john oswald

bio

2010 featured an artist residency in Vienna, and directing, composing, and choreographing **verisimile**, a five hour sequence of human and video tableaus, and travelling brass and choral interludes, involving over a hundred performers, for a Canadian Art Foundation gala. He and Michael Snow had their 2nd U.S. two-man exhibition, this one in Philadelphia.

In 2009 during a three month residency in a small village in Germany Oswald opened **kino**, the community's first cinema which nightly showed his evolving chronophotic **vivaria** in an indoor/outdoor setting.

From 2008 to 2010 Oswald created several site specific works with a long-time collaborator, choreographer Bill Coleman. He created a love duet for an counter tenor (Daniel Taylor) and a soprano in a helicopter; and a piece for choir and buiding demolition. He scored and directed a mobile musical composition for pipers, percussionists in the Manitoba Legislature Building, and accompanied a Merce Cunningham dance performance at a Six Nations Pow Wow. He created a talking school building. He also made his choreographic debut with the Toronto Dance Theatre.

"For the moment, John Oswald is a solo movement, the most exciting school of one in music." — Milo Miles, **Village Voice**

In 2007 **a time to hear for here**, a permanent ever-changing sound environment in the atrium of the radically-renovated Royal Ontario Museum, and he created six new video works for the giant Toronto Life LED display at Yonge and Dundas.

In 2006 Oswald had a retrospective of his orchestral works performed and broadcast by the BBC Scottish Symphony; was the resident artist at Deep Wireless at the Drake Hotel, simultaneous with solo shows of new work at the Ed Day gallery, in conjunction with site-specific trompe-l'oeil photo displays in the transit shelters neighbouring the gallery, and the sound installation Jackoscan at the Prefix Gallery, all in Toronto. His installation of **stillnessence** at Miami Art Basel was repeatedly acclaimed as the best of the fair.

In 2004 Oswald's work suddenly appeared on the visual art scene. In August the Ed Day Gallery in Toronto presented a room of his visual work in the group show Morphia, followed in September by a solo show of his work, including a triple-projection of **instandstillnessence**. This won the Untitled Art Awards prize for best show of 2004 in a commercial gallery, and Oswald was nominated Artist of the Year. That fall his new choreotographic short movie Periphesence premiered at the Moving Pictures Festival in Toronto. Then **entranquillessence** showed during the spring of 2005 simultaneously in three locations in Quebec, including the Musée des Beaux Arts de Montreal (where it had a very successful 5 month run), and was purchased by the Orange County Museum of Art, followed by the expanded **withinstandstillnessence** at the Jack Shainman Gallery in NYC in May and June, during which Oswald made a short musical tour of France and Italy.

"The maestro over there."—Cecil Taylor, 2010

Also in 2004 Oswald became a laureate in the fifth annual Governor General of Canada's Awards in Visual and Media Arts. In the same year he was the third inductee to the CBC Canadian Alternate Walk of Fame, awarded a Distinction in Digital Musics at the Prix Ars Electronica Festival in Austria, and nominated for Louis Applebaum Composers Award. Students of the University of Toronto Music School voted him the third most internationally influential Canadian musician, tied with Celine Dion.

Oswald began 2004 with the first commercial publication of one of his chronophotics: **the Arc of Apparitions** is produced on DVD by Avatar/Ohm editions. In February the New Millennium Players performed a retrospective of sixteen of his works (from solo cello to orchestral) of Rascali Klepitoire at the RedCAt at Walt Disney Hall in Los Angeles. Oswald's own label *Fony* began re-releasing his albums from the nineties, starting with the platinum-sales phenomenon **Grayfolded**. His theatrical feature-length cinematic chronophotic, **standstillness**, premiered at the Images Festival of Film and Video in April (this showing was precisely replicated a year later in the same location for the festival Regarding Toronto), following which he was off on a short Russian tour

"OSWALD IS THE FUTURE OF MUSIC" —Udo Kasemets, Musicworks Magazine, 2004

In 2003 Oswald premiered his new solo dance opera **spinvolver**, withSusanna Hood, in Berlin in February, followed by performances in several European capitols. In the fall, **aparanthesi**, a one note electroacousmatic composition, entailing some research in the perception of sonic morphs, was released on CD by *empreintes digitales*.

Around the turn of the century he composed a "Concerto for Wired Conductor and Orchestra", which premiered at Boston Symphony Hall. He designed the soundtrack and system for **stress**, an eight-screen movie by Bruce Mau, showing at the Museum of Technology in Vienna. A new piece entitled "Oswald's First Piano Concerto by Tchaikovsky, (as suggested by Michael Snow)" was premiered in Vancouver by Paul Plimley and the CBC orchestra. He composed **the idea of this**, a score for the National Ballet of Canada for orchestra, robot piano and the disembodied singing voice of Glenn Gould. The first chronophotic, a plunderphonie video/photo collage, **janéad o'jakriel**, was shown at the Royal Festival Hall Hayward Gallery in London and was immediately purchased as a gift to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. And he was the cover boy for the British music mag *The Wire*.

Back in the late '90's he wrote, directed and produced **brazilianaires**, a radio play in four interwoven languages (Portugese, Dutch, English & German); wrote, animated, directed & scored **homonymy** (for chamber ensemble & cinema); scored the stage version of the silent movie classic "Metropolis"; produced the soundtrack album to the gay porn feature "Hustler White"; as well as appearing as himself in John Greyson's feature film "Un©ut" and Craig Baldwin's "Sonic Outlaws", and he was the subject of one of Moses Znaimer's television documentaries "The Originals". Other recent activities include: a **senecade**, sonic motorcade in Brasilia; and a dance composition for 22 choreographers (including Bill T.Jones, Margie Gillis, & Holly Small); plus commissions from the Lyon Opera Ballet, Dutch National Radio, Change of Heart, SMCQ, Pizzicato 5, and Radio Canada. Other works are in the active repertoire of the Kronos Quartet (they've played his **spectre** over 300 times worldwide, and another commission, **mach** not quite as often), the Culberg Ballet Sweden, the Monaco Ballet, The Deutsche Opera Ballet Berlin, The Modern Quartet, the Penderecki Quartet, and others. His recorded works have been used in productions for radio, stage, concert, television, film, Hollywood movies, computer media and video.

"John Oswald is the most famous person who is not very well known." —Tom Third

Since the mid-70's Oswald has, under the rubric **pitch**, researched and presented works that require absolute darkness. These include events,environments, and concerts, and the installation structure **pivot** ('92). In recent years various independent parties in North America have capitalized on this research to present events and culinary experiences in the dark.

Oswald is also the founder and co-facilitator of **art wrestling/ballroom yoga**, a Toronto-based contact improvisational movement jamboree which has occurred weekly uninterrupted for 32 years.

In 1990, Oswald's most notorious recording, **plunderphonic**, was destroyed by prudes in the Recording Industry representing Michael Jackson. He has since released recordings on *Elektra, Avant, ReR Megacorp, Blast First, & Swell,* featuring transformations of the music and performances of Stravinsky, Metallica, James Brown, Gyorgy Ligeti, Dolly Parton, Sonic Youth, & many others. At the turn of the century a box-set CD & book retrospective of his **plunderphonics** work was appropriated from Oswald's ***fony*** label by Seeland. The first disc of his Grateful Dead production **grayfolded** was selected as the #1 international recording of the decade by the *Toronto Sun*. In the same year his album of improvised music, **acoustics** was a #1 critic's selection in *Coda* magazine. The **grayfolded** package, completed the following year was selected for best of the year lists in *Rolling Stone, The New York Times* and many other publications. The retrospective CD box-set of Plunderphonic works **69plunderphonics96** made Spin Magazine's 2001 top 10.

Oswald is Director of Research at *mLab* in Canada. *Eye Weekly*'s '94 year end report anointed him a "God-like being" (in2003 they have upgraded this to "a god proper"). The *Montreal Mirror* says "John Oswald is probably Canada's most importantcomposer-musician," and the *London* (England) *Observer* has called him "the maddest man on the planet." "Watch him dance, watch him dance." —Laurie Anderson, introducing Oswald for a public dialogue in Banff, 1995

2015 (in progress)

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 straging 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 Chenaux, Chris Cutler and others.

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 insitute 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, electroacousmatics 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 electroacousmatic **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, Musideum, 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 solists, 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.

"**Plunderphonics**.This art is more radical in its social and political associations than the introduction of the electric guitar."
—Henry Kaiser, **East Bay Expess**, 1989