

# B R E A K I N G S T R E T C H

Some of my favorite bands growing up were fiercely rhythmically driven—from salsa ensembles such as Fania All-Stars and danzoneras (Acerina y su Danzonera), to 70's wind-and-brass rock groups (Earth, Wind & Fire; Blood, Sweat & Tears; and Chicago). In those bands, each player was an integral part of the band's rhythmic identity—and each had both the opportunity and responsibility to be a rhythmic force inside the music. *Breaking Stretch* expands on the rhythmic and percussive signature of my *More Touch* quartet. That quartet (with Kim Cass, Marcus Gilmore and Mauricio Herrera) is now joined by three horns carrying unique rhythmic capabilities: Adam O'Farrill on trumpet, Jon Irabagon on alto and soprano saxophones, and Mark Shim on tenor.

On this album, I seek to create depth through the exploration of density and shifting rhythmic layers, and by using orchestral techniques that create what might be called broadness: essentially, depth through width, width through depth. For instance, I use extreme ranges, asking the horn players to explore the outer edges of their sonic envelopes in my written material and their improvisations. In doing so, a certain harmonic resonance gives the illusion of a larger-than-seven sound. I'm seeking to push sonic boundaries up-to-but-not-over the tipping point, while staying true to the inherent nature of the music. I'm interested in essence, not effect.

This record continues my journey of inner search and exploration. The title *Breaking Stretch* distills this inspiration. The word "breaking" refers to pushing the sonic and technical limits of each instrument to a breaking point, past the normal expectations for the role of the instruments within the ensemble. Among other things, in mathematics, "stretch" is a function that makes a graph narrower or wider. Through different methods of expansion and contraction, I seek to make the music mile-wide and simultaneously mine-deep. The generative, triggering tension in the music unifies opposites: broadness and depth, rupture and flexibility, breaking and stretching.

## 1. Los Otros Yo (The Other Selves)

This composition represents our connection to our multiple or "other" selves from past, present, and future; and the parallelisms offered by the physical self, the emotional self, and the spiritual self. Its structure builds on melodic lines that co-exist in parallel, but at different rhythmic rates. The soca-inspired vibe invites the celebration of our true self; that is, a maskless, multiplicative self—encompassing all our constituent elements, and which is neither defined nor confined by our day-to-day existence.

## 2. Breaking Stretch

The rhythmic structure of this piece juxtaposes binary and ternary rhythmic feels, creating the illusion of constriction and dilation coexisting within the same space and at the same time. This juxtaposition also creates a subtle, frictional pressure that simmers beneath the surface, almost breaking through.

## 3. 555

The number five is associated with my Zodiac sign, Virgo. Virgos tend toward analysis and exactitude. Yet the number five, particularly when repeated, also suggests change and opportunity. Thus, "555" represents the pursuit of balance between known specificity and unknown freedom; it shows how flexibility, movement, and action can unfold in exact and exacting spaces. In the composition, these spaces are divided into micro and macro groups of five elements. These groups exist within measures of three beats, each beat divided by five. Ready, set, play.

## 4. Palo de Oros (Suit of Coins)

As a child, I played countless card games with my grandmother. One of the Spanish suits is the suit of gold coins, also known as pentacles. The shape of the pentacle—a five-pointed star composed of ten line segments—inspires the rhythmic structure here: a time signature of ten beats, each of sixteenth-note value, with the division of the measures and phrases divided into micro and macro groups of five beats. Only one section uses four beats. This binary structure, with its melodic and rhythmic density,

represents the grounding force of the earth element, which is also associated with the palo de oros. I want a sense of foundation amidst all the swirling movement.

### 5. Sueños de Coral Azul (Blue Coral Dreams)

August 21, 2024 marks the twentieth anniversary of my immigration to the United States. I've lived as long in what I now consider home as I did in my actual hometown of Veracruz, Mexico. My old life there now seems so distant as to be a dream. At the same time, the emotional pull and wish to return feel quite real. This composition is an ode to an immigrant's journey: the uncertainty, the excitement for a fresh start, the pain of leaving loved ones behind, the hopes for new relationships, the dream of one day reuniting with the people from the place you once loved and called home. As Mexican composer and Veracruz native Agustín Lara said in his song "Veracruz": "algún día, hasta tus playas lejanas, tendré que volver" (*one day, to your distant beaches, I must return*).

### 6. Five Suns

The Aztecs believed that the world has undergone five stages of creation and destruction, hence five suns. According to this legend, we are now living under the fifth sun, Tonatiuh. Each stage marks a period of stability that abruptly ends with upheaval and destruction. This piece deals with this concept of creation, chaos and destruction. The core of the composition is a repeated form that is disrupted every cycle, the disruptions becoming more and more pronounced... until they reach a point of frenzy.

### 7. Mudanza (States of Change)

A poem by Mexican poet and Veracruz native Salvador Díaz Mirón inspired this composition. The poem "Mudanza" is a nostalgic reflection on the joyful pleasures of yesterday, while acknowledging the pain and challenge of the present. This piece takes a drumless, orchestral approach, moving from a gentle marimba solo to the gradual darkness of the full ensemble's chordal resonance.

### 8. Manufacturers Trust Company Building

The gleaming trigger for this composition is the sculpture "Golden Arbor" by Harry Bertoia. Located at 510 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, formerly known as the Manufacturers Trust Company Building, the sculpture is a 16-foot high, 70-foot long, 5.25 ton screen of 800 bronze, copper and nickel panels welded together. Every angle of the screen suggests a different perspective, combining visual complexity with a richness of emotion. "Golden Arbor" is one of the most powerful things I've ever seen: every surface is worked. Our music honors the size, the weight, and the profundity of this masterpiece with its plethora of shapes, textures and tones. I dedicate it to Harry Bertoia, for his brilliant, unique vision.

### 9. Earendel

This composition takes its name and feeling from Earendel, the oldest and most distant star we have yet discovered. The name derives from the old English word meaning "morning star" or "rising light". Earendel, discovered by the Hubble Space Telescope in 2022, lies 28 billion light years from Earth. (It is also known by the less poetic name: WHL0137-LS.) You can see Earendel in this image—it's the second dot from the top on the Sunrise Arc, which is the curving red line at the bottom right. Astronomers estimate that Earendel is twice as hot and a million times brighter than our sun! This song begins and ends over a pulsing, fading heartbeat, which represents the beginning and end of matter, including Earendel itself as it journeys away from us. In this piece we explore the concept of constant expansion, the elasticity of the universe, and our never-ending travel through space into infinity.

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