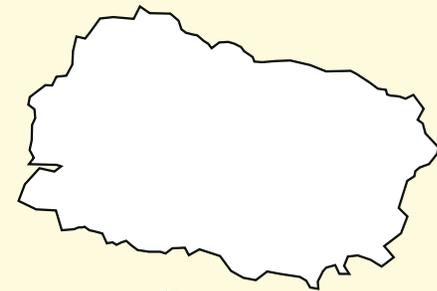
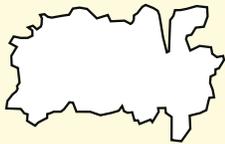


JUAN SEBASTIÁN LACH LAU

ISLAS



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The six pieces included in this album are presented not so much as sonic landscapes but as musical islands, each its own labyrinth, isolated and cut out from the others while sharing some underwater features through the molten rock that chains them together. Each island is a world within a world, a point of view that contains others within it.

THE MUSIC that Juan Sebastián Lach presents in this album was created in the last 10 years, some of it during his stay in Holland where he carried out studies in composition and computer music and where his eclectic language was forged. In contrast to many Mexican composers (not only of his generation, but of all the compositional spectrum included between 1955 and today), the music of this composer is neither post-nationalist nor does it try to adapt itself to the European academic languages that sprung out of Italy, Germany, France, etc¹. I find Lach's aesthetic much closer to the experimental attitude engendered by John Cage and company in New York in the 1950s. And not because his music sounds like one of these American composers, but his stance of centering the music in processes plus his conceptual kind of ideas give an interesting diversity of results in his work, all of them vital and fresh and which do not seem to want to justify themselves historically. Hence, the connection with the North American vanguard sprung to mind, and I imagine it extended to include two close figures that could have a bearing on Lach's psyche, such as James Tenney (1934-2006) and Conlon Nancarrow (1912-1997).

It is important to point out that the use of technology in Lach's work is fundamental, and I'm not referring only to the electroacoustic works but also to the instrumental ones, because his interest in programming and the use of algorithms as generators

of sonic materials has likely been the most important motor in his production. But it must be mentioned that the ideas in his aesthetic always precede the use of the computer, and in this way, the processes of integration and disintegration², more than referring us to the Gyorgy Ligeti of the sixties, take us in his case to the world of appropriation, much more *ad hoc* with our postmodern³ time which has not been exhausted and continues to reinvent itself.

We could say that to work from existing materials refers to the well known theme and variations that has evolved since the late Renaissance, though in the case of Lach, the appropriation is total, being about deconstructing a work of another time (Satie) or one belonging to another style (Monk), and it is in this deconstruction where the composer encounters himself, as if this ex-member of Santa Sabina (a vanished Mexican rock band) would require different kinds of mirrors to be able to look at himself.

What is difficult to reconcile in the sonic portrait of Lach captured in this record is the musical diversity that we find, from an allusion to Dub music (*Pantaleón*), Satie (*γενεαλογαεdie*), Monk (*'round ruby*), ideas derived from mathematical permutations and games, organic and elastic electroacoustic sounds, and even works with an elegant and restrained rhythmic melodic aspect (*Chamba de um acorde*). How

can we then weave through his works and find in these thin threads the true identity of this composer? I think that it lies in various factors. On the one hand, in his organic and almost constant use of discontinuous elements in parallel or in sequence to others of a continuous nature. This duality can almost always be found in the use of rhythm, or in the opposition between the micro and the macro, etc. The quantic paradigm sometimes works in an integrative manner, but also in a non-linear and disintegrative way, as in the case of *Blank Space*, where it seems that we listen to two different pieces, clarinet and piano, and electroacoustic, two worlds that connect and disconnect in the perception of the listener. But what can be said regarding intervallic use and harmony in this series of works? I find a personal universe that refers to a sort of atonalized modal music (surely created by means of invented algorithms), and in other cases of an extended tonality as happens in jazz (but *a la Lach!*). Finally, another factor that could define Lach is the post-Cagean, postmodern attitude that does not try to vindicate specific elements from the past and that even seems to have been chosen randomly, but which simply tries to deal with a modern language (would today's modernism be the use of technology to compose?), with a series of dissimilar elements (we can think of the electronic sounds in *rwz* that remind us of early 1980s 8-bit videogame sounds) that could have hardly been integrated into the music if it weren't for the complex thinking of this creator who, in the end,

has found his philosopher's stone which permits him to compose music with freedom and without having to worry about integrating these dissimilar elements.

At the end of the day what amazes about Lach is his personal hallmark, so original and distanced from the imitations of academic music we listen to so frequently and so well done by young composers, not only Mexican but Latin American, North American, Asian, and of course, European. I have no other thing but to celebrate the appearance of this album, saying, long live *Lachian* eclecticism, and may it become an example of a singular voice for the new generation of contemporary music composers.

—*Manuel Rocha Iturbide*

¹From my point of view, the only exception regarding a clear influence from the Europe could be that of German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, from whom Lach inherited ideas such as micro structure = macro structure.

²This curious obsession by Lach for integrating and disintegrating reminds me of the Woodyal-
lenesque character of Zelig, the man who constantly transforms himself.

³Yolanda Moreno, in her book on Mexican contemporary music of the 20th century mentions the generation of the Postmoderns (composers born between 1955 and 1965 such as Javier Álvarez, Ana Lara, Gabriela Ortiz, etc), and though Lach is younger, I think that in some sense a post-postmodern generation has established itself (that of his and younger composers), less preoccupied with academia and nationalisms than the generation described by Moreno.

Pantaleón (2005)

For custom drumset and two computers. Written and dedicated to The Electronic Hammer.

This piece is a sort of weird, abstract, electroacoustic, microtonal reggae, played wonderfully by this trio of friends who understand my fondness for this music. It breaks down and transforms elements of dub music, distributing them and giving each musician a different function. The percussion plays the central role and is made of three parallel drumsets: a conventional one, a wooden, and a metallic version, which split and follow the materials among each other. The drums are accompanied by the two computers, one of them generates accompaniment material (chords, bass, melodies, soundscapes) algorithmically, producing different but related outcomes each time it is played; the other computer transforms the sounds of the drums by playing around improvisatorially over dub-like signal processes.

—*J.S.*

'round ruby (2004)

"Everything is happening all the time. Every googolplexth of a second!"

—*Thelonious Monk*

This piece is a homage to Thelonious Monk's music; it is also the result of a research into the relationship between harmony and rhythm. Monk's *Ruby, My Dear* is processed based on a system inspired by the ideas of Henry Cowell and Karlheinz Stockhausen concerning the proportional analogies between spectra, intervals, and rhythms. At the beginning the process dominates over Monk's music, overriding its flow, as if the music was slowed down in order to hear the inner life of its chords. As the piece progresses the process becomes integrated with Monk's music which is foregrounded as its pace is reestablished. There are also a few interludes based on his piano solos. The formalism behind the piece served as a departure point for a music that floats between spectral and jazzy sonorities in an interlocking rhythmic framework.

—*J.S.*

rwz / Continuidad Paralela (2002, 2010 version)

This is a stereo version of a quadraphonic piece. The percussion part of *rwz* was inspired by an article of Ian Steward (which I have since lost track of), describing the properties of the mathematical “group of symmetric permutations of order five” where he explains why these properties are far more interesting than the symmetries of groups of three, four, or six, for example. I don’t remember well how I based the piece on the article, as the score was written in an afternoon. It is constructed by mapping permutations of five sounds against permutations of accent patterns in a five meter. The reading of them is made according to their symmetries; when coincidences happen the resulting clash generates a signaling “fill in.” The structure of the piece has this section as its middle and longest one, surrounded by contrasting sections built similarly but in a filtered manner and played with resonant metals instead of skins. The electronic soundtrack was generated in the analog studio from the multitrack recording of the percussion and was done in several passes, processing the instrument’s sound in the outer sections and triggering synthetic sounds in the middle one. The computer was later used stage to synchronize the electronics parts and to do the quadraphonic spatialization. Its title is due to the fact that it was written as a welcome fanfare for composer Frederic Rzewski to The Hague Conservatory in 2002. The piece is written and dedicated to Diego Espinosa.

Continuidad Paralela was the music I made for the short fiction video of Antonia Fritche, *Parallel Continuity*. Here there is no sonification of mathematics, but a structuring based on a visual and circular narrative. Years later I realized it could work well as a diptic with *rwz*, so I made a few small changes, a quadraphonic mix and added some instructions for a more or less open percussion accompaniment. This was done in collaboration with Pedro Salvador who premiered it as a diptic in 2010.

—J.S.

γενεαλοπαεdie (2003)

for Harp, Alto Flute, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass

In 2003, at the beginning of my Master's degree at the Royal Conservatory in The Hague and after having written several pieces that tended towards tonal sonorities—which meant a significant departure from previous works—I thought about delving into microtonality in order to contrast this tendency and delve into unfamiliar territory. The opportunity was found when asked to write a piece based on one of Satie's *Gymnopédies*—choosing the first—for a harp-based small chamber ensemble. The initial idea was to translate insights from the world of electronic music into a chamber music work, deriving pitches from the signal processing technique of ring modulation, with which I was working in the analog studio. The electronic timbres suggested, from their simple but rich spectra, a way to extend harmonies microtonally, making for interesting sonorities and chordal combinations.

I wanted the piece to sound different from the usual spectral music, particularly from the style of the so-called French spectralists. In order to do that, and with the premise of Satie, I realized that he could be considered, in a fictive but also in a not so hypothetical way, the father of spectral harmony, as his use of major seventh and ninth

chords as harmonically stable objects clearly pointed in the direction of timbral, overtone-based harmonies as opposed to proportional-based harmonies, but that's beside the point. Therefore, the idea for the piece was to resemble a *genealogical* homage, some kind of process that would "invent a tradition" by revealing Satie's music as if underlying certain types of current day music made out of spectra. The approach was influenced by my readings at the time of Michel Foucault, as can be seen in the quotes preceding the score. Apart from the aesthetic genealogy, the aim was, borrowing from his concept of archeology, to decontextualize the material by permutating and transforming the "statements" of Satie's music, dispersing its parts in order to arrive at some sort of structured randomness.

Assuming Satie as a spectral composer fitted quite well with the fact that the pitches of the first *Gymnopédie* can be interpreted as corresponding to the overtone series of a single fundamental (see Figure 1). With the ring modulation I could transform them to produce extra pitches corresponding to the sum and difference of the partials amongst themselves. The point was to start the piece at a maximum alteration from the original, gradually filtering towards the reconnaissance of the source, as if it were a residue remaining at the bottom of the process.

For this to be realizable, a pitch palette was devised, consisting of most partials, up to the 72nd, of the fundamental pitch G_0 – a low note of 24.5 Hertz, a whole tone

lower than the lowest note on a piano, which doesn't actually sound in the piece. This already set me in a very different sound world from that of spectralism, where microtones are approximated through quarter tones and partials are limited to the 20th. Had I been as interested as I am now in the music of James Tenney, I would have noticed many of the commonalities that my procedures had with some of his microtonal approaches; he also wrote in the 1970s an homage to Satie (*Quiet fan for Erik Satie*), based on a revelatory process upon *3 Morceaux en forme de poire*. Through calculation and experimentation a retuning scheme was devised that would permit the ensemble to play the majority of that pitch palette: 22 strings of the harp would be retuned as well as the fourth string of each string instrument for them to play only open strings and flageolets that would produce overtones of the G_0 —in this case, multiples of the 5th, 7th, and 11th partials. The alto flute would play partials tolerably close to equal temperament, plus some multiphonics, which in the case of this instrument having a tube tuned to G, would provide timbral chords containing pitches from the palette. The use of this palette implied that the instrumentation would be determined by pitch, as most partials can only be played by one specific instrument. This gives the ensemble a very peculiar character, making for melodic hockets between the instruments in some of the sections. (See the palette in Figure 2)

Having this instrumental setup, what was needed was a way to set it into motion, like if it were a kind of microtonal extended harp that somehow had to be “strummed.” The strumming patterns came out of an inverse spectral analysis of rhythms in the *Gymnopédie*. For all rhythmically homogeneous bars in the score, I would interpret each voice or subdivision of that rhythm as if it were a rhythmic multiple of a fundamental duration. By plotting the obtained spectrum as a waveshape its outline would be used to determine the pitch morphology for that section. The procedure for transcription would involve the graphic approximation of rhythms by tracing them out of the intersection between the morphologies and the pitches made available by the ring modulation, finally assigning the pitches to their corresponding instruments in the score. (Figure 3 shows this process graphically). This is the constructive principle for the first third of the piece, with ancillary variations happening along the way, like making certain notes longer or shorter, emphasizing Satie’s original notes from the ring modulated ones, making the texture more dense or sparse, etc. In the second third of the piece, the process becomes vertical instead of horizontal. The flute plays multiphonics and a rhythmic modulation happens together with a gradual filtering of the ring modulated tones, revealing the rhythms and pitches of Satie. The third and last section of the piece has remnants from the first part intruding on the ending lines of the original *Gymnopédie*. The very end drives up to the unused and highest partials.

By now, the greek letters in the title of the piece should be clear: the gamma indicates the fundamental G and the pi represents the number behind trigonometry and spectral analysis.

γνεαλοπαεδιε in the end points to directions unrelated to the compositional process that engendered it and is susceptible to various possible interpretations. I prefer listening to it as abstract music resulting from, but not illustrating, its premises and references. In this way it becomes a sort of “mini concerto” for harp, with mini woodwind (flute) and string sections, mini solos, and cadenzas. In any case, this incursion into overtones, invented genealogies and modified chamber ensembles made for a strange kind of music which doesn't sound like anything else I've written so far.

The piece is dedicated to my parents Ana and Jack.

—J.S.

1^{ère} GYMNOPÉDIE

ook te maken

ERIK SATIE

Version révisée en 1969

Lent et douloureux (♩ = 66)

PIANO. pp

(18) 17 27 21

15 15 16 12 (27/2) 12 12 (27/2) (27/2) 12

10 9 9 10 10 10 9 9 10 10 9 (27/4)

4 3 #0 (15/4) 5/2 27/8 x 3 x 9/4 3 3 3

pedal...

Figure 1. Interpreting the notes in Satie as partials of G_0 . These are indicated by numbers next to each note; the bottom staff shows some of the *Gymnopédie*'s chords as partials.

Alto Flute

mf < *f* *mp* < *f*

Harp

$A_3 \rightarrow A_b \rightarrow A_3 \rightarrow A_\sharp$ A_3 A_\sharp

Viola

sul IV

Violoncello

Contrabass

sul I

f

Detailed description: This is a page of a musical score for five instruments: Alto Flute, Harp, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The score is written in 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The Alto Flute part starts with a dynamic of *mf*, increases to *f*, then returns to *mp* before increasing again to *f*. The Harp part features a sequence of chords: $A_3 \rightarrow A_b \rightarrow A_3 \rightarrow A_\sharp$, followed by A_3 and A_\sharp . The Viola part includes a *sul IV* instruction. The Violoncello and Contrabass parts are mostly silent, with the Contrabass having a *sul I* instruction and a dynamic of *f* at the beginning of the second measure.

Chamba de um acorde (2011)

This piece again pursues my interest in the analogies between pitch and duration, this time consisting of an abstract process in which each instrument deals with a field of pitches that are mixed and distributed at different rhythmic proportions with respect to each other. It is a set of variations on a (big) chord and the many ways it can be partitioned, patterned and deployed rhythmically. Once the premises were decided on, most of the piece was written spontaneously, in the way of an improvisation over its materials, in about a week. In contrast, the piano solo and the transition to the end took almost a month.

Chamba is a polyphony of cycles and combinations of periodicities, producing an effect analogous to various bicycle wheels spinning at different speeds and interfering with each other, a sort of auditory *moiré* pattern, a bit like the way Galileo explains consonance as “commensurability”: the conjunction of different but related cycles. The writing of this piece broke a spell of almost a year in which I lost many of my reasons to write music. The title alludes to Antonio Carlos Jobim’s *Samba de uma nota*, but in Mexican Spanish “chamba” means “work” or “labor” and it is about a chord instead of a note.

—J.S.

Blank Space (2009)

The score of the piece was generated algorithmically, based on my research and implementation of “dissonance curves” as well as on an algorithm developed with my colleague Alberto Novello for “rhythmification”: accelerations/decelerations in several voices that produces moving canons. The electroacoustic part uses the dissonance software to synthesize various kinds of harmonizations based on sounds related to war.

The first part of the piece proceeds like regular contemporary music: abstract, “interesting” gestures and rhythms over a wide ambit in both instruments, accompanied by rhythmic layers of synthetic electronic sounds. At a certain stage the music steps out of itself as the same time as the world and reality enter into it. This reality is related to events that happened at the time of composition, so they were not completely chosen (at first I wanted the sounds of war to relate to Mexico’s insane and brutal “war on drugs,” then I delved into the by then stereotypical Iraq war, which is why the piece begins with an Iraqi Assyrian funeral chant, but then the bombing of civilians in Gaza in January 2009 overtook everything else). At this point the piece goes astray as the piano and soundtrack harmonize sound recordings of voices and bombs by way of solos separated by electronic chords. Later the clarinet takes a

solo that accompanies recordings of a bombed school, its material derived from the same process as the beginning of the piece but deployed melodically. Finally both instruments and the electronics finish with a chorale made out of notes derived from the bombs sprinkled with computer spoken quotes taken from architect and theorist Eyal Weizman that relate to the blanking out of populations.

The performance by Gabi and Daniel is brilliant. It is a piece I like a lot, quite unlike anything else I've written and, at the same time, a piece I feel quite uncomfortable with, very exposed and touching delicate matters. It has an aura of prayer or some kind of supplication, something I didn't notice during its making, probably due of the solemn subject matter and also because chorales, be them of any speed and kind, tend towards this kind of music.

—*J.S.*



photo by Jack Lach

Juan Sebastián Lach Lau

Composer and keyboard player. His recent instrumental and electroacoustic music as well as sound installations are based on algorithmic processes and harmonic microtonal inquiries from which he obtained a doctorate in artistic research at the University of Leiden in Holland in 2012. He has a bachelor (2003) and a master's (2005) degree from the Royal Conservatory in The Hague, Holland, and for the last four years has taught composition at the Las Rosas Conservatory in

Morelia, Mexico. He has been involved in jazz and rock groups (Psicotrópicos, Santa Sabina) and has composed music for theatre, film, and radio. His music has been played and recorded by diverse groups in various countries.

Track 1 recorded May 26, 2006 at Sonic Arts Research Centre (SARC) in Belfast, N. Ireland
Session Producer Henry Vega
Session Engineer J.S. Lach
Mix Engineer Pablo Lach

Track 2 recorded March 2, 2012 at Reduta Hall in Olomouc, Czech Republic
Session Producer Vít Mužík
Session Engineer Zdeněk Slavotínek

Track 3 recorded February 11, 2012 at Sala Niños Cantores, Conservatorio de las Rosas in Morelia, Michoacán, México
Session Producer J.S. Lach
Session Engineer J.S. Lach
Mix Engineer Pablo Lach

Track 4 recorded November 24, 2009 at Reduta Hall in Olomouc, Czech Republic
Session Producer Vít Mužík
Session Engineer Zdeněk Slavotínek

Track 5 recorded June 30, 2012 at Sala Niños Cantores, Conservatorio de las Rosas in Morelia, Michoacán, México
Session Producer J.S. Lach
Session Engineer J.S. Lach
Recording Assistant Jorge Alba
Mix Engineer Pablo Lach

Track 6 recorded May 25, 2012 at Orpheus Institute in Ghent, Belgium
Session Producer J.S. Lach
Session Engineer Juan Parra
Mix Engineer J.S. Lach

Acknowledgements Ana Lau, Jack Lach, Silvia de la Cueva, Rodrigo Sigal, Javier Álvarez, Luis Jaime Cortes, Pedro Salvador, Jacobo Lau, Francisco Colasanto, Salvador Silva, Manuel Rocha, Pablo Lach

Institutions Centro Mexicano para la Música y las Artes Sonoras (www.cmmas.org), Conservatorio de las Rosas, Orpheus Institute

Produced in part with aid from the National Funds for Culture and Arts, Mexico (FONCA). Producido en parte con ayuda del Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes en su Programa de Fomento a Proyectos y Coinversiones Culturales 2011.

Para Rita, inspiradora de tanta música y vida. In memoriam.

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- 1 **Pantaleón**9:41
The Electronic Hammer | Diego Espinosa, percussion;
Juan Parra, Henry Vega, computers
- 2 **'round ruby**7:21
Moravian Philharmonic Chamber Players | Jan Kučera, conductor
Jakub Látal, violin; Igor Kopyt, violin; Dominika Mužiková, viola;
Marián Pavlík, cello; Luděk Zakopal, contrabass; Marta Talabová, flute;
Jan Kučera, oboe, Aleš Janeček, clarinet; Jakub Moník, bass clarinet;
Vlastimil Hrda, bassoon; Jaroslav Hubek, French horn;
Ondřej Jurčeka, trumpet; Miroslav Tutko, trombone; Jiří Blahuněk,
vibraphone; Lucie Kaucká, piano
- 3 **rw + Continuidad Paralela**9:55
Pedro Salvador, percussion
- 4 **γενεαλογια**4:20
Moravian Philharmonic Chamber Players | Vít Mická, conductor
Michaela Turková, harp; Marta Talabová, alto flute; Dominika
Hánová, viola; Marian Pavlík, cello; Dalibor Teimer, bass
- 5 **Chamba de um acorde**11:31
Ensamble 3 | Salvador Torre, flute; Fernando Domínguez,
bass clarinet; Mauricio Nader, piano
- 6 **Blank Space**8:53
Daniel Pastene, clarinet; Gabi Sultana, piano