

John Luther Adams

Earth and the Great Weather

Nunavlusilaqpauvlu

Nan Kak Nats'aa Gweedhaa

Earth and the Great Weather

...a journey through the physical, cultural and spiritual landscapes of the Arctic, in music, language, and sound....

Music and text by John Luther Adams

Inupiaq translations by James Nageak and Doreen Simmonds Gwich'in translations by Adeline Peter Raboff and Lincoln Tritt.

The Physical and Cultural Geography of Earth and the Great Weather

The landscape from which *Earth and the Great Weather* is drawn is the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Located in the extreme northeastern corner of Alaska, the Arctic Refuge encompasses one of the last great wilderness regions of North America. It also embraces the homelands of both the Gwich'in Indians and the Inupiat Eskimos.

The Inupiat are Eskimo (Inuit) people, related to the Yup'ik of western Alaska and other Inuit peoples in Siberia, Greenland and the Canadian Arctic. The Inupiat live on Alaska's Arctic coast, from the Canadian border west to the Seward Peninsula and south into the Brooks Range. On the north slope, the traditional Inupiat culture and economy center on hunting and whaling on the Arctic Ocean.

The Gwich'in (Kutchin) are the northernmost Indian people in North America. Their homeland is the boreal forest of the northern interior and the south slope of the Brooks Range. Their economy is still largely based on subsistence hunting, fishing and gathering. The Gwich'in are Athabascan people. In language and culture, they are more closely related to the Apache and other tribes of the lower 48 than to their Inupiat neighbors.

The Music of John Luther Adams

By Howard Klein

Three elements contribute to an understanding of the music of John Luther Adams: his beginnings as a percussionist, his identification with a post-minimalist aesthetic and his commitment to the natural world.

As a teenage drummer rock drummer in the late Sixties, John Luther Adams idolized Frank Zappa, whose own interests included the music of Edgard Varese. Zappa thus led Adams to Varese and an investigation of the avant-garde, where he discovered among other things, the seminal movement in the 1930's and 1940's in America called by Henry Cowell "Drums along the Pacific." The movement included the classic percussion works of Cowell, Lou Harrison, John Cage, William Russell, and others.

The extended drum pieces in *Earth and the Great Weather* are, in a sense, Adams' homage to that earlier period in American percussion music and a return to his own roots as a drummer. Of these quartets, Adams says: "This is the first time I've let go and enjoyed the sheer physical power and exhilaration of drumming on this scale." The pieces contain no improvisation, but are rigorously scored, using extensive metric modulations and "layers of different rhythmic velocities, which amount to several superimposed tempos."

Of the older composers, James Tenney and the late Morton Feldman have been the most influential. Adams studied with Tenney at the California Institute of the Arts and admired Feldman's music for many years before spending several memorable days with Feldman, two years before his death. Despite some similarities, Adams sees Tenney and Feldman as opposites: "Feldman was about atmosphere, sensuality and tragedy," a "poetic extremist" as Cage called him. "Tenney is fundamentally an Apollonian in extremis, stripping music down to its basic sonic and perceptual elements and creating entire works from a single compelling sounding image."

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The convergence of sound and poetry in *Earth and the Great Weather* provides for Adams a combination of the intellectually rigorous construction of Tenney and the sensuality of Feldman. Also audible is Adam's admiration of Robert Ashley, whose pared down, richly layered operas are "full of language but not about language".

As a young man, Adams left graduate school discouraged with and alienated from both the academic and the urban worlds, needing to "find his spiritual home." He found that home at 21, when he settled in Alaska, where he has lived and worked since 1974.

Although his life and work are rooted in the natural world, on the subject of "nature music" Adams is both at home and a little uncomfortable. The composer, who says that "the 'Pastoral' is not Beethoven's greatest symphony", considers it somewhat ironic that he himself now concentrates on evoking the Alaskan north in music. He attempts to reconcile this by following Cage's aspiration "to imitate nature in her manner of operation". For Adams, this involves a move away from imitative tone painting toward the hidden dimensions of landscape and nature.

Composer's Notes

"They define space more by sound than sight. Where we might say, 'Let's see what we can hear,' they would say, 'Let's hear what we can see.'"

--Edmund Carpenter, *Eskimo Realities*

My music has always been profoundly influenced by the natural world and a strong sense of place. In my recent work, I have begun to explore a territory I call "sonic geography"—a region that exists somewhere between place and culture, between human imagination and the world around us. I hope to move beyond landscape painting in sound toward a music which, in its own way, is landscape—a music which creates its own inherently sonic presence and sense of place.

Several years ago, I was commissioned to produce a work for New American Radio. In the Arctic I recorded natural sounds as well as the music of the wind on the strings of a small Aeolian harp. With those recordings, I composed and produced a half-hour piece for radio, which also incorporated language and drum rhythms of the Inupiat Eskimo people of Alaska's arctic coast.

From that beginning, *Earth and the Great Weather* has grown to its present form, crossing the arctic divide to encompass the boreal forest of the northern interior—the physical, cultural and spiritual geography of the Gwich'in Athabascan people.

Expanding on my work with the wind harp, the musical ground of *Earth and the Great Weather* is a cycle of pieces for strings and digital delay, collectively titled *Aeolian Dreams*. This music inhabits a non-tempered harmonic world, based on the first eight odd-numbered harmonics of a low-D on the doublebass. All the sounds are produced either from retuned open strings, or natural harmonics up to the 105th harmonic (the seventh of the fifteenth).

The score makes extraordinary demands on the musicians, including special performance techniques and notation, as well as minute nuances of intonation. Fifteen out of sixteen open strings must be very precisely retuned, and simply tuning the ensemble can take an hour or more.

Aeolian Dreams is my most extended work to date in just intonation. In this field, the works of Lou Harrison, Harry Partch, La Monte Young and others have been sources of inspiration. The music of James Tenney has been a particularly important model. The second *Aeolian Dream* (heard in *Pointed Mountains Scattered All Around*) is an homage to Tenney, based on the opening movement of his *Glissade*.

Rising like the mountain ranges above the Aeolian plains of Earth and the Great Weather are three large pieces for four drummers. These quartets are constructed of asymmetrical rhythmic cells abstracted from traditional Inupiat and Gwich'in dance music, which I have admired for many years.

The principle text is a set of eight Arctic Litanies, composed of the names of places, plants, weather and the seasons of the Arctic. Gwich'in and Inupiat names speak vividly with deep knowledge and intimate experience, evoking an authentic poetry of place. In the last two litanies, Latin is included (the scientific binomials for plants and animals), primarily for its contrasting color and rhythmic texture.

The contributions of James Nageak, Lincoln Tritt, Adeline Raboff, and Doreen Simmonds have been immeasurable. Quietly and patiently, in countless details, they have gently corrected and instructed me in the rich nuances of their Native languages and cultures.

Indigenous peoples have long understood the extraordinary powers of certain landscapes. For those of us who have lost or forgotten our intimate connections with such places, the Arctic is a vast and enduring geography of hope. Somewhere out in that far country of imagination and desire lie the foundations of my own faith.

Earth and the Great Weather is dedicated, with love, to my wife, Cynthia, in celebration of the place where we were married.

...until our ashes blow together across the tundra...

John Luther Adams

A Note on Index Marks and Listening Levels:

The music on this CD is continuous. However, index marks have been placed at the beginning of each section of the work. For radio play of individual selections, manual fade-ins and fade-outs may be desirable.

The dynamic range of Earth and the Great Weather is exceptionally wide. To set a level for listening to the entire CD, it may be useful to listen to the opening of the two loudest sections: Deep and Distant Thunder (index mark 6) or Drums of Fire, Drums of Stone (index mark 9).

The great sea has set me adrift.
It moves me like a week in a great river.

Earth and the Great Weather move me, have carried me away and move my inward parts with joy.

-Uvavnuk,
an Iglulik Eskimo shaman

Tagiuqpaum sagvagaanja.
Arjalatkaanja ivigaatun
Sagvaqsiqsuatun kuukpagmi.

Nunavle silaqpauvlu anjalatkannrjra,
Aullatigaanrja
Aulayyaigatt iluga,
Quviatchaktitkaat.

Translation by James Mumigaluk Nageak

Selected Discography

A Northern Suite. Opus One 88.

Dream in White on White. New Albion NAO61

The Far Country of Sleep. New Albion NAO61

Forest Without Leaves. Owl Recording Owl-32
Night Peace. New Albion NAO61, Opus One 88
Songbirdsongs. Opus One 66.

Selected Bibliography

Essay: Resonance of Place. The North American Review,
January-February 1994.

These and other works by John Luther Adams are available from:
Taiga Music (BMI), P.O. Box 81382, Fairbanks, AK 99708
Deep Listening Catalogue, 156 Hunter Street, Kingston, NY 12401

John Luther Adams studied composition with James Tenney and Leonard Stein at the California Institute of the Arts, where his other teachers included Harold Budd, Morton Subotnick, and Mel Powell. He has received numerous commissions, awards and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, Meet the Composer, the Lila Wallace Arts Partners Program, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts, among others. Recently, he was named by Meet the Composer to a three-year position (1994-97) as composer in residence with the Anchorage Symphony, the Anchorage Opera and the Alaska Public Radio Network.

For seven years, Adams served as timpanist and principal percussionist with the Fairbanks Symphony and the Arctic Chamber Orchestra. He taught music and was composer in residence at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. He was also music director for public radio station KUAC-FM.

An active environmentalist, Adams worked in the late Seventies and early Eighties as executive director of the Northern Alaska Environmental Center. He has traveled throughout the far north, recording natural sounds for his Alaska Soundscape Project.

Robert Black has worked with and commissioned over 35 of today's leading composers. He regularly tours North America and Europe as a soloist, and with percussionist Amy Knoles, as the duo "BassoBongo." In addition, he performs with a wide variety of ensembles and teaches at the University of Connecticut. Black has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Canada Council, the New England Foundation for the Arts, and the Fund for U.S. Artists. He has recorded for CRI, Neuma, Opus One, Folkways, Artifact, and Magnetic Music.

Michael Finckel has performed with numerous contemporary music ensembles, including the American Composers Orchestra, the Group for Contemporary Music, the New York New Music Ensemble, Steve Reich and Musicians, and Essential Music. Since 1984, he has been principal cellist of the Bethlehem Bach Festival Orchestra, and has recently been appointed musical director of the Sage City Symphony in Bennington, Vermont. He has recorded for CRI, Opus One, Vox/Candide, Vanguard, and ECM/Warner Brothers.

Amy Knoles tours globally with a program of solo computer-assisted MIDI percussion and live electronics. Knoles performs regularly with the Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group, the Sante Fe Chamber Music Festival, and is a founding member of the California E.A.R. Unit. She has performed at many international festivals and has recorded for New Albion, Nonesuch, CBS, RCA, Relativity, New World, and Crystal Records.

Ron Lawrence is a freelance violist who performs regularly with the Sirius Quartet, the Chamber Orchestra of St. Luke's. Newband, and the Soldier Electric String Quartet. He has composed music for Birlbirloque Dance Theatre, is a teacher of the Alexander Technique, and performs as a soloist and chamber musician worldwide.

Robin Lorentz, violinist of the California E.A.R. Unit, maintains a busy schedule of national and international touring and recording. She performs regularly with the Ensemble of Sante Fe and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and records in a variety of styles, including rock, jazz, bluegrass, swing, and Irish, for Warner Brothers, Lorimar, and Paramount Studios.

James Mumigana Nageak is an Inupiat Eskimo linguist, educator, storyteller, singer, and dancer, and instructor of his native language at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Sociology from UAF and a Masters of Divinity degree from the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary. Nageak has served as an official of the

North Slope Borough Office of History, Language and Culture and has taught Inupiaq and Arctic survival at Barrow High School.

Adeline Peter Raboff learned the ways of her Native language and culture from her mother, Katherine Peter, one of the most respected Gwich'in elders. Raboff has worked as a translator at the Alaska Native Languages Center. She recently completed graduate studies in history at the University of Oklahoma.

Doreen Simmonds was born and raised in Barrow, Alaska. She studied at Sheldon Jackson College. Ms. Simmonds assisted in the development of a dictionary of her native Inupiaq language, published by the Alaska Native Language Center.

Lincoln Tritt is a Gwich'in Athabascan writer and educator from Artic Village, Alaska. His education came from both traditional Gwich'in and modern Western cultures, with experience in many different fields and studies. Currently, Lincoln Tritt is administrator for the Village of Venetie.

John Luther Adams and Musicians
Robin Lorentz violin and percussion
Ron Lawrence viola
Michael Finckel cello and conductor
Robert Black doublebass and percussion
Amy Knowles percussion
John Luther Adams conductor and percussion

Featuring
Inupiat Eskimo performers
James Nageak and Doreen Simmonds

Gwich'in Indian performers
Lincoln Tritt and Adeline Peter Raboff

With
Dave Hunsaker Latin voice

Producer: John Luther Adams
Recording, sound design, and production assistance: Jay Cloidt
Engineering assistance: John Kristopeit
Editing assistance: David Preis
Additional sound design: Jeff Rona
Digital mastering: Paul Zinman, SoundByte Productions, Inc., NYC
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John Luther Adams
Earth and the Great Weather

The great sea has set me adrift
It moves me like a weed
In a great river

Earth and the Great Weather move me,
Have carried me away
and move my inward parts with joy.

---Uvavnuk
an Iglulik Eskimo shaman

1. The Place Where You Go to Listen 8:05
2. Drums of Winter 6:51
3. Pointed Mountains Scattered All Around 7:25
4. The Circle of Suns and Moons 8:00
5. The Circle of Winds 7:04
6. Deep and Distant Thunder 13:05
7. River With No Willows 7:08
8. One That Stays All Winter 8:34
9. Drums of Fire, Durms of Stone 7:25
10. Where the Waves Splash, Hitting Again and Again 2:10

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