



John Oswald is one of Canada's most internationally renowned composers, and arguably its most infamous one. In 2017 he composed [Refuse](#) for super-sized sinfonietta, commissioned by Vancouver's Turning Point Ensemble, for a series of concerts entitled *Zappa Varèse Oswald*, and [Fee Fie Foe Fum](#), a new work for New York's Bang In A Can All-Stars, commissioned by Koerner Hall's *21C* Festival. His 1989 album *plunderphonic* is on the short list for the Polaris Heritage Prize. He is currently mixing a transcription for live performance by rock nonet of the 1994 album [Grayfolded](#) commissioned by and featuring the Grateful Dead.

His multifaceted sonic clock, [A Time To Hear For Here](#) (2007), was created to be a permanent environment at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. As a visual media artist and chronosopher he continues to create large-scale chronophotic light frescos, and is best known for the series [stillnessence](#) — a four-stage retrospective of this work was presented last April at Artscape Youngplace in Toronto. In recent years the Ensemble Modern Frankfurt premiered his [b9](#), a condensation of all nine Beethoven symphonies; with the bnotions technologists [Watchbook](#), an e-reader app he designed, was launched; he toured the former superpowers America and Russia with the Bill T Jones & Arnie Zane Dance Company, and opened a bar in Toronto, [Art and Drinks](#), which specialized in time-based images, conversations, and sounds, plus beverages. He also continues to regularly improvise [music](#) and [dance](#).

He is best known as the the creator of the music genre *Plunderphonics*, an appropriative form of recording studio creation which he began to develop in the late sixties. This has got him in trouble with, and also generated invitations from major record labels and musical icons. The video [Dab](#) (2016) which he produced and edited, is his most recent manifestation from that album.

Meanwhile, in the '90's he began, with several commissions from the Kronos Quartet, to compose scores, in what he calls the *Rascali Klepitoire*, for classical musicians and orchestras.

In 2004 he was appointed as a [Governor General Media Arts Laureate](#). He is an Ars Electronica Digital Musics and Untitled Arts Award winner, the second inductee into the CBC Alternative Walk of Fame, and he has also been nominated to third place in a list of the most internationally influential Canadian musicians, tied with Celine Dion.

He was recently a non-academic Fellow at the Marshall McLuhan Institute in Toronto.

2017 in progress

Very honoured to be part of the **Varèse Zappa Oswald** concerts presented by Owen Underhill and the Turning Point Ensemble, and to be given the opportunity to create a work that reflects on Zappa as a 13-year old discovering Edgard Varèse, and then, 13 years later, as a 13-year old, my discovering both Varèse and Zappa. 1966 was an ear-opening year for me, and I try to refer to as much of it as possible, including pop, spy and avant garde references in the sinfonietta **Refuse**.

2016

appointed as a **McLuhan Fellow** — relaunch, with the regular Monday evening *bull sessions* Marshall McLuhan conducted in the '60's & '70's. each session has 3 celebrity guests from diverse fields.

2 residency retreats: **Other Minds** for composers, at a ranch in California with accompanying concerts in San Francisco; and at the Civitella Ranieri Castle in Umbria, where in addition to creating, Oswald gave daily presentations of his work, for 6 weeks.

for the **21c** festival at Koerner Hall I was commissioned to create an entire concert to take place in absolute darkness. **pitchblackout** featured 50 musicians and singers surrounding and sitting among the sightless audience. quickly sold out, a 2nd show added.

create, with Scott Thomson, **Parcours parcivres**, an hour long performance perambulation for brass ensemble, site-specific to Parc la Fontaine in Montreal.

gave the keynote address at the TIES festival in Toronto and got to present a double bill with the ultimate maximalist composer Paul Dolden.

premiere 2 of my new videos and perform an A/V collaboration with filmmaker Peter Mettler at the IMAX Cinesphere for ArtSpin inFutures.

2015

Residency for the month of May at the **Angelica** festival in Bologna Italy for 5 concerts: a 2-part retrospective of his music-related video work; the premiere of **Transitive Axis** for conducted rock nonet (a precise transcription of the first disc of the plunderphonic work **Grayfolded**, commissioned by the Grateful Dead; orchestral works (conducted by Ilan Volkov) and performing with Alvin Curran, Shelley Hirsch, Eric Chénau, Chris Cutler and others.

later in the year return to Italy to mix a live recording of **Transitive Axis**

2nd ArtScape residency

create a new performance environment work with Emile Morin and Pascale Landry for Recto Verso at Meduse in Quebec.

Many Little Auditoria set for two dozen purely acoustic stages and simultaneous musical acts encircling a park in Toronto, as part of ArtSpin.

2014

Oswald does a 5-month residency at the new ArtScape Youngplace, where he creates an open studio for his visual work in progress, at one point visited by 15 Chinese mayors.

BBC commission for a new orchestral composition, **I'd Love to Turn** premiered by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra in Glasgow in May, & subsequently broadcast by the BBC.

Oswald directs the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and three dozen other musical entities in a multi-ringed musical circus, and parade to celebrate the opening of the park of Regent Park in Toronto.

the Marshall McLuhan institute invites Oswald to direct **Lines of Thought**, a radical new format-redesign of the traditional panel of speakers, at U of Toronto.

with choreographer Holly Small, Oswald presents 12 short works (including 3 he choreographs) for 5 dancers, string quartet, electroacoustics and video, on a Small Stage in Vancouver, co-presented by Music on Main.

U.S. based Important Records releases Oswald's mid-90's work **Grayfolded** as a deluxe 3-LP vinyl set in a triple gatefold package (designed by Oswald).

assemble a **somewhat large acoustic improvising ensemble** (15 instruments and vocalist Mary Margaret O'Hara) first full performance in a church on Toronto Island.

2013



a new performance piece **crowd passage** featured several dozen naked performers taking over a public street in Liberty Village Toronto, as part of ArtSpin

stillnessence / **vivaria** triple-projection a part of ArtSpin group show at the Tower Automotive Building Toronto

world premieres of both the orchestral **b9** (by the CBSO under the baton of Ilan Volkov) and the electroacoustic **vertical time** (diffused on the BEAST, an array of 136 loudspeakers) in Birmingham England

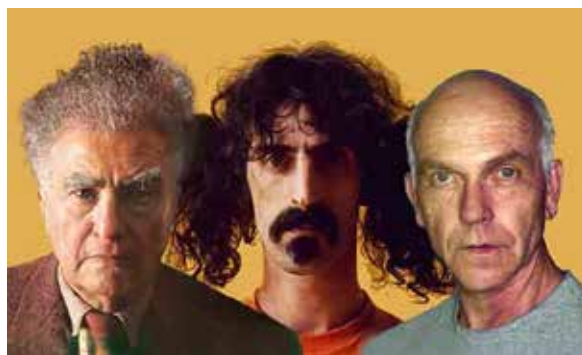
a Quebec tour introducing **spectre** (for live string quartet and virtual 4000 piece string orchestra, commissioned by the Kronos Quartet, who are also playing the piece as the opener for their 40th anniversary tour)

Toronto premiere of **spRite** for robot piano (by Arraymusic)

whisperperfield in the group show *Volume: Hear Here* (Blackwood Gallery Mississauga)

35th anniversary of the weekly **art wrestling** founded by Oswald

ccmc performances at National Art Centre, MOCA Detroit, Musiduum, Open Ears, Arraymusic, AGO



2012

art and drinks was held over through the month of January, when the building became no longer available. New locations, both in Toronto and New York, featuring novel transformations of the the basic concept are in the works.

In the meantime Oswald has been performing, and working on music projects, including the restoration and recreation of his 1973 work **vertical time** which will be part of the French label Sub Rosa's history of Electronic Music series. The piece, unheard for almost four decades, features, at times, thousands of layers of sound.

Another ambitious project has been initiated by Coleman Lemieux et Compagnie for this August.

inverted mountains, liquid sky will be the first performance co-production by the Banff National Park and the Banff Centre. This all-day performance suite will take place from dawn-to-dusk, on a mountaintop, in a forest, a museum, and by river rapids. Oswald will compose for brass ensemble, electronics, choir and soloists, and will direct the performances at two of the locations.

Oswald continues to work on visual art outside the gallery system with a new series of his **census** portraits of large digitally assembled crowds of people. He has so far created over two dozen unique images, each of which is given exclusively to one of the participants on their birthday.

2011

Work on **b9** began in earnest on Christmas day of 2010. In the mid-90's Oswald and Jukka Pekka Saraste, then music director of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, frequently discussed a meta-composition based on all nine of Beethoven's symphonies. The concept languished until a commission for its realization came from the renowned Ensemble Modern in Germany. Extensive preparations for this ambitious work had taken place throughout the previous year, but it wasn't until now that the first notes were committed to paper. Intense weeks of composition and scoring and parts creation (interrupted only by a last minute summons to Ottawa to replace choreographer David Earle to perform with digital-media artist David Rokeby's "Very Nervous System" at the Carleton U Art Gallery) preceded Oswald's flying to Frankfurt for a week of rehearsals with the ensemble and conductor Hartmut Keil, followed by a pair of highly accomplished concerts by the ensemble.

During that week Oswald worked on the creation of a new video chronophotic, and immediately following the Ensemble Modern concerts flew to Quebec City for the Mois Multi Festival, where in addition to a specially constructed 'video wall' of his works at the Meduse centre, he premiered **eyelineQ**, featuring transforming portraits of Quebec citizens, at Le Cercle, a popular bar. Nearby another of his video works, **Frank's last turn** was being shown in La Cuisine (although this installation was prematurely and controversially terminated). These public installations were in part an opportunity for Oswald to test his presentation ideas to be eventually incorporated into his venue **art and drinks**. After a couple of very busy days in Quebec, Oswald flew directly to Boston to be reunited with the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company. Oswald had worked extensively with Jones in the early '90's but this encounter would be the first time that he would perform a score live on-stage, visually integrated with the dance. Those three days of performances of "Continuous Replay" led to another run at the American Dance Festival in the summer, in the fall a ten day run to inaugurate Jones' new venue Live Arts, in New York City, and a U.S. State Department sponsored tour of Russia in November.

Oswald returned to Toronto in February, a few days before the premiere of James Kudelka's "AllOneWord", for which he was the music director. A lecture at McMaster U. was immediately followed by a solo saxophone concert in Toronto followed by another solo sax concert in New York City at the behest of Laurie Anderson and Lou Reed. February also included the premiere appearance of Oswald's massive ceiling-mounted photo mural **hover** at Nuit Blanche Montreal.

In Toronto Oswald created a 'video score' for pianist Eve Egoyan, which she premiered at the Music Gallery.

Various improvised music concerts (and his ongoing participation as co-director of the weekly **art wrestling** (improvised dance) throughout March and April were interspersed with development and rehearsals for the remounting of **spinvolver**, a solo dance opera he created for the incredible singer dancer Susanna Hood. A performance which opened the Open Ears Festival in Kitchener was to have been followed by several other engagements, which had to be cancelled when Hood was injured on another project. Also at Open Ears there was an installation of his life-scale multi-projector piece **stillnessence** and a series of his pet-concept concert series (in conjunction with musician Scott Thomson) **Morning Music** — concerts at dawn or thereabouts.

This was followed by a small west coast tour for the launch of Oswald's highly experimental website **6Q.com** (funded by the OAC) at a conference where developer Mark Reale presented it in a keynote address to a crowd of appreciative web authors, a reconnaissance stop in Seattle, and a concert with local musicians in San Francisco.

The summer schedule focused on finalizing a location for Oswald's media lounge **art and drinks**, to gather works appropriate to this particular venue, and, with production coordinator Geneviève Martel, designing and outfitting the place. Meanwhile this was also a period for the extensive development and testing of Oswald's **watchbook** e-reading app, with Mark Reale heading his team at the bnotions technology agency.

The **watchbook** was eventually launched in September at **art and drinks**, which quietly opened on September 13th.

The following day Oswald was in New York City for the Bill T. Jones shows, followed a month later by the Russian tour.

The remainder of the year was devoted to the ongoing programming, sonic and visual environmental refinement, creating new work for and the public interactive fine tuning of **art and drinks**. An interesting tangent was when, based on discussions among patrons, late in the year the bar became clothing-optional, with occasional participation by visitors and staff.

selected

exhibitions installations residencies performances



john oswald

2018 ARTSPIN TORONTO ISLANDS	3 site specific performances	island passage
2017 OPEN EARS FEST KITCHENER	w/Scott Thomson- perambulating performance	Radiant Brass
2016 OTHER MINDS CALIFORNIA KOERNER HALL TORONTO PARC LAFONTAINE MONTREAL CIVITELLA PUGLIA ITALY	residency and festival performance in total darkness w/Scott Thomson-performance for perambulating brass residency	pitch Parcours parcuvres
2015 INTERSECTIONS : DUNDAS SQ	performance for over 400 string players	1001
2014—17 ARTSCAPE YOUNGPLACE	open studio of still and time-based work	observia
2013 ARTSPIN, LIBERTY VILLAGE. TOWER AUTO	a large group of naked people approach a watching crowd. live performance. subsequent installation of <i>stillnessence</i> .	crowd passage
2012 PALMERSTON & DUNDAS W, TORONTO	creator & curator of a time-based art gallery/bar with 6 artists (Michael Snow, Betinna Hoffmann, David Rokeby, Renée Lear, Laurel MacDonald & Oswald)	art+drinks
2011 ART SOUTERRAIN, MONTREAL	ceiling mounted 16 meter photo 'film strip' in 26 panels	hover
MÈDUSE, QUEBEC	specially constructed wall of chronophotic and miniature video screens, plus complimentary screens in a nearby restaurant and a bar.	video wall and two satellite installations
2010 SLOUGHT FOUNDATION, PHILADELPHIA	joint show with Michael Snow of video, transparent, print and installation works.	many moving and still works by 2 Torontonians
CARLU TORONTO	solo, 5-hour live music, human sculpture and chronophotic projection installations for Canadian Art Hop	verisimile
ED DAY GALLERY TORONTO	solo show of video images and chronophotic projections.	illuminated
MUSEUMSQUARTIER, VIENNA	outdoor multichannel sound and lightbox installation.	eislaufen
2009 BARKENHOF MUSEUM WORPSWEDE GERMANY	specially created indoor/outdoor chronophotic movie house installation.	kino
CANADIAN EMBASSY DEN HAGUE	chronophotic portrait purchased for permanent installation.	after Rembrandt
2008 NUIT BLANCHE	chronophotic double projections shown at different speeds in multiplex theatres.	stillnessence
NEXT ART CHICAGO	6 site specific videos commissioned to be shown in permanent rotation on Canada's largest outdoor LED screen	life size
2007 TORONTO LIFE BUILDING	6 site specific videos commissioned to be shown in permanent rotation on Canada's largest outdoor LED screen	6 panoramas
ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM TORONTO	'permanent' gallery— a multi-dimensional everchanging continuous computer-controlled sound installation.	a time to hear for here
2006 MIAMI ART BASEL ED DAY GALLERY	installation of a double-projection chronophotic video.	after always before
ORANGE COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART LA	solo show— prints, mural transparencies, transit shelter installations, projections.	standstillnessence
2005 JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY NYC	solo show— installation of a triple-projection chronophotic video, purchased for their permanent collection.	withinstandstillnessence
MUSÉE DES BEAUX ARTS DE MONTREAL	solo show— installation of a quintuple-projection chronophotic video, as part of a joint exhibition with Michael Snow and other.	standstillnessence
PIERRE-FRANÇOIS OUELLETTE ART CONTEMPORAIN	annex to the Musée exhibition— solo show of plasma and still works.	standstillnessence
2004 ED DAY GALLERY TORONTO	solo show— installation of a triple-projection chronophotic video and other stills. held over one week and receives the Untitled Art Award for best show in a commercial gallery.	standstillness
IMAGES FESTIVAL TORONTO	a feature length theatrical-presentation of this double-projection computer-driven high definition chronophotic video.	standstillness
NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA	a chronophotic video group portrait	l'arc d'apparition
2002 PAGES BOOKS TORONTO	a plasma screen chronophotic portrait, co-sponsored by the Images Video festival and the Contact Photography Festival. held over for 2 months.	Oswald receives the Governor General's Award for Media Arts jacko lantern
2001 PREMIERE DANCE THEATRE TORONTO	solo show — 13 c-prints. held-over for 6 months.	stills
2000 HAYWARD GALLERY LONDON ENGLAND	a plasma screen chronophotic portrait, as part of a group show with Brian Eno, Christian Marclay and others. purchased for MOMA.	janéad o'jakriel
1991 OBSCURE QUEBEC	intallation — a ten metre diameter nautilus with electronic pedestrian traffic lights which allowed one person at a time to enter a 75 metre, lightfree, progressively quieter and softer path.	pitch/pivot
1977 MIRVISH GALLERY TORONTO	a performance installation event in which 200 'viewers' were ensemble escorted by blind-trained ushers into an absolutely dark gallery, seated, left there for half an hour, and then escorted out again.	pitch

REPRESENTATION

JOHN OSWALD

selected compositions

commissioned by:

2021	TIP	piano	Marc André Hamelin
2020	Mysteriaudicity	online solo	Tonspur Vienna
	Auditorrada	spatialized ohoir and organ	Hallwalls
2019	Elevator Music	a dozen jazz singers and quartet	UoFT Jazz Ensemble
2017	Fee Fie Foe Fum	sextet + synched recordings	Bang On A Can All Stars
	Refuse	chamber orchestra	Turning Point Ensemble
2016	pitch black	various ensembles and choir in darkness	RCM / Koerner Hall
2015	Transitive Axis ⁶	rock nonet	AngelicA Fest, Bologna
2014	i'd Love to Turn	orchestra	BBC
2013	b9	orchestra	City of Birmingham Symphony
2011	b9	sinfonietta	Ensemble Modern Frankfurt
2009	prePlexure	stereo recording	Worpswede Residency
2008	Radiant	brass octet & electroacousmatics	Holly Small
2007	a time to hear for here ⁵	36 channel sound environment	Royal Ontario Museum
	Legislate	countertenor, chorus, pipers & percussion	Colemanlemieux compagnie
	reRite	ensemble	MAE Amsterdam
2006	rien ne va plus	ensemble & samplerist	NOW Orchestra
2005	bird ⁴	soprano & ensemble	Open Ears
2003	aparanthesi	octophonic recording	Rien à Voir
2002	arc of apparitions / whisperfield	chronophotic DVD	Avatar / ohm editions
2001	jackoscan	monostomatic recording	Royal Festival Hall London
2000	Oswald's 1st Piano Concerto by Tchaikovsky	piano & orchestra	Vancouver Jazz Society
	Idyllily ³	string orchestra	CBC Orchestra
1999	ΔfΔ	ondes martenot & brass octet	Vancouver New Music
	the Idea of This	robot piano, recorded voice & orchestra	National Ballet of Canada
1998	Homonymy	10 musicians & synchronized cinema	SMCQuebec
1997	(sp)Utter	talking keyboard	
1996	Bildbeschreibung\Surveillance	trilingual play	Recto Verso Quebec
	Fore	string quartet	Modern Quartet
	Metropolis	silent play with music	Sarah Garton Stanley
	Brazilianaires	quadrilingual radio play	NOS Dutch National Radio
1995	Grayfolded	stereo recording	The Grateful Dead
	24f/s	ballet	Lyon Opera Ballet
	Early 20th Century	woodwind quintet	5th Species
	Classic	orchestra	Esprit Orchestra
1994	Orchestral Tuning Arrangement ²	orchestra	Teatro Comunale di Bologna
1993	(m)utterD · (m)utterK	mezzo-soprano & recording	Anne Marie Donovan · Kathrine Duncanson
	Mach	string quartet with recording	Kronos Quartet / Lincoln Centre
1992	Plexure	stereo recording	John Zorn / Avant
	die Offnüng	illusory orchestra	Deutsche Oper Berlin
1991	Fence	recording for dance	Dancemakers
	Acupuncture	sextet	Arraymusic
	preLieu (from <i>Lieu, dWig Wand/Bay/Tow, v&</i>)	string quartet	Kronos Quartet / Walker Centre
1990	Spectre	string quartet with recording	Kronos Quartet
1979-89	Plunderphonic	recordings	
1989	Zorro	soprano & bass vocalists for dance	Bill Coleman's North American Experience
1988	Wounded	miming musicians with recording	Holly Small
1987	Skindling Shades	recording for dance	Denise Fujiwara
1986	Study [ˈplaus]	multiphonic recording	
1985	Fossils	recording	
1976-84	Pitch ¹	environment	
1983	Bell Speeds	stereo recording	<i>created with:</i>
1982	Jazz Edit	recording	¹ Marvin Green
1981	Beat	recording for dance	² Sarah Garton Stanley
1980	Alto Sax	monophonic recording	³ Martin Arnold & Marc Sabat
1979	Warm Wind Pressure and Aura	ensemble without instruments	⁴ James Rolfe
1978	Moose and Salmon	stereo recording	⁵ Philip Strong & Laurel MacDonald
1977	Animal Voices Human	monophonic recording	⁶ Domenico Caliri
1976	Mrs Schultz Overdubbing	duostomatic recording	
1975	Go,Stop	2 musicians	
1974	burrows (Burroughs)	monostomatic recording	
1973	Vertical Time	stereo recording	