

SBCM program, September 1, 2011:

- Barry Truax         *Riverrun* (1986-87; 2004 re-mix for 8-channels) 19:45
- Barry Truax         *The Wings of Nike* (1987), for digital images and 8-channel tape, 12:30  
                          Theo Goldberg, digital images
- Barry Truax         *Sequence of Earlier Heaven* (1998), 8-ch tape, 12:00

INTERMISSION

- Barry Truax         *The Shaman Ascending* (2004-2005), 8-ch. tape, 15:46
- Barry Truax         *Chalice Well* (2009), 8-ch. tape, 14:20
- Barry Truax         *Fire Spirits* (2010), 8-ch. tape, 12:00

*Riverrun* (originally composed in 1986) creates a sound environment in which stasis and flux, solidity and movement co-exist in a dynamic balance. The corresponding metaphor is that of a river, always moving yet seemingly permanent. From the smallest rivulet to the fullest force of its mass, a river is formed from a collection of countless droplets and sources. So too with the sound in this composition which bases itself on the smallest possible 'unit' of sound in order to create larger textures and masses. The title is the first word in James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*.

The fundamental paradox of granular synthesis (the technique used to create this work) - that the enormously rich and powerful textures it produces result from its being based on the most 'trivial' grains of sound - suggested a metaphoric relation to the river whose power is based on the accumulation of countless 'powerless' droplets of water. The opening section of the work portrays that accumulation, as individual 'droplets' of sound gradually multiply into a powerful broadband texture. The piece, I find, also captures some of the awe one feels in the presence of the overpowering force of such a body of water, whether in a perturbed or calm state, and as such it seems to create a different mode of listening than does conventional instrumental or electroacoustic music.

*The Wings of Nike* (1987) is a collaborative work between two composers, Theo Goldberg who created the images with the aid of Vax and Amiga computers, and Barry Truax who created the music with real-time granular synthesis. The work is in three sections. The visuals are based on a sampled visual image of the famous statue, the Winged Victory (or Nike) of Samothrace, and the music is mainly based on two sampled phonemes of vocal sound, one male, the other female. The work is an extension of an earlier collaboration, *Divan* (1985), which explored sound-image relationships.

The *Sequence of Earlier Heaven* refers to the pattern of trigrams in the [\*I Ching\*](#) known as the Primal Arrangement, based on pairs of opposites, such as Heaven and Earth, Wind and Thunder, Water and Fire, Mountain and Lake. The work, and its counterpart *Sequence of Later Heaven*, is entirely based on musical instruments found in Pacific Rim cultures, including the Javanese gamelan gongs, the Philippine patangok, the khaen from South-East Asia, the Korean kayageum, the Chinese guzheng and tam-tam, Japanese meditation bells, bamboo brushes, the rosewood keyed marimba from Central America, the Peruvian bombo

and box drum, and the Chilean rainstick. These sounds are mixed together to form chords whose complex spectra become more apparent when the sounds are digitally resonated and/or stretched in time.

The composer is grateful to Sal Ferreras, Russell Hartenberger and Randy Raine-Reusch who provided the source material for this work, along with the Simon Fraser University gamelan, *Kyai Madu Sari* (The Venerable Essence of Honey). The work was commissioned with the assistance of the Canada Council by ACREQ (Montréal).

*The Shaman Ascending* evokes the imagery of a traditional shaman figure chanting in the quest for spiritual ecstasy. However, in this case, the listener is placed inside of a circle of loudspeakers with the vocal utterances swirling around at high rates of speed and timbral development. The work proceeds in increasing stages of complexity as the shaman ascends towards a higher spiritual state.

The work and its title are inspired by a pair of Canadian Inuit sculptures by John Terriak with collectively the same name, as well as Inuit throat singing. All of the vocal material heard in the piece is derived from recording of the Vancouver bass singer Derrick Christian. *The Shaman Ascending* was commissioned by the ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany and premiered there in February 2005.

Chalice Well is a holy well situated at the foot of Glastonbury Tor in southwest England, thought to be originally the island of Avalon from Arthurian legend, and the site where Joseph of Arimathea placed the chalice known as the Holy Grail. According to legend, the Tor, a masculine symbol, is hollow underneath and the entrance to the underworld, guarded by the Grail. The well, on the other hand, is a symbol of the feminine aspect of deity, and its waters are believed to possess healing qualities.

The work *Chalice Well* takes the listener on an imaginary journey down into the well, passing through several cavernous chambers on its descent, filled with rushing and trickling water, including the chamber of the feminine spirit. The journey continues to the glass chamber, then to the gates of the underworld, only to be confronted by the image of the Grail, and finally coming to rest in the space where wind and water, the masculine and the feminine are combined.

Fire and its symbolism are featured prominently in most cultures, with common themes of its volatility, and double-edged role as beneficial to humanity and potentially destructive. *Fire Spirits* evokes the power of fire and incorporates references to the Norse god Loki, the Hindu deity Agni, and the Hawaiian goddess Pele, as well as to the Chinese trickster ghost, the "fox spirit" who might emerge from a smoky flame. This soundscape composition takes the listener on an imaginary journey, perhaps to the volcanic island that is home to Vulcan, the Roman god of fire and the forge, to remind us of our age-old fascination with all manifestations of fire.

Original recordings from the World Soundscape Project Tape Collection, and vocal material by Chris Grigor and the composer. Sound processing realized with Soundhack convolution and Chris Rolfe's MacPod software, with spatialization created by Harmonic Functions' TiMax2 matrix mixer. *Fire Spirits* was commissioned by the School for the Contemporary Arts, Simon Fraser University for its inaugural electroacoustic music concert at the Woodward campus.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

Barry Truax is a Professor in both the School of Communication and the School for the Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University where he teaches courses in acoustic communication and electroacoustic music. He has worked with the World Soundscape Project, editing its *Handbook for Acoustic Ecology*, and has published a book *Acoustic Communication* dealing with all aspects of sound and technology. As a composer, Truax is best known for his work with the PODX computer music system which he has used for tape solo works and those which combine tape with live performers or computer graphics. A selection of these pieces may be heard on the Compact Discs *Digital Soundscapes*, *Pacific Rim*, *Song of Songs*, *Inside*, *Twin Souls*, *Islands*, and *Spirit Journies*, all on the Cambridge Street Records label, plus the double CD of the opera *Powers of Two*. In 1991 his work, *Riverrun*, was awarded the Magisterium at the International Competition of Electroacoustic Music in Bourges, France, a category open only to electroacoustic composers of 20 or more years experience. Website: [ww.sfu.ca/~truax](http://ww.sfu.ca/~truax)