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## Oscillith Matara

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Oscillith Matara

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts in Art

by

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Kansas City Art Institute  
Bachelor of Fine Arts in Sculpture, 2012

December 2023  
University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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## **Abstract**

*Oscillith Matara* is a series of improvisational acousmatic compositions that explore themes of birth, death, trauma and transformation. Each composition is an entry from a log of my daily practice. This practice is a meditation using electronic instruments as feedback devices to explore my states of consciousness as it relates to my present situation and personal history. The sound generated through this process of reflecting and responding acts as a cathartic medium for processing depression, anxiety and chronic pain.

As a thesis exhibition *Oscillith Matara* is presented as a group of selected works and is performed as a fixed duration acousmatic concert. These selections share a personal and private activity curated for a public audience.

For the public, *Oscillith Matara* becomes a bottled experience for others to engage with. The goal of sharing selections from this body of work is that any benefit that I have gained in the cathartic process of creating it might be transferred to another through listening to it.

The written portion of the thesis describes the personal history that led to my use of sound as an introspective tool. It is described through a series of textual vignettes of thoughts and experiences that my sonic work is translated from. Further chapters illustrate the process and tools by which the works are created and curated into what becomes the public version of *Oscillith Matara*. The last part discusses philosophically how *Oscillith Matara* relates to a larger fabric of composition methodologies that use sound to induce and reflect different psychological and emotional states.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my thesis committee: Bethany Springer, Dr. Adam Hogan, Adam Posnak, Cole Wilson and Stefani Byrd for their continual support. Many thanks to the team at DxArts that developed the Ambisonic Toolkit ATK that I have relied on so much. I would also like to thank all the incredible electronic instrument designers at Soma Laboratory and Elta Music who created the instruments I have used as a conduit for my work. Most importantly, I would like to thank my wife Kelly for her patience, love and humor.

**Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis in memory of Olive and Moses, who like all pets were a profound source of love and affection. Their passing during the creation of this thesis is a reminder that nothing lasts forever.

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## **Safe In Sound**

Working with sound feels like searching for something intangible, subdividing and endlessly digging for its essence. Suspended in a sea of cacophony, ears sifting through harmonics. With my sound work there is a parallel with the metal of my past... It was never about the final product. Each piece was always just a husk from a cathartic experience. The nature of metal is violent and loud. Burning the skin of the steel is a penance, it becomes a placeholder for the self, a way to immolate, purify and temper anger, guilt and desire. Invoking expressions obscured by a mask, the rush of burning gas and cascades of fire; working with fire and electricity, viscerally wielding the sun to create a barrier and safe space to cry, scream without being heard; existing in a womb of emptiness.

Now, in a similar way, I find solace, cradled in noise and sustained in drones where the sounds are difficult to discern from being internal or external, a remote observer to one's own thoughts. A contemplation on loneliness, beingness and death. Asking...what keeps us all taking the risk of the next day? Imbued with a kind of glitter that occasionally resembles hope I find myself (whatever that is) safe in sound.

## **Origins**

I often think disclosing the impetus of my work, whether physical or sonic, might undermine the experience of the person encountering it. However, disclosure can become permission for another to find relief. I've found sharing the source sometimes becomes an entry door that was previously obscured. Furthermore, I have also come to understand through vulnerability that there are many people gravitating towards similar things for the same reasons. When I have received this gift of sincerity from others it has only enhanced my relationship to their lives and

work. We all have stories of tragedy, loss, love and transcendence. We are bonded and supported through our vulnerability.

### **Exorcism of Words**

Through writing this thesis I've realized that committing to text an account of intense events can be powerfully cathartic. This thesis recounts many events that have shaped the contents not only of my work at UARK but most of my life. I cannot separate the work from its source. I believe it is no accident or coincidence that this chapter in my life has brought me back to a place that has so many traumatic memories. If I had been somewhere else surely my work and thesis would have reflected that environment instead. So with that in mind this document becomes a container, a marker, an effigy and a symbolic gesture. It marks the passing through and transformation that confronting a place can have. I commit these events to text and release them from the power they have over me. OM AH HUM

### **Bone Marrow & The Alchemy of Time**

Bones support the human body but in their marrow they also make red blood cells. The blood that flows through the body and saturates all the other systems is rooted in that base support structure. I think about my life this way. It's impossible to separate the origin of something from its current form regardless if it has traveled very far away and even forgotten where it came from. We can endlessly analyze the things we make or do against the backdrop of history but in the end everything is personal.

I feel completely detached from any country, any group. I am a metaphysically displaced person - Emil Cioran *On The Heights of Despair*



I've always appreciated Emil Cioran because although so much of his writing is about death and suicide he never killed himself. For Cioran the fact that it was an option made life bearable. I relate very much with Cioran's statement above. I spent most of my life denying where I came from, thinking I was invisible or at times questioning if I was already dead. From my earliest memories I was convinced I was not part of the place where my birth certificate says I was. I felt I was born by accident or mistake, took a wrong turn in the bardo or was left in a basket at the doorstep of this dimension. I have never felt like I chose to be here but I have chosen to stay.

There are some things (or sensations rather) I feel strongly connected to that have been polestars for the things I've made. Many are manifestations of fire: flames, the roar of furnaces and the cascade of sparks raining down on one's skin in the heat of grinding metal, time encased in a wall of falling stars.

Like a moth to light I am captivated by sensorial experiences and gravitate towards either extremes like freezing cold or sweltering hot weather, the crunch of snow underfoot and slipperiness of mud, the scent of juniper trees or rotting meat, the darkness of caves or staring into burning embers, the pelting of hail on a metal roof or the silence in the room that arrives when someone passes away. From avalanches to volcanoes, swallowed by the earth and returned to elements.

A biography of sensations...that's what I have...for the last three years I have been distilling these experiences and bottling them into sound. Capsuled into droning, noisy granular pills that can be prescribed and consumed. Sound is the most powerful substance I have ever encountered. It can take any form in space, circle around you, go through you and move you. Sound is time in tangible form. Sound is my life. It always was, I just couldn't see it. I had to listen.

In 3rd grade when asked during career day what I wanted to be my response was *I want to be an alchemist*. My logic was *if* you could transform lead into gold why couldn't you transform seconds into hours or days into years? I didn't think you could stop time literally but perceptually I had experienced it briefly slowing down and speeding up. If you could transform time you had something more valuable than gold.

I still feel that way. Alchemy is about transformation. By transfiguring something existent in your external environment you then transform the internal environment. The gold is on the inside. In regards to sound, I think of composing as a kind of alchemy of time, externally transforming the perceptual experience of time to create internal affect. My work is just as much about what happens inwardly to the listener after the experience is over as what happens during.

### **Chernozem**

Places become imbued with our past and separating the present state of place from one's previous experience of it can be difficult. I am from Arkansas. The ground here is fertile with experience and sown with blood. Being back here has dredged up silt from the depths of my tumultuous past. Things I thought were reconciled have reanimated and there are ghosts at every turn. It's been further exacerbated in the last two years by being saturated in the collective experiences of what this country and world are presently going through and everyone I encounter is covered in scars. These circumstances have created crashing waves on what would have been a more placid surface.

As an analogy one can think of my work as a whole and the individual pieces as a kind of stew. Different pieces have varying ingredients ranging from technical, emotional, philosophical, and spiritual but they ultimately use the same broth. The bones of my life as with all beings have

been boiled down over time, infusing their essence into any ingredient they touch. Below is a short ingredient list of that recipe.

## **Unborn**

I nearly died as a child multiple times. Most were not quick or accidental tragedies, some brought me to the edge of death for months. I entered this world through a door shrouded in thorns via a cesarean after my mother endured 51 hours labor. I emerged suffocating and battered, partially paralyzed to an unwelcoming parent who was because of poor medical treatment, bleeding to death. Obviously, I don't remember concretely but I was blamed for the whole event and it set the stage for everything to come.

Birth did not leave me unscathed and it was the next encounter with death that would forever shape me. When I was around 18 months old I contracted the tick-borne illness Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever which attacked my entire body. In Arkansas in the early 80's RMSF likely would have killed me or at least led to amputations. The treatment I was given had a high chance of either not working or completely disabling me. Even with treatment I spent six months in a feverish trance-like haze. I prevailed but still have lasting chronic health consequences from this event.

Surviving that and a few other close calls, in a non-exhaustive summary, I was brought up with the idea that I did not deserve to live and my being born was the cause of my mother's incessant suffering. She was the victim of significant physical and sexual abuse herself and to her my birth was included in that. Only through her charity was I allowed to exist. Ironically though, in spite of being told I was the cause of her problems which included endometriosis, fibromyalgia, chronic pain, bipolar disorder, and poverty. I was also constantly told that I somehow had the ability to be her healer and that somehow through her esoteric methods of

training/raising me I would save her from all her problems. This *training* included having to learn reflexology, reiki, rubbing her feet, digging out her ingrown toenails, learning healing meditation practices and all sorts of esoteric stuff. I guess the end justifies the means and she believed the abuse would *liberate* my mind/spirit. To some extent I am thankful I had these experiences but the wreckage they left was extensive.

From my earliest memories, my allowed existence was saturated in mental, emotional, and physical abuse. This included everything from being physically beaten, locked up in a cage, wrapped in chains, incinerating my belongings, constant threats and attempts to mutilate my body, hitting me with her car as well as being locked away for long periods of isolation in complete darkness with the gentle muffled sounds of the TV being my only contact with the world. Ironically, those experiences have a subtle resemblance to environments I gravitate towards; I enjoy listening to sounds in the dark. A space that is sad but oddly comforting.

Ultimately, my safest memories were around the age of eight when we were intermittently homeless, living in a tent or at the Salvation Army shelter down the street from where the Sculpture building is now. At that age, I knew something was wrong with the situation I was in. I should have been extricated from my family by CPS but my mother was always on her best behavior when others were around. Because I excelled in school she had everyone convinced she was a wonderful parent. During that time I never revealed to anyone at school about the abuse; most of it sounded so ridiculous that it would've seemed like fiction. My mother was my main abuser but was not the only one and she regularly enlisted my older brother to beat me.

It all came to a head when I was fourteen— holding my mother in my arms as she lay dying of cancer. The hospice bed, surrounded by cats with the movie *Big Trouble in Little China* playing in the background. Her last words to me were “this is all your fault and you will regret it”. Within

a few seconds, she was gone. Our five cats started making strange noises while raising their heads to the ceiling and her color faded. I sat there shocked without resolution but also with a strange sense of relief. I didn't know what to do since my life revolved around her needs and desires.

I started painting the next day as an intuitive survival mechanism, it was that or suicide. I had always thought about the option of suicide but like a gambling addict pulling a slot machine arm I never lost hope or more likely choosing to continue became a form of masochism that I had become accustomed to. I felt so much guilt and self-hatred but I had this glimmer of an idea that if I could let go and forgive those that hurt me then somehow that would flip what they did into something I could draw energy from. Looking back I somehow realized I needed to survive this to transmute these experiences into what they have become...gifts from my mother. I know there is no one in this world who can hurt me as much as she did. These experiences ignited a metamorphosis and ground the lens that I see the world through. However, these experiences led to survivor's guilt, depression, suicidal ideation, masochism, and chronic pain.

As an adult, I would later find out such extreme experiences put me in a unique position to be of service to the dead and dying. It was an exchange, I was able to remain calm and be a neutral point of presence; an anchor for those who were dying and their families. In return, by dying vicariously through them my own demons were fed.

I present this to the reader in trust. it's not to shock, trigger concern, or invoke sympathy. I am not sharing this story because it's unique. The fact that we live in a world where it's not unique is what's disturbing. The only unique part about it that might be unique is that I survived against poor statistical odds, especially in Arkansas. I think I primarily survived due to having a relationship with art.

For a long time when asked what motivates my work or what it is about I would lean into the technical side of things. My steel work was made using very novel techniques I had developed. The wow factor of *how* became a way to protect the *why*. Sometimes my answers are very ambiguous because ultimately the story about what motivates the creation of my work is not the main point. I am not the figure of my work. The beauty of working in both metal and sound is that I can be secretly autobiographical while allowing ambiguity to be a door for others to enter the work. The etiology of my compositional decisions can be decoded from the story above but it's important to note that the ambiguity of the work is where it draws its power. As a percipient, your participatory consciousness melds with the work and creates something new and that communion between inside and outside is what is important.

In the article *Transcendigital Imagination: Developing Organs of Subtle Perception* by Kim Cascone, he makes reference to Henri Bortoft's thoughts on this idea of participatory consciousness.

"In his book *The Wholeness of Nature*, psychologist and philosopher Henri Bortoft describes these two modes of awareness as "onlooker consciousness" and "participatory consciousness" (1996). Onlooker consciousness, or sensory-perception, maintains a subject/object duality, while participatory consciousness, or imaginative-perception, transcends this dualism by merging subject and object into a holistic continuum of consciousness. Again, quantum physics tells us the same thing: the observer affects the observed reality. Or in the context of sound art: the listener becomes the listening and the listening becomes the sound."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Transcendigital Imagination: DEVELOPING Organs of Subtle PERCEPTION," accessed April 19, 2021, <http://www.interferencejournal.org/transcendigital-imagination-developing-organs-of-subtle-perception/>.

This has become a profoundly important idea to me and a major facet of what I create. The ambiguity of the work becomes a way to merge with it. The merging of external experience into internal perception creates a third space, a new work, something that cannot be solidified or recorded.

### **Transubstantiation**

We all have our own experiences and path, some are *Strewn with Flowers and Bones*<sup>2</sup>. I've come to the point where although I would never wish any of these experiences on anyone I would also not change them for myself. It opened a door to a fountain of energy that is neither good nor bad, it's just potential. My job as an artist and human being has been to convert that energy that goes through me. Like converting AC to DC, trauma and suffering can become art and presence.

My work is in service to me as a mechanism for healing but it is also in service to others. I hope that it is perceived as coming from a place of empathy and that even if in a very subtle way, it might create causes and conditions for another to heal by revealing a kind inner space. By experiencing the work it enlivens the imagination of the percipient to wonder in their own mind and merge the inner and outer experience. More invasive than an ambient sonic backdrop, the work is meant to actively elicit a reaction. Through creating this possibility for others to have space for reflection within my work I am able to metaphorically, alchemically transubstantiate the negative energy of pain and guilt of my past experiences into forgiveness. By utilizing these experiences in this way in the service of others the negativity of what happened to me is reversed. This idea keeps me going as a formula for hope.

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<sup>2</sup> Sherdor, *A Path Strewn with Flower and Bones: a Memoir with the Reflections of Tulku Sherdor* (Delancey, NY: Blazing Wisdom Publications, 2009).

I would like my work to induce a state of presence. On a personal level, my work focuses on creating causes and conditions for being in the present moment because in my experience being in the present moment causes past trauma to lose its power. When focusing on experiencing what appears in the moment a sense of relief might be felt from the past as well as the anticipation of future trauma is not focused on.

Abuse taught me how to disassociate. When these types of events occurred I would just shut down mentally, physically, become numb, and check out. I'd play chess games in my head or think about other places or visualize something. I could transport my consciousness to another place. These coping methods induced altered states of consciousness that started as a desire for escapism from the effects of trauma. However, over time those states created the possibility for reflection and ultimately self-healing. The realization that a traumatically induced state of consciousness had positive potential sparked my interest in learning to induce it intentionally through meditation or other means.

### **Sounds, Steel and Supernovas**

My interest in working with sound manifested directly out of working in metal. Both are related to transformation, distortion, and noise. Both have physical qualities but the relationship to time and the physical body is different. My relationship with steel is also much older so my familiarity and ability to predict outcomes is much different than with sound.

My main attraction to steel was that iron transformed through fire across many cultures has been seen as a communion with the divine and a bridge to the spirit world. For much of my life I have not felt dead or alive but somewhere in between, standing on a bridge, unable to commit to either. The more empirical attraction is that iron is the last element a star produces before its consumption of energy outweighs its production. The result of this transformation is a supernova and this dispersion of elements throughout the universe becomes the womb for the birth of



future heavenly bodies.<sup>3</sup> I saw this literal transformation of steel into an art object as a symbolic transformation of myself similar to the rebirth of a phoenix.

The metal sculptures were experienced in totality as the husks of a violently transformative process that became imbued in the beautifully scarred surfaces and twisted forms. The transformation that can be heard in the sound work is experienced more directly within time and as the compositions transform over time, the listener might transform too.

### **Hive of Drones**

In Late summer of '21 I decided I would approach composing in a different way. Instead of collecting field recordings and assembling a piece over many weeks as I had done in previous work I wanted to work directly, intuitively and spontaneously, capturing my inner state as accurately as possible.

I also wanted to work toward having more fluency with my instruments. I began treating my recording sessions like journal entries, uncut and unedited. A recording session would be named with the year, month and day followed by which instruments were used. Occasionally, I would give them a name based on what I was thinking about either before or after I started them.

The idea was threefold. First, I needed a coping mechanism to process all the grief, anxiety and pain I was feeling from personal events and about the general state of the world. Interacting with these instruments had a profound effect on that. It was like listening to the ocean or the wind except I could respond to it, change it in real time and respond again in a feedback loop.

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<sup>3</sup> "Stellar Evolution," accessed April 17, 2021, <https://people.highline.edu/iglozman/classes/astronotes/stellarevolution.htm>.

Second, like any instrument, you have to practice. I wanted to be able to respond fluidly to the instruments and create a dynamic flowing tapestry of sound. Lastly, by practicing and getting familiar with making decisions on the fly I would be working towards being able to perform these works live. I have always had a lot of fear and trepidation with live performances. I am not interested in being an onstage entity performing under the gaze of an audience. I prefer to work more like a herbalist, masseuse, or funeral director, facilitating an experience but not being the focus of it. However, overcoming this fear could lend itself to something much more fruitful. I have often been told that my sound pieces feel like they were made for the person listening to them. I've also experimented with this idea, thinking about someone intensely before beginning a recording session and keeping them in my mind as much as possible the entire time. I try to imagine myself as them with the instruments and working in the intuitive feedback loop I do for myself but for the other person. I am sure there is a level of placebo effect for the person who receives them knowing that these *prescription sound works* were made specifically for them but so far the response has been very positive.

When I started this improvisational sound journal I had a small arsenal of synthesizers from Soma Laboratory and Elta music. I became enthralled with working with analog instruments. These instruments don't have presets and each oscillator's pitch is tunable. I enjoyed the tactility and direct interaction with the circuits. I imagined as I used the Lyra 8 that I was influencing the flowing of water from many streams and the interactions and collisions of these streams created ripples that I could hear.

For a long time I wasn't sure if I was ever going to share these recordings, they were more like entries in a diary. I was consistent with working every morning and evening doing these sessions and they just started piling up. Over time I also just forgot about the fact I was recording them. Initially, I thought I could cut them up and make an extensive sound library to

assemble new works from but upon reviewing a group of them several weeks later it was like I was listening to someone else's pieces. The process of listening to my own work that I had let sit gave me fresh ears and the chance to discover new things. Eventually, I decided I would start a folder of *test tracks* that I felt particularly connected to and listened to them regularly.

I'd listen to recordings from the *test tracks* folder and try to observe how I felt. They became a meditation support. Instead of following my breath or using an object or sound in my immediate environment I would go deep into the sounds of these pieces. I didn't really think about the fact I had made them when doing this. It was sort of like if you made your own clothes, they fit and are comfortable but you aren't constantly thinking about the fact you made them for yourself.

## **Ossified**

The title *Oscillith Matara* is encoded with a number of meanings. I came up with the name in response to thinking about the swinging back and forth of emotional extremes and the weight of heavy experiences. That idea immediately created a scenario in my mind inspired by Edgar Allen Poe's *Pit and the Pendulum* which I've related to much of my life. I imagined laying on the ground in total darkness that became a sea of dark red light. Above me was a great shadow of a stone, ossified from my own emotions, now having become external, swinging above, a force of extremes. It made a low sound cutting through the air but also emanated its own screeching timbre from within. In the room was a female presence, unseen but taking the form of the viscosity of the air. She told me to relax and that if I did the stone would pass right through me, if I did not I would be shattered. I lay there, blinking in and out of shattered and whole swallowed in red.

The first part name *Oscillith* is made from two words- *oscillator* and *lith*. *Oscillator* itself comes from Latin *oscillare* or *oscilium* meaning "to swing" and "a swing". Interestingly, *oscillum* comes

from the Latin root *os* meaning “little mouth or face” in reference to images of Baccus that hung in vineyards as charms that swung back and forth in the wind.<sup>4</sup> Although not directly related, When I discovered this I was also reminded of the Thalia and Melpomene masks associated with comedy and tragedy. *Lith* is a prefix or suffix coming from the Greek word *lithos* meaning “stone”.<sup>5</sup> Although indirectly the Hebrew name *Lilith* meaning “night monster” also played a part in devising this name as a reference to the figure I imagined in the story above.<sup>6</sup>

*Matara* is a Sanskrit reference for the word “mother”. The name is connected to *matrika* or a group of seven sisters or mother goddesses found in Hinduism as well as being connected to the Pleiades cluster of seven stars. My interest in the term was based on two things. First, *matara* as a reference to “mother” whether cosmoslogically or literally and second the Spanish conjugate *matar* which means “to kill” or “will kill” that exists inside the word *matara*. I found the coincidence intriguing because of the personal history of abuse that I had with my mother.

*Oscillith Matara* became a title that secretly housed a plethora of personal meaning that was contained in an ambiguous and phonetically beautiful title. To me the title means that even something like the pain inflicted by one’s own mother is not a static event or experience but a constantly oscillating force swinging back and forth. Fixation concretizes an experience into something that can shatter you but if you relax it can pass through and you’re free.

*Oscillith Matara* as a project came out of trying to cope with my dog, Olive passing. She passed away in late summer of 2021 after being diagnosed with cancer two months before. Olive’s death affected my partner and I very seriously. Despite both of us being very familiar with

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<sup>4</sup> “Oscillation (n.),” Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed November 6, 2022, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/oscillation>.

<sup>5</sup> “Litho” (n.), Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed November 6, 2022, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/litho->.

<sup>6</sup> “Matar,” Wiktionary, the free dictionary, October 26, 2023, <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/matar>.

human death through having lost parents and working in the funeral industry this was an experience of unexpected gravity.

In the following weeks after she died I couldn't work. I had no interest in field recording. She accompanied me on field recording outings like a shadow, a quiet companion, motionless when I was trying to capture a sound. When I'd work at home, she'd lay there under my desk. Her presence was a big part of my work and she was gone.

I was able to listen to stuff though. I dived deep into Lawrence English's discography and engulfed myself in Phill Niblock's epic microtonal drone works like *Touch 5*. Charlemagne Palestine's *Strumming* sorcery on the Bösendorfer carried me to fantastical places. Then there was Merzbow's *Pulse Demon*, for some this album is a lethal poison that cannot be endured for more than ten seconds but to others it is panacea, a profound medicine that resets the mind to endure the next day.

I became fascinated by Noise, Harsh Noise and Harsh Noise Wall music and found it temporarily eviscerated my grief. *Pulse Demon* and French Harsh Noise Wall artist Vomir's albums like *splitCaspelvanderVeen\_onMarbreNegre* induced an experience similar to being in a violent thunderstorm. There was so much going on and at the same time there was no melody, no rhythm. Vomir himself describes his music as:

*No ideas, no change, no development, no entertainment, no remorse*

I wanted to feel nothing. I wanted to drown out all my thoughts and be in a perpetual *Near Death Drone*. I wanted to go to the ocean and have my ears drown in the waves. In my studio landlocked and still in the midst of a COVID pandemic, not knowing what the future had in store.

Later to find out that in a few months my cat Moses would also die followed by President Putin's Government invading Ukraine among other world catastrophes I found a surrogate ocean of drones and noise.

### **Cloud of Knives**

*Noise is the infinitely dense form of silence, the recollection without object.*

*Summoning the Black Flame, Absentology [Mark Horvarth & Adam Lovasz]<sup>7</sup>*

When I read the line above in a compilation of writings called *Sustain/Decay A Philosophical Investigation into Drone Music and Mysticism* by Owen Coggins and James Harris, so much became clear. Through dense clouds of noise, I am ultimately seeking silence, and a way to drown out the cacophony in my head. Noise can be sensorial and physical but it can also be emotional and metaphorical.

Noise shuts things out and shreds incoming messages like some kind of sonic woodchipper. Working in metal, I could take refuge in the sound of a grinder and the feel of my mask engulfed in clouds of smoke and rays of blinding light. It was a safety blanket from the outside world, it made me unapproachable by others and I took solace in that sensorial cacophony. It drove out the noise curtain that rages in my head and distorts my reality. It anesthetized me to be able to tolerate existing and through the physical exertion of creating the work it exhausted me making me too tired to end it but fall into a state of bliss.

These same feelings have been translated to sound now. In my recent work, I use electronic instruments to a similar end. I'm attracted to the muddy drowning frequencies that mirror those

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<sup>7</sup> Owen Coggins and James Harris, "Sustain//Decay: a Philosophical Investigation of Drone Music and Mysticism," in *Sustain//Decay: a Philosophical Investigation of Drone Music and Mysticism* (United States: Void Front Press, 2017), pp. 148-149.

times bathed in fire. The timbre and feeling of my work has often been described as gloomy, dystopian, depressing, visceral and violent. How would work like this lead to a state of presence or any kind of healing? The pieces evoke imagery, memories and emotions. By sitting with these emotions and images enveloped in sound away from other external distractions, time is returned and emotions can be processed.

With my most recent improvisational work, I've developed a strong affinity for using oscillators and frequency modulation. Metaphorically, I see oscillators as the rhythms of beings, places, and events and the frequency modulation as representative of the interdependence of those oscillators, each one modulating and influencing the other. By constantly responding and tuning oscillators to my own emotional state I create a feedback loop. As more and more oscillators are introduced the intersection of those signals leads to a rich interdependent fabric.

All the pieces included in the public concert of *Oscillith Matara* utilized this approach. The technical side of the emotional feedback loop was rooted in experimenting with how different frequencies and wave shapes interact with each other and how those relationships can act as a sonic mirror and modulator of my own emotional state.

### **Hunting for the Inside Through the Outside**

When I began my investigation into sound three years ago I started with field recordings. I was fascinated with Francisco Lopez's idea of not making sounds, only curating them into an acousmatic collage that creates a new experience removed from its source and becomes a flowing transfiguration of time and matter.<sup>8</sup> The entire world became an abundant sonic resource and all thoughts about past events and their emotional baggage dissolved. Like mushroom hunting in a forest I was able to collect sounds as a response to the environment. My emotional

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<sup>8</sup> Francisco Lopez, "Wine and Dust," Francisco Lopez, 2001, <http://www.franciscolopez.net/pdf/wd.pdf>.

state would drive my awareness of time and place and pull me toward different sounds that resonated with me. This experience created a feedback loop of call and response to my external environment.

In the production of my previous ambisonic pieces used in the collection called *Inside Beyond Outside Gone*, I was constantly collecting sounds in my environment. This fixation of field recordings was a combination of a honeymoon period with unfamiliar technology and the awareness that the field recordings were altering my awareness of the environment. By listening more deeply through what could be considered a sense-enhancing prosthetic device I was changing my relationship to my environment. Things that perhaps annoyed me about a place became more interesting and places that seemed pleasant at first became tiresome to inhabit.

That being said the final works are less concerned about accurately representing the places they come from. They're not meant to be representational like a photo. A closer parallel would be to think of the process of dreaming where fragments of memory, fantasy, and the akasha congeal together into a new symbolic world.

Although the goal is the same, the works for *Oscillith Matara* do not rely on field recordings. These compositions don't offer the same kind of anchor of familiarity that can come from recognizable sounds found in field recordings. I think of *Oscillith Matara's* sounds as field recordings of emotions.

### **Shaping Stones**

I am working with sound in a similar way that I created steel sculpture; the perspective that all the work I've made is imbued with what I was listening to at the time. Maybe I couldn't remember specifically what was going on in my life during the production of a piece but I could



definitely remember what I was listening to. I used music to create an emotional wave on which to ride and would keep repeating that album or group of albums until the piece was done. With that in mind I have been looking to an endless lineage of musicians and composers and the influence of their work finds its way into mine. Most recently I've been interested in the work of Keiji Haino and his collaboration with Oren Ambarchi and Stephen O'Malley from Sunn O))) called Naborian. All three of these artists are very important to me and discovering this collaboration has really inspired me to think about collaborating with other musicians, composers and other artists.

Another influence that can't go unmentioned is composer and filmmaker Phill Niblock. Niblock uses high amplitude microtonal drones performed as long fixed duration tape pieces accompanied by live musicians and multi screen film installations that *play* the architecture of the installation space as an enormous instrument. Niblock describes his work as having no rhythm, no melody, no trajectory and no *bullshit* with the goal of essentially "Killing Time".<sup>9</sup>

The richness, gravity and density of Niblock's work has for many years been a source of refuge for me. Through stripping away many of the trappings that we attribute to music like rhythm and melody, Phill Niblock provides a dense but every moving fabric of sound. Often constructed from many acoustic instruments recorded and layered together playing sustain tones, his pieces have a profound effect on the listener's sense of time and space. On a personal level the sustained drones became for me an open landscape with microtonal winds that anesthetized anxiety and pain.

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<sup>9</sup> "AV Festival 12: Phill Niblock Interview," YouTube, April 7, 2013, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jL4Jt4Tc\\_i4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jL4Jt4Tc_i4).

An endless list of other artists have influenced me which most recently include La Monte Young, Arvo Pärt, Pauline Oliveros, Eliane Radigue, Terry Riley, Ram Narayan, Daniel Menche and Mark Deutsch. Many of these artists create works that transport the listener to another world that envelopes them, shift time perception and for some induces a spiritual experience. As I said above in the past I used music and sound works as a support for making my physical works. There was a period of two years in my early twenties when I only listened to Phillip Glass and the melodic death metal band Amon Amarth. Everything I made then sprung from that music. Now the process is different. I listen to be transported but I am also always gathering information about how different pieces affect me and synthesize those experiences into the fold of my own compositions.

### **Jewel of Space**

In addition to artists that influence me for the last twelve years, Dzogchen has been the philosophical and spiritual framework that I try to approach all aspects of my life from. My late teacher Chogyal Namkhai Norbu (whose name means the title of this chapter) taught that the basic premise of this is to overcome dualism and remain in a state of instant presence beyond accepting and rejecting. Regardless of the experience, the awareness of awareness is constant. From the perspective of Dzogchen (and Tibetan Buddhism in general), the cause of all suffering is rooted in the oscillation of accepting and rejecting— desire and aversion and running back and forth between these extremes. These states carry sentient beings through life like two legs— accepting rejecting accepting rejecting accepting rejecting and so on.<sup>10</sup>

This framework informs how I engage with art. In addition to creating space for reflection and presence as mentioned above, I am also interested in the experience of non-duality or *one*

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<sup>10</sup> Namkhai Norbu and John Shane, *The Crystal and the Way of Light: Sutra, Tantra and Dzogchen* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2000).

*taste*. When confronted with a sensation induced by an artwork or other experience I ask myself what has changed and what remains the same? In *Oscillith Matara* there are many moments that are not harmonious, noisy, and abrasive coupled with moments that are pleasurable. When I listen back through these pieces I try to be aware of the sensations that they induce and just recognize that as a sensation without going after some conceptual idea. By creating these pieces improvisationally, it's easier to decouple myself from them as the author and engage with them from the perspective of *one taste*- not grasping at concepts such as like or dislike, pleasure or pain.

### **Drinking of the Soma**

An enormous part of what shaped the content of *Oscillith Matara* and is of particular interest to me technically and philosophically is Soma Laboratory's founder and lead designer of the Lyra 8 (the primary instrument I used for *Oscillith Matara*), Vladimir Kreimer. The Lyra 8 was developed by Vladimir Kreimer and Soma Laboratory in 2016. Kreimer is a Ukrainian born radio engineer, musician, and philosopher. The inception of the Lyra 8 as well as all Kreimer's instruments is to eliminate the menus, algorithms, and automation of electronic music production that are so often used and reconnect the artist/musician's body and spirit more concretely with the physical instrument without divorcing the musician from the vast capabilities that electronic instruments have that classical instruments do not.<sup>11</sup>

The Lyra 8 is a tunable analog eight voice synthesizer that uses keys that rely on the electrical conductivity of the user to make sounds. This means the relative humidity and moisture of the user's hands affects the responsiveness of the conductive pads. The Lyra 8 also uses a series of analog FM synthesis modulators, allowing a pair of voices to modulate the frequency of another pair. The intensity of this modulation can be controlled with a dial and can range from a

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<sup>11</sup> "Philosophy," SOMA LABORATORY, accessed November 7, 2023, <https://somasynths.com/philosophy/>.

slight pitch bend to percussive pulses. This interaction between voices is what gives the Lyra 8 such a dynamic range of sounds. In many ways the Lyra 8 has qualities like a stringed instrument in that not only each voice is tunable but voices can be influenced by other voices similar to the sympathetic resonance that occurs with strings. Furthermore, there is no menu of presets or quantized memory loops (other than a simple delay module) that can be utilized.<sup>12</sup>

Kreimer's designs for these instruments are driven by our relationship with technology which shapes how we interact with each other. By making electronic instruments like the Lyra, Kreimer aims to subvert the disassociated dominance we enact on each other. From Kreimer's perspective we have developed technology in such a way that it is designed for us to dominate it, tell it what to do and have expectations that it repeats the same thing repeatedly at our will. This relationship with technology shapes our expectations and perceptions of our fellow sentient beings, rendering our relationship to the world as one of dominance and control.<sup>13</sup>

This idea about dominance attracted me to Soma Laboratory's instruments. I did not want to feel like I was completely in control of every detail of my compositions or the tools I was using to make them. It was also important that the nature of the instrument only conveyed itself as opposed to intentionally trying to synthesize and replicate another device. When a lyra 8 is played to someone unfamiliar with it the sounds seem alien and might be reminiscent of whales, pipe organ, violins or machines but the instrument has a timbral essence that is unique to its nature. When I worked with metal in the past I had a similar relationship with using an oxyacetylene torch. Yes, I was consciously controlling the movement of the torch on a coarse level but the fine intricacies in the surface of the metal that are created by the subtle movements

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<sup>12</sup> "Description / Lyra-8," SOMA LABORATORY, accessed November 7, 2023, <https://somasynths.com/lyra-organismic-synthesizer/>.

<sup>13</sup> Behance, "Underground Romantic Engineering," July 7, 2019, <https://www.behance.net/gallery/83036415/Underground-Romantic-Engineering>.

of burning gasses over the molten surfaces happen as a result of the nature of the material. The surface of torch carved steel is only possible because the material is steel. It could certainly be argued that similar sounds to the Lyra 8 could be produced via a coding language or via a single chain of virtual or analog instruments but I have no interest in staring at a screen more than I already have to. The experience of physically using the Lyra 8 along with its sounds and how it is imbued with the energy of its designer is unique to it and important to me.

My time using this instrument has been a profoundly transformative experience. The Lyra 8 is an artwork in and of itself and a piece of technology that shapes the person that works with it. It feels like a chaotic animal that cannot be tamed or controlled. Music made with it is a collaboration. It requires attentive focus and moving a dial a millimeter moves the sound a mile. When developing the Lyra 8 Kreimer was inspired by Hindustani Raga music which as a practice is often more focused on the state of mind of the musician than the playing itself. Because each one is handmade, they all have different personalities. Kreimer's goal with the Lyra 8 is to help humanity interface with technology in a spiritual way.

I've corresponded with Vlad Kreimer and have found a teacher and friend. His philosophy, performances and personality have really given me an intriguing direction that I want to include in my own work. Using the Lyra feels like a sacred rite. I don't see myself so much in galleries or museums but performing pieces during celestial events or for ghosts of dilapidated buildings with cathedral-like ceilings.

### **Solar Flares from the Cosmos**

In addition to the Lyra 8 two other instruments are used in *Oscillith Matara*. The first is also a Soma Laboratory instrument and is called *Cosmos*. Although it is technically an effects and looping module, I think of it more as an accompanying instrument. The Cosmos is described as

a *drifting memory station*. This device was designed to carry the artist into a meditative state by supporting a spontaneous flow of shifting reflections generated from whatever the input might be.

The Cosmos has multiple dynamic buffers that record inputs and play them back with a constantly shifting start and stop point that can be either slow or very fast. This has a resemblance to singing a song in rounds where someone starts and others repeat but at different points. These dynamic loopers can also be changed in real time to control how quickly or aggressively the loops are overwritten. Recording can also be paused to allow the buffer to either keep going or it can be allowed to completely decay over time.<sup>14</sup> The interface is very intuitive and in combination with the Lyra 8 helps create an ever changing tapestry that is also spatially dynamic as the panning of loop buffers can also be influenced.

In addition to Soma Laboratory's instruments I also used Elta Music's Solar 50 Big Ambient Machine. The Solar 50 synthesizer has ten touch pads that activate individually tunable sawtooth oscillators that are in banks of five totalling in fifty separate voices. Each individual oscillator can either be active or inactive in its respective bank and each bank has its own attack, sustain decay and release setting. The Synth is a semi modular in that many parts of it can act independently but also can be patched together with cables to influence each other. In addition to the oscillators themselves the Solar 50 has two LFOs and a simple effects module that accepts programmable cartridges for reverb, delay and distortion.

My interest in using this instrument was that like the Lyra 8 each voice is tunable. As is the case with many analog instruments the oscillators are finicky and exact tuning is very difficult. Like a

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<sup>14</sup> "Description / Cosmos," SOMA LABORATORY, accessed November 7, 2023, <https://somasynths.com/cosmos/>.

stringed instrument the tuning tends to change slightly while playing. As cumbersome as it is tuning what could be thought of as a fifty stringed instrument the potential for rich harmonics is profound. Tuning the solar 50 is a ritual and meditation in itself. The last feature that is unique to the Solar 50's oscillators is that each one has a photoresistor that can be activated. This allows the pitch to be modulated with a light source or by simply covering the sensor with your hand you can modulate the pitch giving the synth the feel of a theremin.<sup>15</sup>

### **Harmonic Dissolution**

Although my approach to composing pieces for *Oscillith Matara* was improvisational before each recording session I did make some concrete decisions. This included what instruments, effects pedals I would use, the physical layout of the gear and how the signal chain would be patched as well as the initial tuning of the synths. Other than tuning and settings I would often keep the same layout from a couple days to several weeks. Basically, it can be thought that each time the configuration and settings were significantly changed a new instrument was created from the patched components and I would spend time learning to play that new patch.

Up to three Lyra 8 synths were being used simultaneously for *Oscillith Matara*. Before beginning a recording session I would tune each of the Lyra's eight oscillators. Most often I would decide on a fundamental frequency for the lowest oscillator and either tune the next ones to be in unison or up an octave. Additionally, I might pick frequencies from the harmonic series of the fundamental and tune the other seven voices within that series. When played the first of the three would typically have coins placed on the conductive pads to hold notes that would drone. I would treat this first Lyra as the base for everything else to build on. The second Lyra would be tuned to be the mid range instrument and the tuners would stay fixed. This one would occasionally be set to drone intermittently or would be used to drive whatever melody was

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<sup>15</sup> "Solar 50," eltamusic, accessed November 7, 2023, <https://www.eltamusic.com/solar-50>.

emerging. The last Lyra, although tuned at a higher register initially, is more of a solo instrument and is allowed to have the most dynamic frequency modulation, delay, distortion and pitch shifting happen.

The same approach was applied to the Solar 50 as well. However because of having more control of the attack, sustain, decay and release (ASDR) of each bank I would treat five of the ten voices as more of a drone instrument and treat the other as half as something to have more of a staccato ASDR to add small details. In most of the work for *Oscillith Matara* the Lyra 8s were the primary instruments but in some instances like *Requiem Kaddiska* the Solar 50 in conjunction with Cosmos was the main instrument.

The final part of the signal chain was incorporating up to two Cosmos looping devices at the same time. Five out of the seven tracks incorporated at least one looper. *Summoning the Kobolds* and *Orcha's Lament* did not use the Cosmos or the Solar 50 and relied exclusively on all three Lyra 8s with the addition of a Electro-Harmonix POG 2 octave pitch shifting pedal and an Earthquaker Devices Sunn O))) Life Pedal Distortion clone. With the loopers I set up things in such a way that I had a small mixer box so I could easily influence how much of each instrument went to each looper. A good portion of my playing was using one hand on a Lyra and another alter how much or how little of the sound got digested into the loopers. Eventually, I also started using volume pedals on both feet so I could use my whole body to shape to control the different signals. In short, I was constantly experimenting with different combinations of tools. I was searching for a sound that I could hear in my head and wanted to conjure out of these instruments. The sound I was hearing in my head was something akin to dragging a large metal box on a concrete floor, a suspension bridge collapsing and a cello mixed together.



As I recorded these sessions and transitioned from *Oscillith Matara* as a practice into *Oscillith Matara* as a public concert I made a few decisions early on. The first was related to time and the number of movements in the concert. I wanted to curate a group of works that equaled around an hour of runtime and was formed from five movements. An hour runtime was decided based on the comfort of the seating I could acquire as well balancing between being immersed by the totality of the work with the limits of how long I thought an audience could stay engaged. I chose five movements in reference to the dissolution of the elements of earth, water, fire, wind and space that occur at death according to treatises of Tibetan medicine and cosmology.<sup>16</sup>

The complete album that makes up *Oscillith Matara* is different from the concert in that the album has seven movements and is 120' long and the public concert equaled 58'. The sixth movement from the complete work is connected to the afterlife and traversing the bardo or intermediate state. As the title *Purgare Train* suggests it could also be thought of as a kind of purgatory. The seventh completes the series and becomes a birth from the rich *Black Soil* of many lives before. Most of the tracks used were composed around the time President Putin's government was invading Ukraine. By this time I had recorded well over a hundred tracks with a handful being considered. The events in Ukraine combined with my cat passing put a fire in me and I dove deep into these instruments. The events in Ukraine have obviously influenced me and because I have been working improvisationally and intuitively using instruments designed by engineers from Ukraine they definitely found their way into the work and titles. A brief synopsis of the tracks and their titles is discussed below:

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<sup>16</sup> Namkhai Norbu, Elio Guarisco, and Nancy Simmons, *Birth, Life and Death: According to Tibetan Medicine and the Dzogchen Teaching* (Arcidosso: Shang Shung Inst, 2008).

## **A Mandala of Voices**

### *Olga's Breath* (14:27)

Named after Olga of Kiev, Ukraine's patron saint of vengeance and widows. Even before these tragic events the general sentiment of *Oscillith Matara* was concerned with death, loss, grief and transformation. After Ukraine was invaded I imagined Olga of Kiev looking down on the people of Ukraine and giving them strength to survive the atrocities they would face. This piece sets the initial mood of the total experience and acts as a dense cloud of shifting tones. I played this piece first thinking of it as a deep tunnel in the earth that feels like it is compressive and expansive at the same time. A threshold to pass through to the next piece.

### *Requiem Kaddiska* ( 11:31)

I made this the day after my cat, Moses died. As the title implies it is requiem. *Kaddiska* is a root word of Egyptian origin for "cat". The theme of cold and water influenced my compositional decisions because Moses died in my arms at home during an ice storm.

### *Summoning the Kobolds* (11:18)

Kobolds are the local spirits of a place often referred to in German folklore. They are thought to sometimes take the form of a fire. This piece was composed shortly after President Putin invaded Ukraine. The title suggests that the Kobolds are being implored to rise up and protect their lands

### *SaPaZa* (13:24)

Sa and Pa in Indian classical music are the octaves and fifth notes of the swara or scale. Once the fundamental note is chosen for Sa in a raag then Sa and Pa stay fixed and all other notes cycle around them. Za is a reference to a class of beings in Tibetan cosmology that are connected with heavenly bodies and celestial events like eclipses. So SaPaZa is about movement or time around constants. In the case of the compositions there are several

frequencies that drone throughout the entire work and a number of frequencies from the harmonic series of those notes shift about.

#### *Orcha's Lament* (6:30)

This was the last piece included in the public concert. I set up my gear in this piece to have three Lyras feeding separate effects lines of distortion, pitch shifting and delay. At the time I was thinking about schools of fish or how animals in a group will follow a leader and spatially become one organism. With the way my instruments were set up many of the events that happen in the composition are the result of a delay that follows my movements. After listening to the piece I felt like I was constantly hearing sounds that reminded me of dolphins, whales and orcas crying. The piece is ultimately a plea to stop destroying the ocean.

#### *Purgare Train* (12:04)

*Purgare* is the Latin root of *purge* which means “to cleanse or purify”. This title is derived from thinking about the intermediate state after the dissolution of the elements at the time of death. Many of my drone pieces contemplate death or in between states like the moment of falling asleep or waking up. In the later part of the piece there is a kind pulsing or chugging that resembles the sound of a train.

#### *Black Soil* (22:30)

Black Soil is the english translation of the name *Chernozem*. Chernozem refers to the incredibly rich soil belt that covers portions of the earth. Ukraine has the highest concentration of this fertile soil in the world. This soil is the reason why for so many years Ukraine has been thought of as Europe's *breadbasket* and has made Ukraine's land so valuable to invaders. When I was working on this piece I couldn't help but think of the story of an elderly Ukrainian woman who approached a Russian soldier and chastised him for invading their land. She then gave him

some sunflower seeds and said *Take these seeds and put them in your pockets so at least sunflowers will grow when you all die down here*. I can't help but think of how much blood is in that soil now and what will grow from it.

### **Communion and Kvass**

In regards to space and experience I chose to have a limited number of seats and required a RSVP. This was in part because I wanted the concert to be experienced in its entirety without the interruption of people entering and leaving the space. Requiring RSVP was a chance to disclose information about the environment like lighting and atmospheric haze as well as fix the number of people who would be in the room per a show. An RSVP is also an agreement and a consent to be at place at a given time and participate. Whether this took place in a large or small venue I wanted a limited number of attendees. There are different levels of intimacy that occur in an event relative to the size of the group and the familiarity the attendees have with each other. Having a fixed number for me is also connected to a ritual or an initiation where the power of the event and its efficacy is dependent on the number of participants. I was interested in either having 21, 42 or 58 participants including myself. These numbers have metaphysical significance and were decided at the outset. In this case I chose 21 because of the size of the room relative to the speaker array.

Due to the location of the performance space I solicited help from friends to guide people from the entrance of the building upstairs to a waiting area. In the waiting area my partner provided a variety of foods and refreshments which included pickled vegetables, cured meats, dark breads, Ukrainian butter, Russian and Eastern European candies and Kvass. These items were available for new arrivals as well as participants who were leaving the performance space.

In preparation the room was cleaned and arranged so there was a partition separating the room into two spaces. Initially, I had thought of keeping the desk where I would operate from in the room and be obscured from view with a cover but per suggestion I moved it on the other side of the partition. This separated me from the audience, made me a ghost or in the spirit of where the word *acousmatic* comes from, working behind a curtain.<sup>17</sup>

Twenty seats were arranged facing a projection screen. The room contains eleven speakers in the array and two subwoofers. All the pieces are composed in stereo and decoded for the speaker array using the ambisonic plugin suite ATK for Reaper<sup>18</sup>. Because of the flexibility of ambisonics not needing a front listening position I could have had all seats face any direction but I let them face the screen imparting a little humor to the fact the only film that would play during the show would be the one in the listener's head. Visually, the seats and screen encircled by loudspeakers looked orderly and symmetrical. Everything was placed with intent.

The space was lit with a number of red lights. Along the parameter there were two fill lights with red filters and four red LED bars along the floor. In the months leading up to the show I experimented at home with different colored lights. Visually and conceptually red was the most fitting. Red is a color of extremes. It is a color associated with blood, birth, death, violence, menstruation, and sacrifice. It is fire and passion. It is a way to see in the dark and is easy on the eyes. In this case it set the space and created an environment that said upon entering it that *this is a different world I have arrived in*. In the practical sense it was also a way to keep everything visible for attendees to feel safe and see but give a sense of other worldliness that might happen in total darkness.

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<sup>17</sup> Acousmatic comes from the notion that Pythagoras taught his students from behind a curtain. This term was used later to describe sounds coming from speakers where the source of the sound was not visible.

<sup>18</sup> "ATK for Reaper," ATK for reaper, accessed November 6, 2023, <https://www.ambisonictoolkit.net/documentation/reaper/>.

To further define the space and give the lighting a stronger sense of presence an atmospheric haze machine was used. Controlled lighting and atmospheric haze has a very long history in theatrics and entertainment but it also harkens back to the use of fire, smoke, and incense (unfortunately, I could not implement these items because of the fire restrictions of the university) to create a sense of space and place for ritual, celebration or just cooking and staying warm. Humans have been staring into red light and smoke for a long time.

All these visual and spatial elements were meant to support the sonic experience and provide a base from which the listener would travel. If an attendee chose to close their eyes they weren't missing out on anything but if they kept them open there was an atmospheric support to ride on. The visual decisions in the format of this concert are meant to parallel many of the attributes of my compositions. There is an intentional ambiguity that gives the imagination of the listener or viewer power. I think of all my work as having the function of a mirror. However, this mirror is not a perfect reflecting surface but one with a frame, scratches, distortions and even tinge of color. This version of *Oscillith Matara* is a red mirror. Within the ambiguity of the work you see yourself. If the mirror is full of distortion and scratches you see that distortion and those scratches reflected in yourself. The attributes of the mirror become a secondary cause for a different kind of reflection. You might spend more time looking than if it was a perfect mirror. Now you are looking at the nature of the mirror and not just what it is reflecting.

My first experience of this idea of a mirror reflecting its own nature was when I visited the Rothko Chapel in Houston Texas in 2011. I had no particular expectation and had never seen a Rothko in person. Upon entering I felt the cool air, it had a crispness to it compared to the viscous Houston heat. Standing in front of one of the triptychs I saw a great black and mauve painting. I felt instantly anxious and peaceful at the same time. I sat down and stared into each of them and felt like I could step into them. They were great portals into one's mind, like the

night sky but crafted with a human hand. The vastness and intricacy of these paintings truly inspired me. They were a visual form of drone music with microtonal colors. The experience of these paintings revealed how consciousness' pregnant potentiality can be reflected in a field of color or inside a drone.

I am interested in creating a mirror of potentiality for myself and others. I've had similar experiences to the Rothko chapel, atop mountains, sitting in front of the ocean, looking into the sky or in sensory deprivation tanks. One might suggest doing one of those things rather than making art that attempts it but when the experience is induced via the conduit of a human vehicle's creativity there is a familiarity that arises that is different than the vastness of the sky or the ocean. When we observe art that has this vastness we are observing the sky or the ocean inside the human.

Hosting *Oscillith Matara* as a concert rather than an album release party is about two things. First, the collective experience of live sound vs private listening offers the possibility of controlling the listening environment and providing a more tangible physical experience. Not everyone is going to use quality speakers or even listen with more than a Bluetooth speaker. By using the array in EMA I was able to take advantage of having a stereo composition be decoded with ambisonics for thirteen channels (11.2). Having the sound come from all directions lends itself to the nebulous cloud-like qualities of the compositions and with the use of two subwoofers I was able to play the pieces at an amplitude that made the bass frequencies physically palpable. Second, the collective experience binds people together. Even if no words are exchanged, during an event people who are sharing the same space for a collective experience are individually experiencing personal versions of the same thing. There is a level of trust that manifests in collectively committing to staying for a performance that might not be the same if someone is alone.

*Oscillith Matara* has many forms and meanings. Personally, It is a dynamic mirror that I've used to process pain, grief and mental anguish. As a concert or public performance it becomes a support for self-reflection and contemplation. As an album it becomes freely available for anyone to listen to.

In closing I am excited to keep diving into this endless ocean of transformation through sound and am eternally grateful to everyone.

May you be safe in sound. Samaya Gya Gya Gya



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## Figures



Figure 1. *Oscilith Matara* Room pre show 2022. Photo by Jonathan Green



Figure 2. *Oscilith Matara* Room pre show 2022. Photo by Jonathan Green



Figure 3. *Oscilith Matara* Room 2022. Photo by Jonathan Green





Figure 4. *Oscilith Matara* Introductory Statement from artist 2022. Photo by Jonathan Green



Figure 5. *Oscilith Matara 2022*. Photo by Jonathan Green

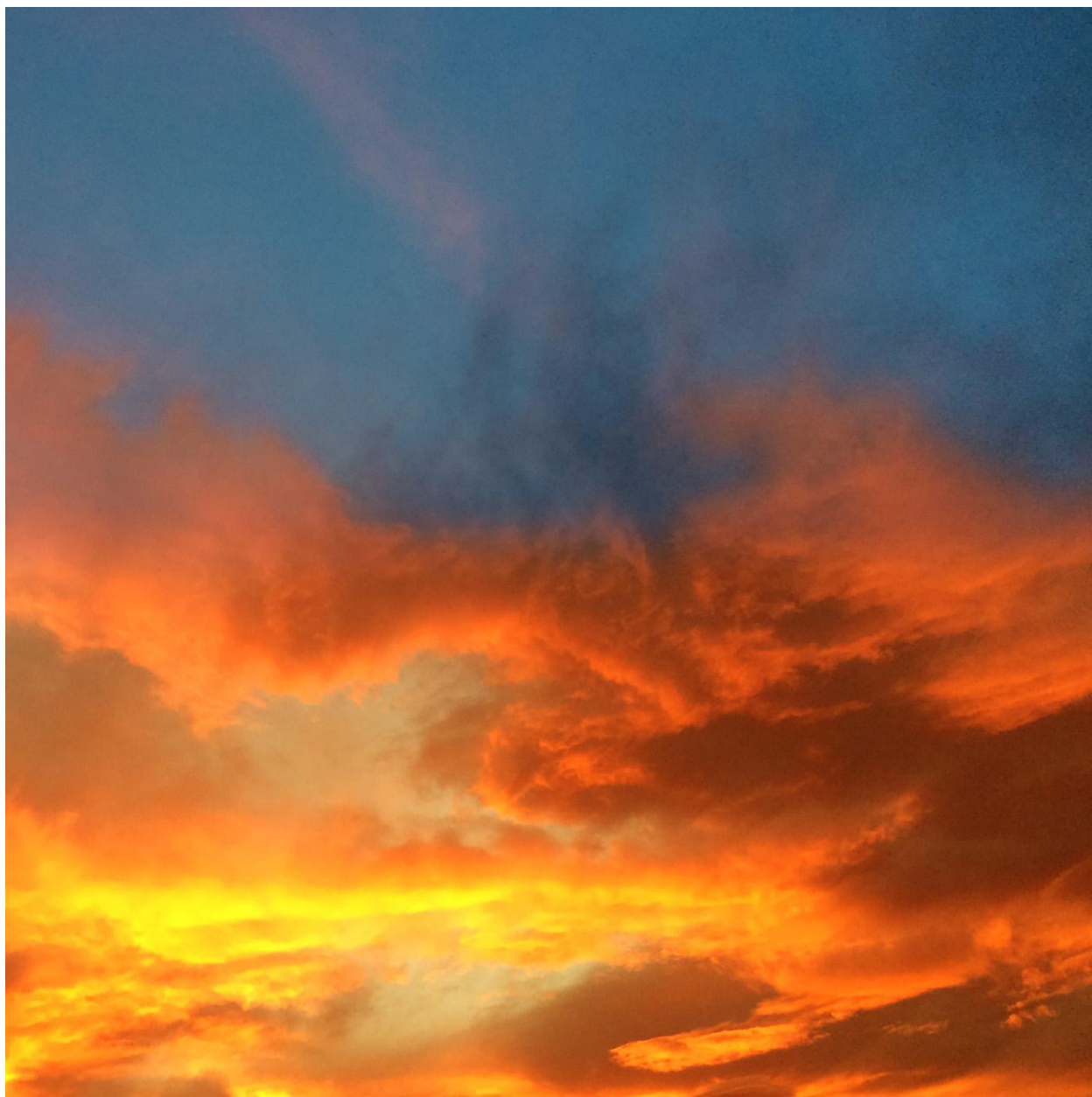


Figure 6. *Oscilith Matara* album cover 2022. Photo by Reilly Dickens-Hoffman



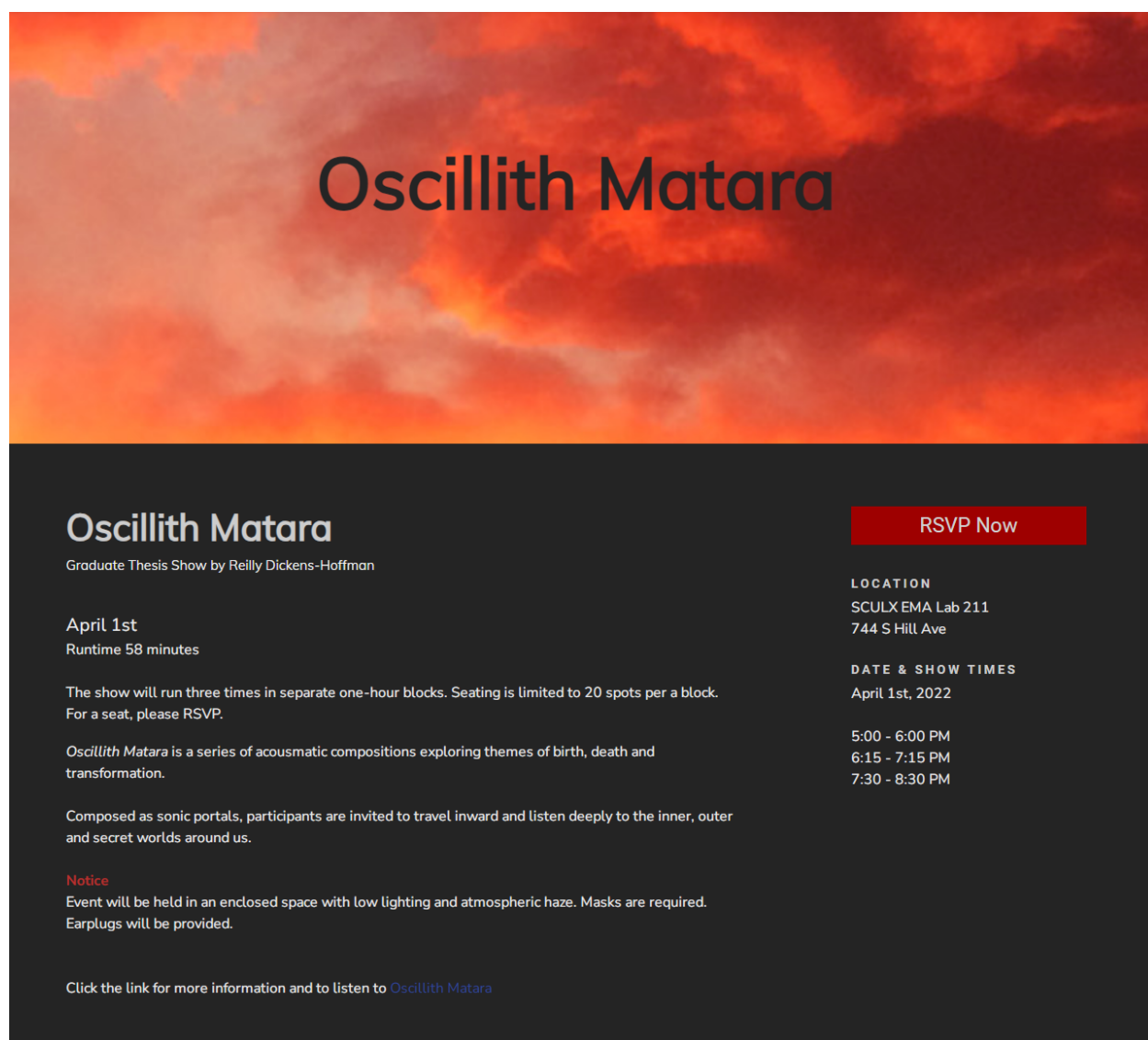


Figure 6. *Oscillith Matara* RSVP Invite 2022. Photo by Reilly Dickens-Hoffman