

encore



Philip Miller is a composer and sound artist from South Africa who works in many different media from live performance to film, video and sound installations. His most recent music recent projects with the artist William Kentridge include *Five Themes* at the Tate Modern, London; the lecture-opera production: *Refuse the Hour*, which is currently on tour in theatres across Europe; as well as the multimedia installation *The Refusal of Time* at documenta and at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Name three artworks that you love and why.

West Side Story: Leonard Bernstein/ Sondheim – My father used to play the record of this Broadway musical to me as a child. Loved the emotion in the music. *Horton the Elephant* by Dr Seuss – understood that good things can come out of difficult situations. A painting by my mother of a woman's face who modelled at Michaelis School of Art in the 1970s.

Name one artist you would love to meet.

Yo Yo Ma.

What are you reading at the moment?

Little Failure: A Memoir by Gary Shteyngart.

What is in your car's CD player?

Krzysztof Penderecki's *Sextet for Clarinet, Horn, String Trio and Piano*

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

To say 'yes' to everything.

How have the arts industries in South Africa changed over the last ten years?

There is now an over-reliance on corporate funding with meagre support from government. Everything has to be commercial or politically correct to have sponsorship.

Name one thing you think would improve the arts and culture industry in South Africa.

Teaching children at an early age about the wonders and joy in making art, music, writing etc. Making it a priority from preschool onwards.

What is your most treasured possession?

A sense of humour.

What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?

Running out of black chocolate late at night.

What is it that makes you happy?

Walking my dogs Ziggy and Lola on the beach.

Describe a defining moment in your life.

Losing a parent at a young age.

What projects will you be busy with during 2014 and into 2015?

Touring the new cineconcert *Paper Music* with William Kentridge, featuring the singers Ann Masina and Joanna Dudley.

Name one goal you would like to achieve in the next twelve months.

Raising funding for my opera *Extracts from the Underground*.



Scenes from *The Refusal of Time* installation. Photographs by Henrik Stromberg

The Refusal of Time

The Refusal of Time, a 30 minute, five-channel video installation created by William Kentridge, Peter Galison, Philip Miller, Gavan Eckhart and Catherine Meyburgh, has finally made its way to Johannesburg. *Classicfeel* spoke to composer Philip Miller about some of the ideas and inspiration behind the work's music.



A few years ago, William Kentridge teamed up with Professor Peter Galison – a science historian at Harvard – to collaborate on a work exploring ‘science, and time, questions around time, the philosophy of time – not just the physics or the actual scientific element to it, but also looking at time from different perspectives; historical, philosophical – and then find a way of expressing something in terms of visuals and music,’ explains Philip Miller, composer of the music and soundscape for the resulting *The Refusal of Time*.

The Refusal of Time is not a case of art illustrating science; as Kentridge says, it does not ‘convey some deep theory of time.’ Rather, ‘all these other things, which were not about science, but... about human emotions or states of being, very quickly came from the science outwards.’ Time, clocks, machines; the pulse of the telegraph, Morse code; a universe pitted with black holes traversed by light travelling at a constant speed of 186 000 miles per second: all are a

fecund source of metaphors. For Miller, the subject was fascinating; ‘the question of time, and time elapsing; and what it means to be making something that is completely dependent on time in the listening, and time in the making, are all integral elements to the composer,’ he notes.

Miller works extensively through collaboration, beginning with an idea – a piece of text, an image, a sound heard in the street – which he workshops alongside ‘a group of very talented musicians,’ in this case including singers Ann Masina, Bham Ntabeni, Thato Motlhalwa, Mandie de Villiers-Schutte, and Joanne Dudley, a Berlin-based performer of the ‘most extraordinary voice acrobatics, from a car alarm to a frog croaking,’ says Miller; as well as musicians Adam Howard, Dan Selsick, Thobeka Thukane, Waldo Alexander, Tiale Makhene, and Robert Ndimma and the Ntuba Brothers Choir. ‘I’ve lost count of how many workshops we had,’ says Miller, recalling that some of these were ‘very intense’.

Throughout the process, an eclectic variety of snippets – from the chiming of the clocks of 18th century Paris and



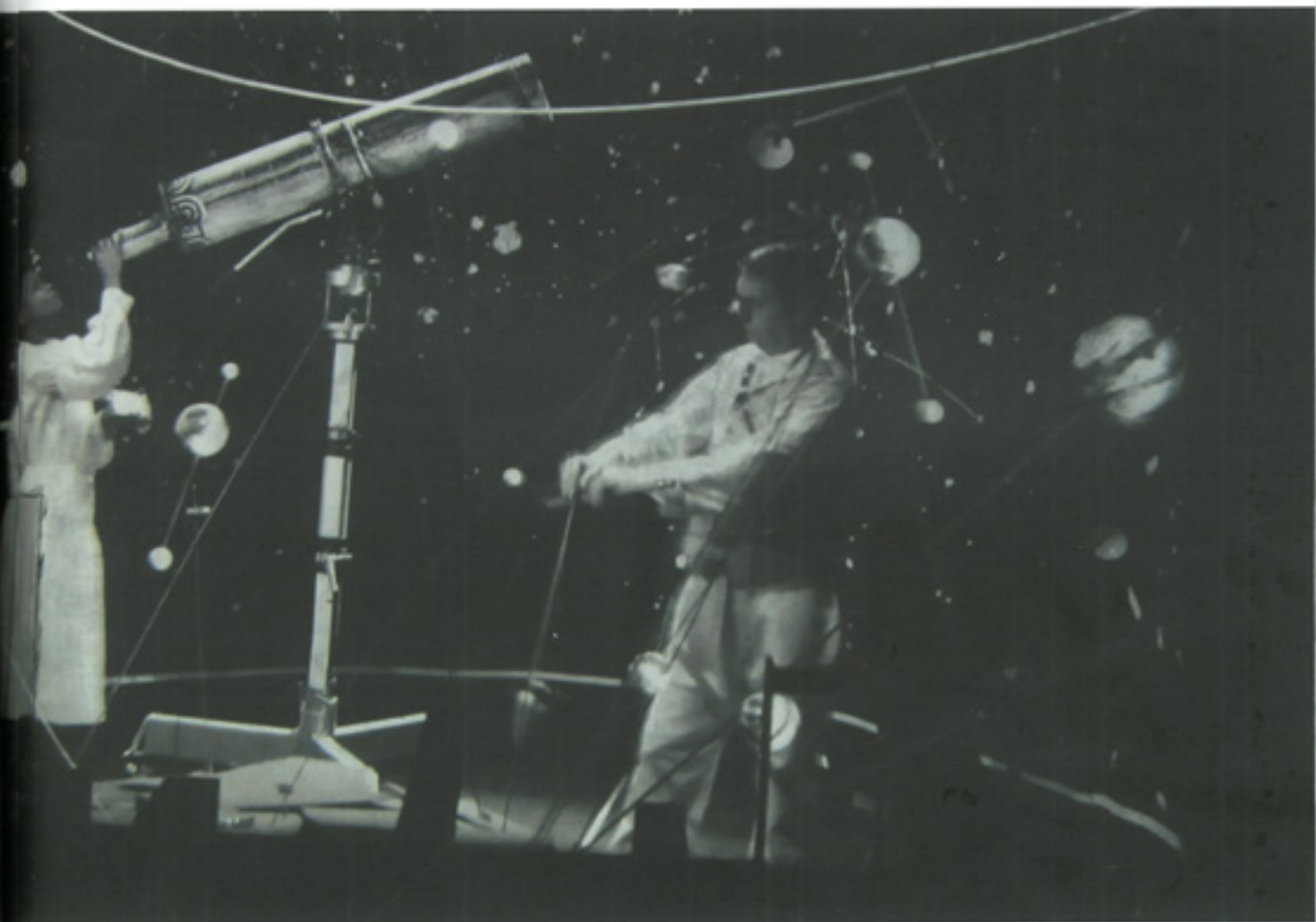
selections from Kentridge's lectures, to music by Berlioz and Shembe processional marches – were sampled, taken apart, juggled and juxtaposed by Miller, to form musical 'raw material' to be absorbed within a process of composition.

The pneumatic clocks of 19th century Paris formed one of the key inspirations for Miller's 'musical magpie' approach. Prior to the introduction of Greenwich time, the search was on for a universal language of time, and so, a network of pipes were installed beneath Paris, pumping air to pneumatic clocks in institutions and homes. 'The Mother clock was made with powerful bellows,' recounts Kentridge in Miller's soundscape: these bellows find expression everywhere: 'pulses of air' through accordion, flugelhorn, tuba, trombone and trumpet, as well as the installation's breathing machine: giant lungs, the rhythm section of the human body – itself a kind of clock, 'wound up at birth and... ticking until it winds

down at the end of its allotted years,' says Kentridge, in a video introduction to the work.

Another source of material came from the artist's interest in Berlioz's 'le spectre de la Rose' from *Les nuits d'été*, a song alluding to 'the most romantic notion of what time is all about... the ephemerality of time, the rose that fades, nothing lasts,' says Miller. '[Kentridge] asked me to look at that song; also because Berlioz, in the 19th century, was fascinated by technology. He already had this idea that he could be in one place conducting music, using, I think, the beginning of the telegraphic system....'

'I said, let's look at trying to sing the song backwards... [thereby invoking] this idea of reversing time, or trying to go back. How do you undo something? How do you unsay something, and unremember it? So it's all about memory of the past, as well.' Miller describes the song being sung on an



afternoon somewhere in a Parisian parlour; travelling out into the universe; being recorded using a nascent technology, and so making its way down to the colonies, to Africa. There it is reheard, resung; but this time, backwards, in an attempt to get back to the beginning: 'to call back, to annul, and to obliterate... To undo. To unsay. To unsave. To unremember. To unhappen,' intones Kentridge.

But instead, light travelling at an invariable pace transmits images through the universe, so that every event, every action – 'heroic or shameful, every secret deed' – is projected eternally through space, a part of what German scientist Felix Eberly called 'the Universal Archive of Images'. 'Unless [the image] gets swallowed by a black hole,' says Kentridge, 'which is a scientific postulate about the nature of the cosmos, but it's also a poetic description of what it is to have a grave and a burial.'

The idea of time as 'a march that takes us inexorably towards our death' led Miller, who has always been interested in musical processions, to include influences from the Shembe processional marches. Ultimately, *The Refusal of Time* suggests a resistance to the outcome of this march: 'Can we say no to death, can we stop it?' asks Miller. For all the music's humour, its carnivalesque playfulness, it conveys a kind of irresistible urgency – there is no whiling away the hours, no avoiding the onward stomp of time, however much one drags one's feet.

'It's a celebration of making, against the fact of our eventual disappearance,' says Kentridge of the installation. 'That's the refusal of time. We're not going to escape our journey to the black hole at the end, however fast we dance and run away. But that dance, and the run, is what it's all about.' CF