

*"Holy the supernatural extra brilliant intelligent / kindness of the soul!"* – Alan Ginsberg, Howl

I work as an improvisational sound artist. There is no score that accompanies my work samples. Instead I have included a brief description of each in hopes of providing some insight into my working methods. I am the cellist (performer) / composer / sound engineer on all samples.

Visual forms such as collage best describe the process behind the layered, multi-threaded compositions. Abstract expressionist drawings provide inspiration for the more minimalist, single line work. I am a strong believer of in-the-moment, free-style improvisation. I welcome both sublime and imperfect sounds that emerge and try to weave them into a textured whole. I embrace chance. Composing for me consists of choosing a palette (such as a texture/tonal set/emotional or narrative landscape), creating "found sounds"/layers/threads with the cello (or with collaborators), assembling a collage using a dose of chance, and/or generative methods to create the resultant sound canvas.

I have used 12-tone techniques and modal studies to help me expand my tonal range. Studies of classical and folk forms have informed my work but I am not a formalist. I have been particularly intrigued by the emergent soundscapes created from the minimalists' experiments with tape loops and tape delays. I find Pauline Oliveros' concept of deep listening to be core. John Cage's exploration of chance was freeing for me. I have also immersed myself in the relentless energy of late John Coltrane, the intensity of Jimi Hendrix, the whirling dervishness of Thelonius Monk, the simple modal backdrop for early blues, the outside-the-box Ornette Coleman, the stuttered rhythms of spoken word and the incredibly soulful, punk sensibility of Patti Smith. I study music theory for inspiration but I am a free-style improviser at heart.

### **Disk One:**

1) *"elegy" from the album cloth (2008)*: This shows the dense orchestral landscape that typifies much of my recorded work with subtle, arched cries embedded throughout. This work is 4:41 minutes in its entirety. It has been shortened here to 4 minutes for the purpose of this grant.

2) *subway icarus/last dream (2009)*: This album explores an urban character named subway icarus as he/she experiences falling or being "raptured" through transcendence. This is an emotional/narrative arc that often runs through my live performances. This album was my first cd-length recorded excursion across a larger narrative. My albums/journals before this time had largely focused more on specific sound explorations. For example, my recording "rain clouds" (2007) explored a drone-based minimalism, "lines" (2007) examined single-line cello, and "cloth" (2008) focused on texture and chance layering.

I first experienced New York city as a 17-year old and have returned often. The sound and gritty textures of the cityscape seared themselves into my imagination. For "subway icarus / last dream" I leaned towards a post-punk classical sound to express the story. The tracks include:

- *falling / rapture (3:35)*: This densely-textured, distortion-laced, disorienting wall of sound roots our character's dream in an urban dissonance.

## Kathy McTavish, cellist/composer

## Work Sample Description

- *bent* (6:40): A textured space lies on top of an atonal drone created by playing the space between bridge and tailpiece on the cello. This drone is a recurrent sound in many of these tracks. It provides a thematic backdrop for the narrative.
- *pierce the night / sweet angel* (7:35): This consists of two parts/"themes". Throughout the entire track there is an offset replicate melodic layer. This is inspired by the tape delay experiments of composers such as Steve Reich and Terry Riley.
- *winged darkness!* (4:35)
- *glassy fires* (4:41): A blurred, high-pitched harmonic vision of lights or trash-can fires.
- *and sky and sky and sky* (5:00): A simple, still blurred hint at transcendence - flat on the back / face to sky.

### Disk Two:

This contains a collection of tracks from past recordings. I have tried to include a variety of sounds from the more richly layered, meditative landscapes to the careening, single-line work.

- *cloud 9* (6:04) from "rain clouds" (2007): an exploration of drone space
- *whisper darkness* (6:29) from "night language" (2007)
- *echo meditation 4* (3:38) from "summer 06" (2006)
- *love, love, how grief rises* (3:38) from "cloth" (2008): This is inspired by a poem by Sheila Packa. This poem was read over different music on the poetry/cello album "fearful journey".
- *early evening* (4:27) not released (2009): a minimalist sound description of the early evening strands of light that poured through a window while I was performing
- *line 12* (5:58) from "lines" (2007): This album is a series of single-line, sparse, sketches.
- *horse speaks sky* (7:09) from "winged instrument" (2008): I keep working towards the "sheets of sound" flight of John Coltrane, a limitless, soulful pouring of notes. This album was a focused study of that energy.
- *graphite* (11:38) from "cave drawings" (2008): A listener called one of my live performances "cave drawings" for its primal edge. I used that as inspiration for this recorded journal.
- *night flying* (5:50) from night language (2007): This track contains recurrent bird sounds (cries). For example, see 2:31. You can hear that the notes are slightly lowered/bent flat. I like the tension induced by that "off-ness".

The first 5 tracks are also part of a thematic collection called "love meditations". This collection has been widely accessed online and in its handmade, hardcopy form for use behind meditation/creative flow experiences.

As a classical cellist I was deeply moved and forever influenced by Bach's unaccompanied cello suites. Tracks 6-8 were included in a thematic collection called: "joyflight: euphoric love letters to Bach", a reeling, dizzy, almost out-of-control set of tracks.

The last track is also part of a thematic collection called "blue".