

John Psathas

Biography

Ioannis (John) Psathas makes music without borders of genre, culture or scale. Over more than three decades and some 200 works, the New Zealand-born composer of Greek heritage has written for orchestras and street bands, jazz legends and rock singers, concert halls and city streets, and has worked alongside musicians from North Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Asia.

His music first reached a truly global audience in 2004, when a billion people heard his fanfares and ceremonial music during the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Athens Olympic Games. That appetite for the epic has shaped much of his work since. *No Man's Land*, an eighty-minute cinematic concert marking the centenary of the First World War, brought together 150 musicians from 25 countries, each descended from opposing sides of the conflict, filmed in performance on battlefields around the world. The artists ranged from Serj Tankian of System of a Down to the Refugees of Rap and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg. *CubaSonic* turned 500 metres of Wellington's Cuba Street into a single instrument: 300 musicians from big bands, brass bands, taiko and batucada groups, orchestras and a musical Tesla coil, playing in total synchrony at a time when much of the world was still in lockdown. *Voices at the End*, for six grand pianos and immersive electronics, is a cinematic reckoning with our cosmic origins and our future as a species.

Collaboration is at the heart of John's work. He has worked with jazz saxophonists Michael Brecker and Joshua Redman, percussionists Dame Evelyn Glennie, Pedro Carneiro, Fabian Ziegler and Alexej Gerassimez, and singers OUM and Meeta Pandit, alongside many of the world's leading orchestras and string quartets and artists from rock, pop and electronica. He moves freely between notated scores, improvisation, film, electronics and new technologies, treating each as another way of reaching people.

Percussion has been a constant thread. Over three decades John has become one of the most sought-after composers for percussion, and several of his works are now cornerstones of the modern repertoire. *One Study One Summary*, for marimba, junk percussion and electronics, is a favourite of solo percussionists worldwide and is credited with reshaping electroacoustic marimba writing in the twenty-first century. *Kyoto*, written for Taiwan's Ju Percussion Group, and *Atalanta*, for Fabian Ziegler and pianist Akvilė Šileikaitė, are performed on concert stages and in conservatoires around the world.

Increasingly, his work confronts the world as it is. *Second-Hand Time* draws on the documentaries of Adam Curtis and the writing of Henry A. Giroux, Brad Evans, Noam Chomsky and Svetlana Alexievich. *Achlan wa Sahlan*, with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, marked five years since the Christchurch mosque attacks. For John, music is first a way of communicating, and of bringing people together.

John is an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit and an Arts Foundation Laureate. He lives in Wellington.