

Labyrinth: Music For Gongs

(for Andrea Centazzo)

Gongs have fascinated me for almost as long as I can remember. Not only the sound, but also the look, as the circular shape is symbolic of so many things. It is an archetype. The look of the different colors and hammering on the face are also intriguing. And then there is the spirit of the maker, as each gong is hand made. The spirit of those who forged and beat the gong into shape is imparted into the metal and sound.

Each gong has its own personality/spirit and responds differently. They are unique and need to be respected and played according to their own wishes. Even within the same types of gongs, their personalities can vary greatly. One gong may be delicate sounding, while the next may be brash. One may need a gentle coaxing to yield its sound up, while another may need to be struck forcefully to speak its full voice.

I have been collecting gongs for 30 years and the music here has been composed with these particular gongs in mind. They are unique, and their personalities define the music itself. The music here was also shaped by external events. I had been working on parts of it for over a year and kept wondering if I had chosen the right musical direction to pursue. Then in the fall of 2002, I had opportunity to hear and meet the legendary Italian drummer/composer Andrea Centazzo at the Percussive Arts Society International Convention (PASIC) in Columbus, Ohio. Upon entering the room he was performing in, I felt a sense of familiarity. Andrea's set up was very much like my own, with cymbal trees surrounding the drums and a large array of gongs behind. And when he played, I felt an instant connection, a kindred spirit. My mind was filled with «*sound pictures*» that matched the music I was working on. It was both inspiring and confirming.

This music, inspired by Andrea Centazzo, is dedicated to the gongs we both love so much. ~ **Michael Bettine**

Recorded and mixed at JP Productions by Joel Bohlen and Paul Luy, February 26, 2003. All titles composed, arranged and performed by, and © 2003 Michael Bettine.

Produced and edited by Michael Bettine for Intuitive Arts Media (IAM)

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Recording Notes

The Gong is an engine of power and transformation. It is a doorway to the self and other dimensions. The oldest known examples are over 5000 years old. Any culture that reached a bronze age, created Gongs.

The Gong is both earthy and mystical. The sound is that of the universal *OM* and its resonance stimulates and opens the Chakras, allowing us to reach a deeper meditative state, and heal on a cellular level. It is a *feeling tone* because it can be felt in the entire body, as well as being heard.

Ritual-Ascension is about space and pulse. While there is no regular rhythm played, the resulting reverberation of the Gong vibrates at its own frequency, producing a steady, meditative pulse.

Medicine Wheel: Water & Earth represent the terrestrial aspects of the four corners of the medicine wheel. Both are short rhythmic cycles played upon the small gongs. Each phrase repeats 8 times, and this 16 bar pattern repeats. The effect is circular, like a wheel turning.

Mandala represents another sort of wheel. Here, there is both lateral (represented by the 2-note chords played upon the small bossed gongs) and circular (from an 8-note/5-tone phrase that is played on 2 distinct tone ranges) motion.

Vesica Piscis is played on the Philippine *Kulintang*, a set of 8 pentatonic bossed Gongs. The Vesica Piscis is the all-knowing eye that sees through everything.

Water Wheel is a slow moving piece that again presents circular motion from a repeated 4-note bass drone played by the right hand on the larger bossed gongs, while the left hand plays a series of contrapuntal melodies on the smaller gongs.

Tangram is a short, repetitive cycle played on the overturned *Kulintang*, which produce a ringing, bell-like tone.

Showers Of Spectral Light is played by hand on a 13" Indonesian Bossed Gamelan Gong. By varying the hand technique and the part of the gong played on, a wide variety of harmonics are drawn out of it.

Ritual-Continuum is played upon a 32" Paiste Symphonic Gong. Using a large headed mallet, the gong is played in a spiraling motion from the center outwards, then back again, and repeated. The resultant wave of sound pulses and releases different harmonics, much the way the light pulses in the Aurora Borealis.

Labyrinth is a slow, open piece using the 32" Symphonic and the 24" Sound Creation Water gongs. They are played with large mallets in the direct center to produce a focused, bell-like tone.

What people are saying about LABYRINTH:

Labyrinth...consists of nine beautifully hypnotic tracks. From the opening majestic washes of "Ritual-Ascension" to the high-pitched melodies of "Medicine Wheel," the entire sound spectrum is covered...Sinking into Bettine's sound world is fascinating and inspiring.

- MODERN DRUMMER magazine, March 2004

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Addendum: Labyrinth, my second solo recording, was the culmination of many years of thought and experimentation. While I had been playing Gongs since the mid 1970s, it was only in 2000 that I decided to make the leap to playing solo and performing my own music. I owe a debt of thanks to various drummer friends who both pointed the way, and encouraged me to follow my aspirations, especially Fredy Studer, Terry Bozzio, and Alex Cline.

For **Labyrinth**, the challenge was to be able to sustain a complete musical vision over the course of an album with just the Gongs. Judging by the positive reception it has received over the years, I was successful. While it's been over 10 years, and many performances and recordings since **Labyrinth**, this album holds a special place for me, as it was the true beginning of a new direction in my musical evolution. I still play many of these compositions today, which is a testament to their enduring quality.

~ Michael Bettine

November 2013



Recording Showers of Spectral Light



Well laid plans



Gongs in waiting at LABYRINTH session