



**MUSIC
FOR
NATURAL
HISTORY**

a sonic interpretation by
TINA PEARSON and PAUL WALDE



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Music for Natural History is a multi-media installation and live sound performance work that literally gives voice to the taxidermied birds and mammals, artificial trees and painted landscapes that form the dioramas of the Natural History Gallery at the Royal BC Museum (RBCM) in Victoria BC.

The project takes four forms:

- a) a site-specific sound performance inside the Natural History Gallery at the RBCM
- b) an installation featuring video footage of the RBCM Natural History Gallery dioramas and performers with an audio soundtrack
- c) an immersive live multimedia sound performance featuring a video environment adapted from the installation and representing the dioramas

- d) an audio publication featuring elements of the installation soundtrack

The Elk Concerto and *Shoreline Operetta* are the two main pieces of *Music for Natural History*. Through careful cataloging, research, transcription and notation, the sounds of the flora and fauna of the major dioramas of the Royal BC Museum's Natural History Gallery were orchestrated into two naturalistic compositions performed by a small orchestra and chorus of musicians and vocalists. *The Elk Concerto* is a sonic portrait of the 5 biomes in the Forest Exhibition on a single day in early autumn; *Shoreline Operetta* explores the soundscape suggested in the Seashore Exhibition over the period of one year.



CONTEXT

Music for Natural History is part of a growing global movement of art projects that intend to foster renewed connections with a rapidly changing biosphere. The project blurs boundaries between sonic mimicry, soundscape composition, classical music, and dadaist sound poetry, reminding us of the complex array of biospheric sounds being silenced by loss of habitat and species extinction.

BACKGROUND

In 2012 the Royal BC Museum invited sound artists to sonically re-imagine the displays in its second and third floor galleries. *Music for Natural History* was Tina Pearson's and Paul Walde's collaborative response to this creative challenge. Walde brought a broad conceptual framework for the relationships between sound art, the visual arts and music, while Pearson contributed her long background in music transcription, field recordings, experimental music composition, improvisation and sonic mimicry. Walde and Pearson recruited and trained Victoria musicians, students and community members to participate in a workshop version of this project, which was performed on April 28th, 2012 as part of the Museum's *Site and Sound* program.





SITE SPECIFIC PERFORMANCE

In 2015, supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, Pearson and Walde further developed the scores for the *Elk Concerto* and *Shoreline Operetta*, and introduced crucial staging strategies and other elements that enhanced the audience experience of the complete work. On January 14, 15 and 16, 2016, *Music for Natural History* was performed to sold out audiences in six shows at the Royal BC Museum. Leading up to the performance, musicians and community members participated in specialized workshops designed to enhance their listening and soundscape awareness. Sixteen vocalists, sound artists and instrumentalists learned to embody and mimic the sounds of wind, birds, mammals and rain, in order to replicate a dry coastal forest, a rainforest stream, or the dynamic sounds of ocean surf. Alternately cacophonous, dramatic and serene, these performances were bookended by two complementary site-specific audio installations: *Prelude in Blue* and *Delta Transposition*, which were installed in the Woolly Mammoth and Delta Estuary displays.

NOTES ON THE SCORE

The scores for *Elk Concerto* and *Shoreline Operetta* are a combination of conventional music notation, graphic notation, diagrams, and text instructions complemented with audio samples and individual instruction for each vocalist or instrumentalist. The performers use acoustic instruments and voices to attempt an accurate replication of the sounds of each creature represented in the dioramas. Non-traditional uses of instruments and extended techniques are essential in the realization of the score. The composition also includes vocal notations for sounds of the specific vegetation, waters and winds associated with the microclimates represented, and interactive elements based on the communicative behaviours of the birds and mammals. There are no pre-recorded or electronic sounds in the live performances of these works.





AUDIO/VIDEO INSTALLATION

All four audiovisual compositions of *Music for Natural History* are being developed into discrete audio visual gallery works: *Elk Concerto* into a 3 channel multi-screen projection work that occupies 3 walls; *The Shoreline Operetta* to a dual screen projection work that fills a long wall. Both pieces incorporate detailed ultra-high definition (4K) video documentation of the dioramas of the Royal BC Museum's Natural History Galleries and staged performances for the camera.

Shot with a professional film crew on a RED cinema camera, these panoramic immersive installations do not attempt to recreate the site-specific performances but instead offer audiences a distinct artistic experience.

The accompanying soundtracks were recorded at the Phillip T. Young Performance Hall at the University of Victoria and will be remixed, layered and produced at the University of Victoria's sound studio.

In contrast, the audio compositions, *Prelude in Blue* and *Delta Transposition*, are combined with carefully composed video footage of the respective dioramas for which these works were created: the Woolly Mammoth and Delta Estuary. The result is two stand alone single channel video works with high quality stereo audio tracks intended to bookend the larger more elaborate multi-screen works in this proposed exhibition.



IMMERSIVE MULTI-MEDIA CONCERT PERFORMANCE

The multi-media performance features live performances of *The Elk Concerto* and *Shoreline Operetta* each approximately 30 minutes in length. Experimental musicians, vocalists and sound artists bring to life the sounds of the Pacific Northwest lifeforms represented in the Royal BC Museum, within an immersive environment of three large-scale projections that surround the audience. There are no pre-recorded or electronic sounds during these these pieces. The projections include slowly revealing footage of details of the dioramas, but unlike the installation version, shows no footage of the original RBCM performers. This version of the piece is prepared for the creation of an equivalent soundscape by live performers, with the projections acting as a moving set, part of the score, and larger-than-live environment for the audience, resulting in a unique viewing and listening experience. Bookending this live performance are two pre-recorded audio/visual works: *Prelude In Blue* and *Delta Transposition*.



AUDIO RECORDING

The audio recording is an audio-only version of the installation soundtrack prepared for a listening audience. It features remixed and rearranged elements from the original *Elk Concerto* and *Shoreline Operetta* recordings. In addition, the publication of the audio recording—including a vinyl record and digital download -- will feature notes by the artists as well as score samples and images selected from the performances and installation.

TINA PEARSON is a composer, performer, and facilitator. Her work often incorporates eco-mimicry, altered tunings and spectral-temporal investigations, and usually focuses on breath, attention states and/or stretched modes of performance practice. As a member of the Avatar Orchestra Metaverse, Pearson also conceives new instruments and practices in networked virtual reality platforms. Recent presentations include the live virtual reality works *PwRHm with Helicopter* (NetNewMusic Festival, Birmingham, UK), *Rotating Brains / Beating Heart* (Digital Resources for the Humanities and the Arts Conference, Brunel, UK), and *Breathing with PwRHm* (EMPAC, Troy, New York); the mixed reality audiovisual work *In This Far Now* (Newfoundland Sound Symposium); the musical compositions *Gentle Hands* (Cluster New Music Festival, Winnipeg), *Migration of Their Materials* (Innovations en Concert, Montreal, Western Front, Vancouver, Open Space, Victoria); the electronic works *Between Five and Six* (Mobius, Cambridge); and the audio installation work *This Is For You* (ohrehnhoch, Berlin). Pearson founded LaSaM in 2007.

PAUL WALDE is an intermedia artist, composer, and curator. Walde's body of work suggests unexpected interconnections between landscape, identity, and technology. Recent exhibitions of his work include: *The View from Up Here* at the Anchorage Museum (2016), *Nature's Handmade* at Museum London (2015) and *All Together Now* at the University of Toronto Art Centre (2014). In 2013, he completed *Requiem for a Glacier*, his renown site specific sound performance featuring a fifty-five piece choir and orchestra live on the Farnham Glacier in the Purcell Mountains. *Requiem for a Glacier* was subsequently developed into a multichannel sound and video installation which has been the basis of solo exhibitions at L' Université Laval Art Gallery in Quebec City, QC; Art Gallery at Evergreen, Coquitlam, BC; Oxygen Art Centre in Nelson, BC, (2014) and The Langham Cultural Centre in Kaslo, BC (2013). Walde is a founding member of Audio Lodge, a Canadian sound art collective and has been a member of LaSaM Music since 2012.





CONTACT INFORMATION

Tina Pearson: pearstina@gmail.com

Paul Walde: paul.f.walde@gmail.com

lasammusic.wordpress.com