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HADAL ZONE

[in search of depths....]

Duration 1 hour 4 min.

For bass clarinet, tuba, violoncello, contrabass, piano and electronics

Hadal Zone is an hour-long piece featuring the lowest range instruments such as tuba, contrabass, bass clarinet, piano with pre-recorded electronics. It is an immersive sonic journey through various gradations of darkness - low frequencies and the resulting overtones as a metaphor for descending into the depths of the ocean. The Hadal zone named after the realm of Hades, the underworld in Greek mythology is found in waters deep down below 6,000 meters. Scientists divide the ocean into different zones based on depth and by the level of light that reaches them. The myth of Hades has many parallels with the deepest reaches of our oceans. They are both extremely remote and dark. Marine biologists hope to save these depths from destruction caused by global warming. Much like Orpheus, they are seeking to save something precious such as rare Hadal habitats that have been beyond the reach of humanity.

In the "Hadal Zone", a long duration of time is given to small instrumental forces of an unusual chamber ensemble. I chose instruments of the lowest range to simulate the peculiarity of a dark atmosphere. Darkness as we perceive it, is not differentiated and so are low frequencies, low vibrations of sound - what we usually hear is some indistinguishable hum or a murmur and mostly feel the vibrations of those sounds through our body. In the "Hadal Zone", the live instruments are combined with pre-recorded electronics consisting of a larger variety of low range instruments - contrabassoon, contrabass clarinet and bass voice. These instruments are rarely featured on their own but rather serve as a backbone of harmonic structures. I'm taking them into the limelight or to say in poetic terms "making the darkness visible". Brass and wind instruments utilize a lot of singing various vowels "a, e, i, o, u" while playing to produce mysteriously sounding overtones. In combination with the lowest perceivable notes underneath, they can be hinting at moans and sighs of imaginary ocean creatures or remind one of the chanting of deep voices or Mongolian throat singing. Chanting has been shown to affect numerous physiological functions of the human body. These include effects such as lowering heart rate, decreasing respiratory rate and blood pressure, and calming brain waves thus bringing the listener and the performers into a much calmer state of mind.

"Hadal Zone" is offering a somewhat similar experience found in a concert hall where the sense of ritual is strengthened by a semi-dark performance space thus submerging listeners into more meditative states of mind. Drones of long sustained tones with a myriad of subtle timbral changes, slow structural shifts and sung vowels layered on top of it are reminiscent of the repetitive mantras heard from afar and then up close. The variety in sonic perception here is achieved by the intentional choices of specific vowels and their sequences as well as the interval relationship between the singing note and the played pitch. In a way this usage of vowels and consonants precedes language, thus bringing up the association of being in the waters of our mother's womb and lulling us into a deeply submerged subconscious state.

Research shows that many ancient traditions (Egyptians, Greeks and Tibetans) ascribed sacred, mystical and healing powers and significance to vowels. The details might vary in different traditions, yet it is clear that something miraculous happens through the very act of prolonged repetition of certain vowels - whether in the form of a mantra or prayer or as a self-healing ritual. Each vowel in elongation stimulates the appearance of particular overtones of the natural harmonic series. I want to experiment with subtly shifting, sometimes barely audible clouds of overtones resulting from the sustaining of certain vowels and merge them in various proportions with instrumental sounds while adding an extra depth of sonic perception through the use of electronics.

"Hadal Zone" consists of multiple sections that are played without interruption. Interspersed with transitional episodes, the main sections of the piece are titled after the ocean zones:

- I. Epipelagic (sunlight/surface to 660 ft)
- II. Mesopelagic (twilight/660ft to 3,300 ft)
- III. Bathypelagic (midnight/3.300ft to 13,000 ft)
- IV. Abyssopelagic (lower midnight/13,000 ft to the ocean floor)
- V. Hadopelagic (hadal zone/below 20,000 ft)