

Voices at the End

Composition: John Psathas
Theatrical visualisation: Sjaron Minailo
Piano Circus

A project curated by Maestro Arts

Voices at the End includes text excerpts from the Mahabharata in Jean-Claude Carrière version, an Armenian song (Yarko Parag), the NASA Voyager Golden Record, instrumental and voice recordings from Joe Callwood (guitar), Briar Prastiti (voice), Renkei Hashimoto (shakuhachi).
Sound design and effects by David Downes.

Voices at the End was originally inspired by the film *Planetary*. In this film, author and environmental activist Joanna Macy suggested there are three stories that we have to choose from, to make sense of our lives now, to make sense of our world. The first story that we could see and accept as reality is **Business as Usual**. All we need to do is keep growing our economy. We could call that the industrial growth society.

But there's a second story which is seen and accepted as the reality by the scientists and the activists. These are the people who lift back the carpet and look under the rug of **Business as Usual** and see what it's costing us. And it's costing us the world. We call that story **The Great Unraveling**. Unraveling is what biological and ecological and organic systems do as diversity is lost. They shred.

That's not the end of the story though, because there's a third narrative, another lens through which we can choose to see. And that is that a revolution is taking place. A transition. From the industrial growth society to a life sustaining society. And it's taking many forms, this third story, **The Great Turning**. It's our story of survival and it's got huge evolutionary pressures behind it. After all, the story of evolution is everybody's autobiography.

These three stories - **Business as Usual, The Great Unraveling, and The Great Turning**, form the three parts of **Voices at the End**.

The title **Voices at the End** draws attention to each movement ending with voice or voices. In the prologue, it is the Mahabharata; in Business as Usual, massed crowds chanting in unison. In The Great Unravelling it is the voice of the natural world reasserting itself after we are gone, and in The Great Turning it is the voice of humanity's interstellar message being taken further and further into deep space. Finally, in the epilogue, it is the distant voices of children playing.

John Psathas

John Psathas's evocative composition ***Voices at the End*** for six pianos and electronica seems to desire images. Maybe it's the fact that the work itself was inspired by a moving images, or maybe it's the composer's use of his notes to paint phantasmagorias in the listeners' mind – what ever it may be, this composition leaves an essential space between the music and the listener that calls to be filled with imagery.

As a director this composition is extremely inspiring exactly for these reasons. Visualizing music is my specialty and I often approach music theatre as a kind of theatrical music video. By adding live images that does not aim at illustrating or explaining the musical narrative, rather aim at opening it up for audience through associative and evocative images, one can help the audience to listen with their eyes and see with their ears. The goal is to achieve a musical, visual, theatrical experience that draws the audience outside of their daily life and into the particular world of the music. Music beyond music; theatre beyond theatre.

My initial idea for *Voices at the End* is to create a large-scale installation to be operated by a performing technician who represents the human element as an active agent in the process of nature's demise.

A large slanting mirror hangs behind the six pianos on stage reflecting all the six musicians to the audience. A scaffolding structure is hidden behind this mirror – once this hidden space is lightened it is revealed through the mirror. On this scaffolding the performer will create sculptural images through the placing and displacing of objects – these object can represent realistic things such as light, water, fire, earth and cityscapes but can also be more abstract and formalistic. Through the movement of shapes and colors I will aim at creating a flux of associative visual compositions that examines different aspects of humankind's relation to nature, both constructive and destructive. The images are always in a process of becoming – unlike video images, the live element makes the creation and elimination of images visible for the audience. Therefore the image is never static and always as part of a process of becoming. This large-scale puppet theatre-like installation results in a performance in which John Psathas's music is the core but goes further beyond a mere concert or a concert with (video) visuals. It's a concert that places the human being in its center – as creator, performer (musicians, operator) and participator (audience).

Sjaron Minailo

Links

Video: <https://vimeo.com/282325939>

Sound: <https://soundcloud.com/john-psathas/voices-at-the-end/s-0aSoi>