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GARGANTUA is scored for large ensemble, consisting of three drum sets, three electric basses, three trombones, three French horns, and three high voices. This instrumentation came into my mind during a long, beautiful hike in Molde, Norway in 2022. I had had the idea of a sextet (three basses, three drum sets) in mind for several years, but during that excursion, some combination of the Nordic wilderness; the calm, introspective, repetitive act of hiking; and the view from of the summit of Varden, looking out at the fjords and a vista of 222 mountain peaks, struck me to my core. I became inspired by the resultant orchestrational possibilities of adding brass and high voices to my low-end heavy ensemble. That sonic image became an obsession in my mind's ear, and I couldn't think of anything else for quite some time afterwards.

The title of the work is inspired by Rabelais' 16th-century pentalogy *Gargantua and Pantagruel*—a series of novels chronicling the adventures of a giant named Gargantua and his son, Pantagruel. The work is written in an amusing, extravagant vein and features a great deal of erudition, vulgarity, and wordplay. Considered

obscene by Rabelais' contemporaries, the series has long-since been recognized as a classic of satirical literature, and Rabelais has frequently been named as the world's first great comic genius. On a personal level, reading *Gargantua and Pantagruel* throughout my 20s always left me feeling as if a psychic door had been opened that connected my mind and soul to a centuries-old transgressive artistic unconscious. That sense was my inspiration to create an ensemble that could sonically capture and musically explore the epic, monumental, and bombastic extremes—both terrifying and joyous—that Rabelais conjures so deftly. In doing so, I join the ranks of a great many artists who have claimed Rabelais as a transgressive influence, including Alfred Jarry, Aldous Huxley, Alester Crowley, James Joyce, and Jonathan Swift.

I composed the movements "Knock-androw," "Lacerated By A Flying Shard," and "Submit To The Fabulosity" in Rabelais' bawdy, satiric spirit. Other movements, however, come from a different place. "A Series Of Waves Tremble In A Sea Of Blood," "Moirai," and "I AM" are shaped by a deep reverence, a grave awareness of the delicacy of life, and a sense of profound emotion.

"Gigantes," "Lucifer/Aureum Chaos," and "Hekla 1970" are imbued with a feeling of "ecstatic," explosive terror—a concept which has been a fundamental part of the GARGANTUA compositional process and which is reflected in my newfound obsession with the scientific and mythological power of volcanoes. I connected with this feeling while wandering alone across the desolate lava fields of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park in the fall of 2024, when I spent three weeks in artistic isolation in Volcano, Hawaii, the town bordering Kīlauea and the surrounding national park. My initial fascination with volcanism was born out of the desire to understand temporal relationships that dwarfed humanity's own experience of the passage of time. Volcanoes, with their slow breath, primordial formations, and centuries-long pauses between eruptions, are a perfect example of an extra-human timescale. The ability of volcanoes to generate life, as well as their power to decimate it—to reduce it to nothing but ash and flame—has fascinated and terrified artists and scientists alike for centuries. Portals to hell, realms of mythological guardians, destructive, chaotic, impossible

for human beings to fathom: these are the terror-inducing volcanic attributes which so fired my imagination and which I labored to capture in GARGANTUA.

My compositional strategies are also inspired by Renaissance polyphony, Ukrainian trembita music, the long horns of Tibet, '70s hard rock, metal and hardcore music, noise, American minimalism, and turn-of-the-century European avant-garde music.

The music of GARGANTUA has remained—throughout the entire process of rehearsal, performance, and recording—remarkably close to my initial sonic conception. Most of the shifting that took place happened during the imaginal stages, as I went through the arduous, exciting, inspirational process of moving from the GARGANTUA sketches I had scribbled over the last few years into a more focused, dedicated period of research and composition.

A SERIES OF WAVES TREMBLE IN A SEA OF BLOOD explores the relationship between two seemingly disparate musical traditions: Vocal polyphony from the high Middle Ages (c. 100-1250) and Tibetan Buddhist chant. The piece is a synthesis of those traditions' expressions of the sacred. In order to achieve balance, I add my own dose of the profane in the form of a thick, lugubrious web of repeated bass harmonics. The lyrical content also explores the dichotomy of two sacred traditions: In the first half the text is taken from Tibetan Buddhist texts translated into Italian: "A series of waves tremble in a sea of blood," "enjoying the original place where the serpent lives," "the spreading cloud of sensual pleasure." The second half is mirrored texts from Dante's *Inferno* that also reference rivers of blood, giant serpents, and clouds of sensual (ecstatic) pleasure (joy).

GIGANTES started out as an exercise in following a Stravinsky-esque compositional model and quickly grew into a standalone movement. The musical phrases are in contrast—a heavy riff played by the basses and drums versus a simplified, almost saccharine major mode melody in the voices and horns. Halfway through the piece the material switches orchestration, all hell breaks loose, and it builds to a climax in which the melody is now supported by the heavy, atonal bass notes.

KNOCKANDROW is perhaps the most directly Rabelaisian piece on the record, in that the lyrics are taken from Book 1, Chapter XIII, “How Gargantua’s wonderful understanding became known to his Father Grangousier, by the invention of a torchcul or wipebrech.” The hilariously scatological lyrics are sung in old French. From a compositional perspective, I am juxtaposing influences —Transgressive French literature of the Renaissance, vocal polyphony, and Ukrainian mountain horn music—into a coherent whole, and laboring to make sure they are balanced with one another. The result culminates in sonic chaos, which is music to my ears!

LACERATED BY A FLYING SHARD Edgar Varese once described his music as “the movement of masses, varying in radiance and of different densities and volumes.” In my experiences studying composition and being part of music communities in which harsh noise, sound art, free improvisation and other similar forms of sonic investigation take place, I’ve found Varese’s quote resonates. “Lacerated” takes this idea as a basis for the composition by utilizing block form—sections are delineated in minutes and seconds, not bars—and the orchestration is centered around specific areas of the frequency spectrum.

THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST IS 666 David Munrow’s recording of *Terpsichore* (1612), Michael Praetorius’ compendium of musical dances, has been a huge influence on me. The faster *Terpsichore* dances were my inspiration for “666,” with a particular eye to the occasional odd time signature, a confusing cadence or modulation, and the sound of powerful brass playing in baroque counterpoint. So I wrote my own brassy, powerfully rococo brass piece with almost completely non-functional harmony, odd time signatures, and a sense of grandiosity mixed with a regal attitude. Incidentally, I found this exact idea reflected in the writing and painting of William Blake, who interpreted western religious iconography to fit his own passionate sensual theology.

SUBMIT TO THE FABULOSITY In “Submit,” I tried to think as maximally as possible, both in terms of adopting a dense compositional language, and in terms of using the piece as an opportunity to “get my ya-yas out.” The piece is an experiment in giving my imagination free rein to draw any sort of association and the challenge

became how to arrange the ideas so they felt justified. As a result, the piece is extreme in several ways: in the density of the compositional language, at the micro scale in the level of detail, at the macro scale in the number of different sections and the speed and dynamic intensity, and at the “meta” scale in the number of stylistic references and quotes (including Stravinsky, Mozart, SUM 41, John Williams, Led Zeppelin, Xenakis, and Nirvana) that are integrated into the music.

MOIRAI is entirely about volcanoes. I wrote it in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, spending my days between long hikes across the lava fields, and quiet working and reading. The title references the three Fates, as represented in Greek mythology, and the kernel of inspiration was imagining a single note, like a thread, which the three singers pass back and forth between one another. The text is a collage from three sources: Dante’s *Inferno*, Pliny the Younger’s letters describing the 79 AD eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, and Petronius’ *Satyricon*. All three passages deal with the attempt to comprehend processes that exist on a timeline which so dwarfs the human conception of time/space, be it an imagined hell, the eruption and breath of a volcano, or the lasting ramifications of war. In essence, phenomenal representations of fate, personified.

LUCIFER/AUREUM CHAOS “Lucifer” (part 1 of this diptych) was inspired by imagining what sacred music would sound like if some sort of Pagan religion that worshipped a Luciferian deity was more prevalent than Christianity in western Europe during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. I utilized what would have been the opposite of the “correct” conventions of sacred music—disregard for thematic development, dissonant chords, heavy repetition—supported by trance-inducing rhythmic drumming inspired by non-western ecstatic ritual music. The hope is to inspire a true sense of deep dread and terror in the listener. “Lucifer” came to my mind amidst the terrifying desolation of a remote Hawaiian lava field. The utter absence of sound, the scorched black landscape, open chasms which seem to extend down into the earth’s core—was the stuff of a truly nightmarish, terrifying beauty, which had a profound effect on me.

“Aureum Chaos” (the 2nd part of the diptych) is a reference to a topographic area of Mars where volcanic activity is believed to have occurred, indicating that there may have once been bodies of water on the planet. I am again dealing in desolation and dread, this time of a cold, otherworldly nature - something truly alien. In this section, the instrumentalists are given repeated motifs which are cued by the conductor to slowly develop and change. Meanwhile, the singers are performing from a conventionally notated score that directs them to sing long tones while swinging their mics in front of their mouths in specific rhythmic phrases.

I AM is a re-orchestration of an older composition which has a new meaning in the context of this ensemble. It is the simplest piece in terms of the musical material on the record, and it speaks to something which has been a driving force in all of my compositional work, but particularly in GARGANTUA—reaching out for, and almost grasping hold of, something intangible. The lyrics of the piece have been altered slightly from the original to more graphically represent the feeling of standing at the edge of an abyss, and holding onto the awareness that such an abyss can represent a great many possibilities, both ecstatically joyous and ecstatically terrifying.

HEKLA 1970 was inspired by an Icelandic picture postcard of the 1970 eruption of Mt. Hekla and by volcanologist Tamsin Mather’s description of how many of the volcanoes in the “Ring of Fire” are connected with each other via magma chambers under the earth’s crust. Hekla was believed to be one of the Gateways to Hell. I imagined a giant mythological creature that would play volcanoes the way a human plays a pipe organ—by hitting notes on some kind of paleolithic keyboard, activating individual volcanoes across the Pacific Rim to erupt, each cone with its own distinct sound. I utilized integral serialism to divide the GARGANTUA ensemble into 3 quintets and 9 trios. Each of these groups is assigned a note in a 12-tone row, plus a final, extra-special 13th sound, a harshly consonant C major chord, played by the whole ensemble. Writing a dodecaphonic melody with the instrumentation and pitch material fused creates an automatic series of hockets, imbuing each note with its own ingrained orchestrational identity. For contrast, in the second half of the piece I experimented with functionally orchestrating the sound of an EQ sweep using all

natural sonic effects. The explosive ending to the piece is an homage to Heinrich Beiber's *Missa Salisburgensis*, Messiaens' *Turungalila Symphonie*, and most importantly, to the sound of the eruption of Hekla in 1970.

GARGANTUA represents the turning of a page in my compositional life. It is a summation of ideas, inspirations, obsessions, and anxieties that I had previously been unable to express in my musical endeavors as a composer and bandleader. In this way, it represents a significant moment for me and charts a progression into a new phase of musical self-actualization, as well as into a new stage of adulthood.

I am extremely grateful to the 15 incredible, talented musicians, who put a great deal of their energy and personal musical spirit into interpreting the ideas I presented to them, some of which were very abstract. The care and attention with which they approached the music, even the most bombastic and aggressive parts, helped to give the piece its identity and life. Thanks also to David Breskin, Isabel Breskin, Kris Davis, Ann Braithwaite, Ashley Capps, Pele, and Moe's Books in Berkeley.

Simon Hanes

Brooklyn

December 13, 2025

A SERIES OF WAVES TREMBLE IN A SEA OF BLOOD

A series of waves tremble in a sea of blood

Enjoying the original place where the serpent rules

The spreading cloud of sensual pleasure

The spreading cloud of sensual pleasure

The river of blood draws near

A serpent with six feet darts up in front of one and fastens him all over.

I saw in that light other wheeling lamps, some more and some less swift, yet in
accord, I think,
With what their inner vision was.

KNOCKANDROW

(English translation, sung in old French)

In shitting yesterday I did know
the sess to which my arse did owe;
St Anthony's fire.

The smell was such came from that slunk,
That I was with it all bestunk;
St Anthony's fire.

Oh had but then some brave signor
Brought her to me I waited for, in shitting!
St Anthony's fire.

I would have cleft her water gap,
And join'd it close to my flip flap,
Whilst she had with her fingers guarded
My foul knockandrow, all bemedred in shitting.
St Anthony's fire!
Amen.

Who his foul tail with paper wipes,
Shall at his ballocks leave some chips.
Squittard,
Crackard,
Turdous,
Thy bung

Hath flung
Some dung
On us
St Anthony's fire seize on thy toane!

If thy
Dirty
Dounby
Thou do not wipe, ere
Thou be gone.

MOIRAI

On Vesuvius
Vesuvius
Twisted fiery spirit
Burning flames
Vesuvius.
Torch of stars joined with new fire
Fresh blood rains from the sky
New souls
Squalid chaos
Flames
We pour out our lips with our hearts
Amen.
Good Vulcan, Help!
Hit me with everything you've got!
Thundering Omniscience
Our new souls
Our new souls
Burning,
Burning.

I AM

I am sitting on the edge of

I am sitting on the edge of something

Good

I am standing on the edge of

I am standing on the edge of something

Good

I am speaking on the edge of

I am speaking on the edge of something

Good