You really should have been there." My success in this direction however means that work samples cannot convey remotely the same message. The music is generally conceived for specific places for a particular audience, and is not intended to travel or enter the standard repertoire of anything.

My philosophical direction, of course, in no way diminishes the more mainstream tradition and academic musical circles. I maintain a strong involvement in those but simply choose to pursue my own path (albeit not so far from a Pauline Oliveros or Maryanne Amacher world). I find the more I let go, the more my own compositional voice and concerns take shape and follow a path without the usual models. Originality, if I have any of it, is a natural result rather than a goal.

The categories of sound sculptor, sound artist, performer and composer are likewise blurred in my case. I compose more than sound sculptors do; I make more instruments than composers typically do; I perform alongside others in my own compositions without controlling the specific outcome... And yet I have tried to anticipate the occasion and stipulate the kinds of musical interactions that will take place (if everyone agrees to the rules of the score). Sometimes there are written instructions (a score, like the rules of a game); and sometimes simply instruments in space for you to play (the space itself is the score). Perhaps I am a ritual designer.

BIO

Philip Blackburn started composing at the age of 16, writing experimental works for mixed ensembles and working with a simple electronic tape studio. He studied privately with Anthony Milner and Bryan Kelly of the Royal College of Music in London. He was a co-founder of the Oxford composers' collective Soundpool and developed a number of improvised, notated, and electronic works which were performed in Oxford and London. He began studies in experimental music, cognitive studies, phenomenology, linguistics, and theatre with Kenneth Gaburo in San Diego in 1979.

Subsequently he attended Cambridge University on a Choral Scholarship to Clare College, where he organized the weekly New Music Workshops and studied with Robin Holloway. Works at this time included AIR: Air, Canary, New Ground for Clarinet and Piano (scheduled for CD release) and Come o'er the Burn, Bessy for choir, which have received numerous performances in the U.S. and Europe.

In 1985 Blackburn moved to Iowa to continue studies with Gaburo where he began to involve non-trained musicians in his compositions and investigate the notion of composition as meditation; his Ph.D. thesis, *Minding Steps and Other Matters*, described several of his site-specific performances/group meditative activities. These were the first in an on-going series of verbal instruction scores, collectively known as *Music to Play*, used to generate musical performances by any number of participants, regardless of "musical" training.

His installation in collaboration with Don Engstrom, *Spirit maps; A Learnings Project*, which relates to the spiritual experiences of those affected by HIV, was commissioned by Arts Over AIDS and took place at Intermedia Arts Gallery, Minneapolis in June, 1994 with subsequent

showings at the Johnson County Museum, Iowa (during the November 1994, Inqueery, InTheory, InDeed conference). Other collaborations include At the Crimson Tree with choreographer Marylee Hardenbergh. P.P.S., a work for Organ and Tape in memoriam Kenneth Gaburo, commissioned by Gary Verkade, was premiered during the Society of Composers Inc. National Conference in April, 1995, and is released on Winded (innova 524)

In March, 1996 Blackburn was composer-in-residence at CSPA New Music Festival in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, working with volunteers at the Rapids AIDS Project, students at an alternative High School, and students at Cornell College to present an evening of his works. That month he also organized the largest gathering of Vietnamese musicians outside Vietnam for the 6-week World of Vietnamese Music Festival, which included 23 concerts and 17 educational events. In May he realized a dream to study with more than 30 experimental instrument builders in Australia and Western Samoa under the auspices of a Jerome Travel Study Grant, and spent 7 weeks collecting ideas for his Sonic Playground concept. He is now working on a sound park in the Belize rainforest.

For 15 years, Blackburn worked on producing a series of publications about the extraordinary American composer Harry Partch (1901-1974). Enclosures takes the form of two videotapes, two CDsets, and a gargantuan scrapbook, all intended to let the much-misunderstood Harry speak for himself. The series has received great acclaim from such journals as: The Village Voice, LA Times, The Wire, San Francisco Examiner, Fanfare, The American Record Guide, CMJ, Torso, Music and Letters, Spin, and Time Out-London.

Blackburn is also a papermaker, woodworker and designer of experimental musical instruments. He continues to work with the medium of tape and organize non-exclusive, participatory performance events which explore the notion of composition as meditation. He is currently designing and building a prototype Sonic Playground. In his work with choreographers, videographers, and visual artists, Blackburn interrogates the nature of collaboration: the dissolution of the artists' independent roles, a complete sharing of each other's domain.

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