

oude kerk

the instrument

dreams of troubled people

cardiff & miller:

introduction

A raven flies through the space; a lone rower navigates amongst the pillars in the flooded Church; a boat overflowing with people is hit by a storm off the coast; Sweelinck composes in the organist's loft; a wave of bombers passes overhead; the police search a small apartment, a Ferris wheel floats past on a barge. Sounds wash over the viewer, and the past, present, and future intermingle, tempered by the soaring presence of the oldest building in Amsterdam.

The Instrument of Troubled Dreams (2018) by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller submerges you in sounds, which gradually fuse the present, the centuries-old past and the future of the Oude Kerk. A stirring moment of consciousness within Amsterdam's oldest building.

In the High Choir, you can play on a Mellotron. The artists have transformed this 1980s precursor of the sampler into a surround-sound installation. The Mellotron has 72 keys, each programmed to produce a different sound effect, vocal number or music fragment. Many of the sounds were recorded in and around the Oude Kerk: sounds of water, a few notes from the Vater-Müller organ, the ringing of the church bell, choral hymns by Sweelinck, the creaking of the ceiling. But there are as many sounds coming from the sound library of the artists. Memory, preference, the unpredictable and the mystery of technology all contribute to your ephemeral soundtrack for the space.

Janet Cardiff (1957) and George Bures Miller (1960) are internationally renowned installation and sound artists. In 2011, they represented Canada at the Venice Biennale. In the past several years, they have had exhibitions in such venues as Tate Modern (UK), the Palais de Tokyo (France), the Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte (Italy) and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid (Spain). Their work is part of museum collections all over the world.

until 29 April 2019
oudekerk.nl

Prior to the opening in November 2018, artists **Janet Cardiff (JC)** and **George Bures Miller (GM)** spoke about the work with director and curator Jacqueline Grandjean (JG).

JG: Could you tell me a little more about your strategy for making a new work in the Oude Kerk? How did you approach the commission to make a new, site-specific work for the Oude Kerk?
JC: We visited a couple times and we had lots of ideas. GM: Did we?

JC: Yeah, to do with light and the immensity of the space. We were responding to the space first. Then we thought it might be great to have a video walk here, but it's so sparsely populated that we didn't think that would work very well, and maybe it wouldn't be making use of the opportunity. We thought of a big surround sound music piece too, like *Murder of Crows*, but then George started getting very interested in the idea of the Mellotron. GM: When you're working in a big space like the Oude Kerk you try to think of a piece that won't try to compete with it. The space is already so beautiful that it doesn't need visuals; the visuals are already there, they're inherent to the space. It seemed to make sense to do something that was just sound and then the idea developed. We were thinking of a surround piece like what we did in Kassel in the forest, *Forest (for a thousand years)*, like going out of that, but then, I'm not sure where we got the idea for the Mellotron. I guess when we had done this piece called Poetry Machine [an interactive installation with poetry and the voice of Leonard Cohen, 2017], that was the first time we used an organ. But then I was playing with this new software that emulated a Mellotron and there was one demo patch that really pushed the idea of it from being a musical instrument into something where each key held little sound spaces inside of it. I remember playing that for Janet and talking about how we could do something similar but in surround sound, so that each key really became a small world. Then you could overlap these sounds to create a film-like sound track. The Oude Kerk seemed like the perfect, historically loaded place for a work of art like that.

JG: The title of the work is poetic. The Instrument Of Troubled Dreams. Where did the title of the work come from?
GM: Our working title was *Surround Sound Mellotron*. We always knew we would have to find a better one...
JC: And then I was memorising some Wordsworth poetry and one line was 'Now too on melancholies idle dreams'. And then I thought, idle dreams, what about *The Instrument of Idle Dreams*? And then we were thinking, maybe it's more troubled dreams. GM: The current dreams of the world are much more troubled than idle.

JG: But it is poetry all together.
JC: Poetry is actually a big thing in all of our work. The thing we use to put things together.

JG: Absolutely, The fragmentation, the rhythm of it.
JC: Yes so much of our work is about poetic juxtaposition. You have to have the memory of the one segment to move on to the next segment and figure out how they go together. It has to sink right. Create this magic.

JG: People hardly perceive the installation. When you enter the choir it totally blends in. Still, there's a strong visual aspect but it works in another way. Could you explain how you see the visual part of your work?
GM: It was really tough to site the piece in the building. We had the idea of the sphere of speakers, but weren't sure where to put it – at first we felt the choir was a bit too small. On one of our visits, Titus [Maderlechner, our *tonmeister*] and I set up eight test speakers in one location and there they sounded a bit dead. So we moved them up into the choir and the sound there was fantastic. But then visually we wanted it to not compete with the church, to fit in with the church. Like the last installation by Giorgio Andreotta Calò with the red windows, that's not competing, it's using the

church completely but it's fully engaging it on its own kind of enormity. We were more like, let's go with simplicity, keep it small, and try to be almost invisible, and use the sound to engage and envision the church. So, the sound is big, hopefully, and the piece, visually, is not. The one visual aspect that sticks out is the Mellotron itself, with its sort of retro 1960s vibe, but this contrast with the church and it's layers of history felt right to us.
JC: And on one trip to the Oude Kerk, Matteo [Imbruno, organist] played a couple of different organs for me and we thought: Wouldn't it be cool if the visitors had their own organ to play?
JG: You leave meaning up to the visitor. The visitor is in the driving seat of the installation.
JC: I think it relates to a lot of the other work in that

JG: With a large part of what one experiences, the brain fills in the gaps. Sometimes the segments aren't connected, and you have to fill in the images yourself.
GM: That's right. And then we have good viewers and bad viewers. The good viewers are able to do that. And the bad viewers maybe not.

JG: Altogether, the work contains an algorithm that is very difficult to grasp, because you never know how people are going to behave.
GM: Exactly. I guess we mainly program it for ourselves and then the way people approach it is the way they approach it, but it's interesting because for them it's also about discovery. There's this whole testing and listening. It's hard for us to know how the audience will react because we know it so well, but it's nice to see. Like when Jacob [Lekkerkerker,



photo: Maarten Nauw

way, for instance a work that I did in 1990 called *Whispering Room*. It was 16 different speakers and out of each speaker came a woman's voice. There were three female voices telling a simple story about a woman leaving her house and walking down the street, but all from different points of view. It was very Alain Robbe Grillet or French New Wave. So that was all about the viewer choosing which way they went to create a story. The idea is continued in a lot of our works, like *Forty Part Motet*. How people choose to hear the composition, even the walks, even though we direct them, it's up to the viewer to really do it...
GM: And to make sense of them. This is the most complicated of any of the interactive works because there are 72 keys with different sounds in each key. Viewers can create so many different juxtapositions and mixes. I think in *To Touch* there were nine sensors, and *Whispering Room* had 16 speakers, so it's a real continuation of different works that we have done in the past.
JC: It's like we're trying to create another forest piece, except that the viewer decides what happens. The Forest is the Oude Kerk.

organist and the Oude Kerk's curator of music] came by to play for 15 minutes, but when we came back an hour and a half later he was still there, intensely engrossed.

JG: More than 72 different sounds come together in one Mellotron. How did you select those sounds or where did they come from?
JC: We had previously recorded some surround sound for other pieces, and we set up a surround matrix in our studio and started listening to these recordings. We kept thinking about how it would resonate in the church, or how it would sound in the church. The script then developed out of listening and imagining sounds in the church. I was thinking about climate change and rain and a lot of different countries that are experiencing a lot of different changes with weather and we were having a lot of rain, and it made me think of what would happen if the rain didn't stop in Amsterdam. It would be a disaster, right? We are metres below sea level here. It was also inspired by a few books that I read years ago, *Ice*, by Anna Kavan, a story from multiple viewpoints where ice had taken over the world and another early-twentieth-century book that I don't

remember the name of and never found again, written about the rain not stopping and London flooding. Of course there's also the classical biblical story of Noah and the ark. I started to think about the canals of Amsterdam and how the water would overflow in the canals. So, we were writing according to the sounds, but then the writing gave us ideas for sounds, too.
GM: The script was much more detailed about this whole story and we pared it down so that it would be subtler and more open to interpretation. You can still read a dystopian futuristic narrative into it. But we wanted it to be – it could be the past, it could be the future, it could be now, like a scene of a refugee boat that's going to sink. It flows through all those, because the church has been far in the past and it will go far into the future, the church is the constant that will always be there, so we wanted to work with

online. Then we bring this stuff to each other and discuss where the project will go next, how we can push it, what will work better...
JC: In the studio, it takes quite a while to get the sounds into the program. So, every few days I would go into the studio where George was working and he would show me what he'd put in. Some of the stuff wasn't working – we were trying different types of music and different things. So, George was managing most of the project. But then if there would be a next step, I would come in and we would talk about it. In that way, it's great to have a fresh pair of eyes, well, actually ears.

JG: Your work often relies on technology, and I do not mean the brand new digital techniques that are recently developed, but often the more old-school stuff. You are not afraid to use outdated or failed techniques.
GM: With the surround sound, we're using an old technique, it's called Ambisonic. It was invented by an English mathematician, Michael Gerzon, in the 1970s. It failed commercially, but what it allows you to do is capture a full soundscape with one microphone and then decode that recording to any number of speakers. What we really like about it, is that it includes height information, so you're not just capturing a circle of sound but a sphere of sound, so you're really getting a full three-dimensional soundscape. We started using this in about 2002 for our work called *Berlin Files*. We love Ambisonics because the sounds become so immersive. That was really important to us: that this piece was all surround sound. When you press a key, you're taken to that environment. And some of it was recorded in the church, some of it elsewhere, but the idea is that you really get this sense of reality around you and you become immersed in that.

JG: You created almost a perfect balance between abstraction, filmic tactility and narrative. Nonetheless, the viewer is in the driver's seat and the work only exists when the viewer/visitor is playing. But is the viewer playing the Mellotron or the instrument of troubled dreams?
GM: Well, it's not a Mellotron anymore, really. The piece exists only when someone is playing. I mean, we loved the idea conceptually of the Mellotron because of the history of where it came from. A Mellotron was a somewhat failed, but also somewhat successful piece of musical equipment from the 1960s, invented by an American named Chamberlain and then taken to the UK and improved and produced in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s. It's a tape machine, where each note has a physical tape player inside so the thing would weight about 500 kilograms. You pressed a key and they would have recorded the G note of a cello, say, and you'd get the G note, and you could move up and get the next note, which had also been recorded.

I was always fascinated by this machine because I love old analogue stuff and I love mechanical stuff and anybody who had the crazy idea to create this kind of machine seems interesting. Visually, it's also a very interesting device. So we built a replica in our studio. In the 1960s the BBC had two Mellotrons made specifically for them and they used them for sound effects. The whole keyboard was set up with gunshots, doors opening, footsteps, car sounds, etcetera. So it was perfect for radio plays. So anyway, I was fascinated by this machine. And by the idea that we could build our own Mellotron, but we'd make it a surround sound device. It would be like the BBC sound effects machines, but it would be more like a reality-creating machine. You press a button and you have the whole sound of the world where the microphone recorded the sound. Then you can overlap different places: we have sound recordings from Kathmandu, you can overlap Kathmandu with the west coast of Canada, Berlin or the Netherlands. And this all relates to how we perceived the church as a sort of time machine.

JG: The sculptural quality of the work emerges when you listen to the sounds. It is a strong call to your imagination. Images occur in your head. Is that an individual kind of way of listening or do you see it as a collective one as well?
GM: Because each person can play the piece, it will be interesting to see whether people will be comfortable performing in front of an audience. I think the experience is probably more powerful if you are an individual sitting alone in a dark church at night, playing the piece by yourself, which you will be able to do. I played it in my studio at home, alone in the dark and it's just so perfect, the sounds change in the dark. They become more visual and in some ways more physical. Darkness adds a spooky aspect as well but even Titus says that we hear differently as the light changes.

JG: In the installation, we shift between fact and fiction, and reality, projections of fantasy, personal desires, and these are of course elements that were also present in former installations. What would you like the visitors to take home? Because they are perceiving or listening to the work, or playing the installation themselves. Do you have any idea of what they leave with?
JC: Well, I've been thinking a lot about how when people go to symphony halls and they listen to music, what do they take home with them? And it's the same kind of thing when they go to anything that has to do with culture or art. They go or come into this church and then they see our piece, they won't be expecting that. Hopefully what they will take home is a bit of magic.
GM: To me it's like when you get that tingle up and down your spine when you're doing something; that's what's important. When you're playing certain keys together and you get something completely unexpected, you can have an inexplicable emotional response. It's happened to me with this work and hopefully it will happen for the viewers. I'm always hoping for a piece to achieve this, to reach people on a level that has nothing to do with our intellect. Also, if they just thinks it's a cool, fun piece that intrigues them on some level, I'm okay with that, too.

that idea. The church as a sort of time machine. A lot of our work always does that: shifting realities between past, present and future. I can't remember when we realized that the piece needed to have a narrative or story, but we were pretty happy when we did the first recordings of the voice. It gives you a little bit more of an emotional buzz. Janet's voice is super special.

JG: It was the love for film that brought the two of you together when studying at the University of Alberta in Edmonton (Canada). That was the early 1980s. You've been creating works together for quite some time now. How do you work together as a team?
GM: We work differently on every piece. We do almost always start with a lot of discussions about what the piece will be. There are usually a lot of 'what if?' questions in that discussion. Sometimes we just go off separately and start working on what we're interested in doing for a project. Janet practically wrote a novel for this one and I started working on the programming to see if what we imagined could actually be done. I spent a lot of time on the Internet researching and getting lots of help from nerds

and further

come closer

***Come Closer* brings you even closer to the work of Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, and closer to each other. During four intimate evenings, visitors experience different modes of active listening involving dance, performance and deep listening practices. *Come Closer* is developed in relation to the work of Cardiff & Miller and is curated by Radna Rumping.**

come closer: jo kali

Friday 18 January 2019, 6–7 pm
Jo Kali is a musicologist and writer. Visitors will be guided into a heightened state of sonic awareness during a Deep Listening workshop. The practice of Deep Listening, developed by composer Pauline Oliveros (1932-2016) navigates our use of consciousness and our ability to train and develop our senses, between the involuntary nature of hearing and the voluntary, selective nature of listening. Both beginners and more experienced ears are welcome to join the interactive workshop.

come closer: ivar cheng

Friday 22 February 2019, 6–7 pm
Artist Ivan Cheng focuses within his practice on misunderstanding, abrasion and desire in the act of reading, often gesturing towards systems of power and reproduction. He will make a new performance in collaboration with Kristoffer Zeiner, departing from the *Instrument of Troubled Dreams* as a device that disorients spectrum, site and chronology.

come closer: matthew day

Friday 15 March 2019, 6–7 pm
Choreographer Matthew Day presents *Figures for Landscapes*, a work for an ensemble of dancers that migrates across different sites with distinctive histories and codes. The body makes field recordings, transmits imprints of one space to another by movement. After a first edition in the Rose Garden of the Vondelpark in 2018, now *Figures for Landscapes* makes contact with the sound work of Cardiff & Miller in the historical space of the Oude Kerk.

come closer: compilation

Friday 12 April 2019, 6–7 pm
A compilation of previous research with the visitor in the leading role.

silence

Musicians have been performing concerts at the Oude Kerk for 400 years, usually music in 'self-contained units': the hermetical counterpoints of Sweelinck's choral music, the walls of organ sound of prestigious Bach pieces. Cardiff & Miller's *The Instrument of Troubled Dreams* opens up the way people perform and listen to music, creates new spaces and balances sounds with silences. The Silence concerts performed during the exhibition 'The Instrument of Troubled Dreams' are in keeping with this approach. Two small and intimate concerts will be performed in the choir of the church and, as a counterpoint, two big concerts will spaciouly resonate in the entire church space.

7 December and 5 April

The first and last concerts in December and April will be performed in the choir of the church and revolve directly around 'The Instrument of Troubled Dreams'. They will be intimate concerts; a meeting between musicians from the Dutch music world and the aesthetics of Cardiff & Miller.

1 February and 1 March

The concerts in February and March will resound throughout the church as the world of the mellotron is extrapolated spatially; including confrontations, fragments, contrasts, numerous voices, strings and organ sounds. Listeners create their own composition by either moving through the church or choosing a fixed place.

The *Silence* concerts take place on the first Friday of every month at 8 a.m., they are curated by Jacob Lekkerkerker.

colophon

The Instrument of Troubled Dreams is a project by the artists Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, curated by Jacqueline Grandjean, and initiated by Oude Kerk.

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All recording, editing and mixing by Cardiff & Miller unless otherwise stated. Additional mixing by Titus Maderlechner. Mellotron Replica built by Maryke Simmonds; paint by Cody Clyborn. Production Management by Zev Teifenbach. Additional thanks to: Bodo Groen, Pirka Balvers, Roel Gremmer. Special thanks to: graphic designer Chantal Hendriksen, curator music Jacob Lekkerkerker, photographer Gert Jan van Rooij and Maarten Nauw, communication officer Laurence Ostyn, organist Matteo Imbruno, project leader Richard Pelgrim, Finbar van Wijk and Sjoerd Tim and their team for making *The Instrument of Troubled Dreams* possible.

Instrument of Troubled Dreams, 2018
by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller.

credits:

'Theme for Troubled Dreams'
composed by Til Ritter, recorded and edited by
Titus Maderlechner
(Keys 1-7)

'Wind Gusts, Wind Shrieks, Deep Low Wind',
recorded by Alan Splet
(Keys 9, 10, 12)

'Guitar Chimes'
composed and performed by George Bures Miller
(Key 18)

'String Quartet #1',
composed by Da Jeong Choi, recorded and
edited by Titus Maderlechner
(Keys 21 and 45)

'Tango delle Rose', 1927,
composed by Bottero-Schreier, performed by
Hélène Cals,
(Key 29)

'Entrance of the Gladiators', 1897,
composed by Julius Fučík
(Key 35)

'Psalm 138', 1604,
composed by Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck,
Performed by Matthew Baker, Kaspar Kröner,
João Moreira and Cressida Sharp.
(Key 39)

'Moody Guitar',
composed and performed by Orion Miller
(Key 43)

'Seagulls SFX',
recorded by John Leonard
(Key 48)

'Traditional Tibetan Prayer',
performed by the Nuns from Thrangu Tara Abbey,
Kathmandu, Nepal
(Key 49)

'Improvisation on the Vater-Müller Organ',
composed and performed by Jacob Lekkerkerker
(Key 60)

'Lancaster Bomber SFX',
recorded by John Leonard
(Key 61)

'Improvisation on the Transept Organ',
composed and performed by Matteo Imbruno
(Key 62)

'Bowed Metal 1 and 2',
composed and performed by George Bures Miller
(Keys 63 and 65)

'Steam Engine SFX',
recorded by John Leonard
(Key 66)

'Moody Synth 1 and 2',
composed and performed by George Bures Miller
(Keys 68 and 69)

'Scary Theme for Troubled Dreams',
composed by Til Ritter, recorded and edited by
Titus Maderlechner
(Keys 70, 71, 72)

Talking Vocal Tracks by Janet Cardiff