

PAUL DOLDEN





Canadian composer and multi-instrumentalist Paul Dolden is an anomaly even within the anomalous universe of modern music. An unparalleled master of digital studio techniques, he uses only acoustic sound sources, making him an acoustic-electro-acoustic composer. Shunning the safety of academia, Dolden has traced out a singular path for over 30 years, producing an astonishing array of maximalist works that have won over 20 international awards. Because he labors for literally years tweaking every upper partial and microsecond of each work, new releases are rare events to be celebrated.

With equal regard for Jimmy Page and Pat Martino as for Bach and Xenakis, disparate genres coalesce within a single musical event, yet Dolden's constructions are instantly recognizable as his alone. Despite retaining his signature sound, even the closest followers of Dolden's career will be surprised by the innovations on this CD.

The first piece, *Who Has the Biggest Sound?*, displays Dolden's talent for mixes that are dense in content yet retain transparency even when layering hundreds of tracks. His unique gift is the ability to imagine and then painstakingly realize orchestrations where the sum is not only greater than the parts, but the results are completely unpredictable from the parts. Is that atonal noise or a romantic sonata for cello? Is that country twang or is the earth spinning into an apocalyptic portamento? A field recording of cicadas or an Argentinean tango? It's all of that and more, as musical nanoparticles collide at the speed of light and splinter into volatile sonic projectiles that whimsically fuse and re-explode with unimaginable creativity.

Despite the non-stop head-twirling juxtapositions of genres and sonorities, *Who Has the Biggest Sound?* remains coherent thanks to a hierarchy of thematic concepts that are as multi-layered and intertwined as the musical tracks themselves. Most immediately apparent is the dig at contemporary music culture, reflected in the title and opening lines from the choir, which reference music as if it were an Olympic sport. Dig a bit deeper, however, and it becomes clear that there is much more

at stake. Nature's handiwork is everywhere, from the massive swarms of insects to the busy sections of brass and winds which model the same intense microtonal and polyrhythmic patterns. Dolden considers the relation between culture and geography, and takes it to its logical extreme. He first recognizes it is no coincidence that country music sprang to life alongside the howling hounds of the open plains, and that Spain begat flamenco alongside crickets that chirp in 6/8. By placing the original sources into the music itself, we travel full circle back to the land. Unity is furthered by the recurring melodic themes, initially presented by the choir and later shredded on guitar, barked by dogs and generally embedded and transformed throughout. While listeners cannot be faulted for concluding that Dolden *Has the Biggest Sound*, Dolden instead suggests that it is nature itself. Scratching the surface humor behind the "misbehaving animals" trope reveals a desperate cry for both musical and environmental relief. If nature has the biggest sound, nicest melodies and biggest noise, then it must be respected and protected.

True to the spirit of outsider forefathers like Harry Partch, Dolden has created his own set of tools and tuning systems ideally suited to his artistic vision. This is equally evident on the CD's second work, *The Un-Tempered Orchestra*. Moments of detuned madness most remind us of Partch, but while Partch physically sculpted an original armamentarium, Dolden electronically sculpts familiar classical, rock, and world instruments into new harmonic shapes. If *Who Has the Biggest Sound?* proves Dolden shares Partch's biting wit, *The Un-Tempered Orchestra* extends the possibilities for tuning systems into dreamy realms beyond anything Patch could have imagined.

The abundance of information is such that you may never discover all of the supersonic gems that fly through the superhighways of sound, but trying guarantees a wild ride.

- Lawrence Joseph



Who Has the Biggest Sound? (2005-2008) 52:11

*Commissioned by Réseau (Montreal)
and Diapason Gallery (New York)*



ST-220

- 1 The Village Choir Asks the Important Questions of the Day 2:58
- 2 The Village Orchestra Poses the Main themes of this Musical Quest 1:03
- 3 The Village Wind Orchestra: The Answer is Blowing in the Winds 3:37
- 4 Who Has the Biggest Noise? 2:00
- 5 Who Can Play the Fastest? 3:48
- 6 To Play or Not to Play? 1:10
- 7 The Saddle Song 3:52
- 8 My Hound is Out of Harmony 3:38
- 9 Who Has the Dreamiest Melodies? 3:11
- 10 Who Has the Nicest Melodies? 8:51
- 11 Who Can Talk Faster: Crickets or Man? 4:06
- 12 The Village Orchestra: Tonic Tango 2:48
- 13 The Village Percussion Orchestra: Cha-Cha 5:02
- 14 The Village Wind Orchestra: more Blowing in the Wind 2:55
- 15 More Unanswered Questions 3:10

The Un-Tempered Orchestra (2010) 18:30

*Commissioned by the Sinus Ton Festival in Germany
with assistance from the Canada Council for the Arts*

- 16 Orchestra 1 4:48
- 17 Orchestra 2 2:36
- 18 Orchestra 3 2:28
- 19 Orchestra 4 2:03
- 20 Orchestra 5 4:10
- 21 Orchestra 6 2:24

Total Time: 70:53



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COMPOSER NOTES

In *Who Has the Biggest Sound?*, our composer pursues the important questions of the day: Who has the biggest sound? Who has the nicest melodies? Who can play the fastest? And, Who has the most complex music? During this quest for the musical Holy Grail the composer is impeded by the sounds of nature.

00:24 CHOIR: Who Has the Biggest Sound?

01:00 CHOIR: Who Has the Nice Melodies?

01:23 CHOIR: Who Has the Strangest Sound?

02:02 CHOIR: Silence Shhh! Dream Shhh! Dream

07:39 CHOIR: But! Who has the Biggest Noise?

13:28 NARRATOR: Test, test, test..., Hey, is the microphone on? Okay. But as the local church choir said six minutes and twenty seven seconds ago: "This sound was fast enough." But the important question of the day still remains. Drum roll please. To play or not to play? Now I and the Tremolo Trailblazers are going to play: "The Saddle Song."

19:11 NARRATOR: Okay that is enough of misbehaving animals!

19:17 COUNTRY HICK: My hound is out of harmony. The pig popped his polyphony. The animals ain't just atonal they caught cacophony.

21:55 NARRATOR: Okay that is enough of misbehaving animals!

23:29 CHOIR: Silence Shhh! Dream Shhh! Dream

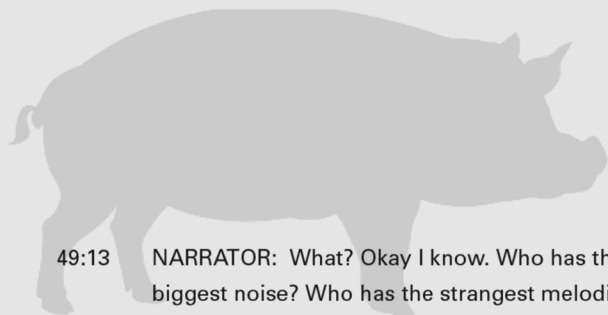
24:04 SOPRANOS AND ALTOS: Dream

25:19 CHOIR: My hound is out of harmony. The bad animals have gone to bed. They cannot hurt us now. But the big question of the day is: Who Has The Nice Melodies?

36:19 SPANISH TOURIST: Carbon! That is enough of these misbehaving bugs. Crazy. Enough of these grasshoppers, these cicadas, what do you think this is? We are listening to music? These bugs drive me crazy, crazy, crazy. Let's get onto the through-composed thoroughfare and hear the Tonic Tango. And hear: Tonic Tango. Let's get onto the through-composed thoroughfare and hear the Tonic Tango.

41:29 CHOIR: Strange melody.

48:58 CHOIR: But! Who has the Biggest....



49:13 NARRATOR: What? Okay I know. Who has the biggest sound? Who has the biggest noise? Who has the strangest melodies? Who has the nicest melodies? Who can play the fastest? Look I may work at the Centre for Strategic Sound but I don't know the answers to these important questions of the day. So I will leave you here to listen to the tuneful traffic go by. Enjoy the freeway jam session. And what about: who has the most complex music? Who has the longest sustain? Who can play the slowest?

52:03 NARRATOR: Okay that is enough of misbehaving animals!

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Bach wrote *The Well-Tempered Clavier* in order to demonstrate the musical possibilities of a new tuning system called 12-Tone Equal Temperament (12 ET). Bach built a beautiful, perfectly symmetrical building which has become the model home for all Western music since. I wrote *The Un-Tempered Orchestra* to demonstrate the musical possibilities of a non-symmetrical building which uses non-tempered tuning systems, many of which have no octaves. The octave, like the symmetrical building, surrounds us every day with its repetitive pattern. My artistic intention is to create a new musical space within which Western and non-Western musical practices can co-exist. I want to create a big modern multicultural family, in which everyone gets along together harmoniously under one non-symmetrical roof.



These artistic intentions to break the familiar hold of 12 ET upon our ears can also be summarized by James Joyce's aphorism: "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake." The nightmare in this case was already announced by the third century Chinese tuning theorist who was probably the first to observe the musical perfection of 12 ET but also decided that it was "too ugly for human ears."

In order to construct this house, first I wrote simple diatonic melodies and chord progressions. Then I recorded Eastern and Western performers reading these lines in their native dialect or tuning system. With the aid of the new technologies I next retuned and edited all these performances to fit under one non-symmetrical roof. Everyone had to compromise a bit to get along together harmoniously.

In the end, our family gets along together so harmoniously that there is time for musical humour. To pick one of many examples, I will select the room we find ourselves beginning at 3'. This room is stuffed with "free jazz" solos each of which I recorded separately. These solos have been retuned into ancient Greek, Babylonian, and Chinese tuning systems. This room in the house, acts like the "Room of Mirrors" such as found in circuses. Specifically we see our current Western jazz-style of playing reflected back to us and distorted by ancient musical tuning systems. By combining different musical languages and styles we invert time: what is old becomes new and vice versa. Please enjoy these moments of musical transcendence.

“A leading figure in sound art”

- *All Music Guide*

Canadian electroacoustic composer Paul Dolden began his career at age sixteen as a professional electric guitarist, violinist, and cellist. After extensively exploring the possibilities of recording technologies, he arrived at his unique approach of concocting otherwise impossible musical performances. The resulting compositions are characterized by a maximalist aesthetic, in which hundreds of digitally recorded instrumental and vocal performances are layered in up to 500 tracks, to create a new, virtual orchestra, conducted by Dolden with as much sensitivity and finesse as he desires.

Dolden was recognized as a composer of note when, at age 29, he won the first of over 20 international awards he has received, in a career now spanning over 30 years. Dolden has written over 30 commissioned works, including those for: orchestra (Esprit Orchestra, Canada; Phoenix, Switzerland); chamber ensemble (Stockholm Saxophone Quartet, Sweden; Bang on A Can All-Stars, New York); virtuoso soloists (Rivka Golani, Stefan Osterjo, Nancy Ruffer, David Brutti, Francois Houle); and pure electroacoustic music (Groupe de musique électroacoustique de Bourges, France; Réseau & Association de creation et recherché électroacoustique du Québec, Canada; and Starkland, USA).

Dolden's 2-CD set, “L’Ivresse de la Vitesse” (empreintes DIGITALes), widely regarded as a landmark recording, was selected by *The Wire* magazine as “one of the top 100 recordings of the 20th century.”



Produced, recorded, mixed, and mastered by Paul Dolden.

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