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**NHM EXHIBITION
USES MUSIC TO EXPLORE ITS WORLD-CLASS COLLECTION
OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY**

**Musicians from a Spectrum of Genres Commissioned to Create
Original Works for Museum's Main Galleries**

Sonic Scenery: Music for Collections

On view at NHM February 3 through May 3, 2006

LOS ANGELES—On **February 3, 2006**, the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County opens *Sonic Scenery: Music for Collections*, an exhibition that, for the first time, uses original music to focus attention on one of the world's most valuable and extensive collections of natural and cultural history. Ten renowned musicians and composers known for pushing the boundaries of music — **The Sun Ra Arkestra, Ozomatli, Autolux, Jon Hassell, Matmos, David J, Stephen Hartke, Nels Cline, Languis and Nobody** — were invited by the Museum to compose music specifically created for the Museum's main level collection galleries and spaces. Renowned conductor **Esa-Pekka Salonen** narrates the introduction for the exhibition.

“This transformative journey asks the question: ‘what do collections sound like?’ We believe that *Sonic Scenery* inspires visitors to wander and explore the collection—from dinosaurs and gems to ancient Latin American artifacts—in a way they never have before: through music,” says Museum Director and President Jane Pisano.



Musician David J analyzing the
gems inside NHM's
E.C. Hixon Gem Vault.
Photo: © Ryan Miller/
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The Exhibition

Sonic Scenery was developed as the Museum's second installment in a series of exhibitions designed to explore the ways visitors "see" its significant collection. Like its exhibition predecessor *Conversations*, the acclaimed visual-arts exploration of the Natural History Museum's collection, *Sonic Scenery* uses an artistic medium—music—to awaken imagination and understanding of the natural and cultural world. Concepts from both the *Conversations* and *Sonic Scenery: Music for Collections* exhibitions will be reiterated internationally in Leiden, Netherlands and Paris, France in 2006. A third exhibition, similarly encouraging a new way to experience the Museum's collection, is being planned.



“As you’ll hear, each musical composition shapes our discovery and enjoyment of the objects within each gallery or space. In a way, the composers have taken on the role of curators,” says the Museum’s Director of New Media and the exhibit’s director, Ben Rogers.

Jon Hassell inside the Rhinoceros diorama in the Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Oschin & Family Hall of African Mammals. Photo: © B +.

Sonic Scenery: Music for Collections remains part of the Museum experience through May 3, 2006. Visitors will use a personal audio system with infrared activation, enabling them to choose their own route and wander through the first floor galleries without having to push buttons. This system is available for a \$3 equipment rental fee to Museum visitors. An illustrated guide will provide pictures, a map, and comments by participating composers revealing insights into their methods and sources of inspiration.

Ancient Latin America Hall

The Sun Ra Arkestra, Recorded Live at NHM, Los Angeles

Sun Ra formed the Arkestra around 1953, performing big-band swing before evolving their music into cosmic jazz. Sun Ra and his Arkestra were music innovators—playing avant-garde jazz long before the genre was established. Now under the direction of Sun Ra protégé Marshall Allen, The Sun Ra Arkestra continues to perform its inimitable big-band improvisation in its work for the *Sonic Scenery* exhibition.

The band scheduled a late-night recording session inside the Ancient Latin America Hall to create new music amidst ceramic vessels, musical instruments, and ritualistic objects. Performing in front of a huge *Aztec Sun Stone*, the 15 members of The Sun Ra Arkestra spontaneously composed a song inspired by the ceremonial objects in the Hall.

Cenozoic Hall

Ozomatli

This beloved East Los Angeles band is known for its self-described “Afro-Latin-and-beyond style-mashing” music and social activism. Ozomatli wanted to create an orchestral piece to reflect the sense of imagination and delight inspired by Charles Knight’s *Rancho La Brea*, a painted mural of an imagined Pleistocene-Era Los Angeles. Images of the Museum’s prehistoric mastodons, sloth, camels, and horses surrounded Ozomatli during their recording, influencing them to use an intensive amount of percussion as a hip-hop backbone for the piece as a bass clarinet maintains the band’s distinctive brand of fun. The GRAMMY®-Award winning Ozomatli has a long history with NHM, dating back to vocalist and guitarist Raul Pacheco’s six years of choir practice at the Museum from the ages of 8-14.

The Garland Gallery American History Hall

Autolux

Walking into the American History Hall, the members of Autolux were struck by the problemsolving represented in the transportation and communications inventions displayed within the gallery. Fascinated by the size and elegance of the objects, the trio found itself moved by the human interface with invention and progress as expressed in their musical composition. Using a steady loop of mechanical sounds bearing a distinctively odd rhythm, Autolux forced itself to play their electric guitars, bass, and drums within the constructed parameters of the machine-like loop. This piece, perhaps *Sonic Scenery*’s most emotional, captures the vibrance of the gallery: from its wide-eyed excitement and wonder to its alluring melancholy for a bygone era.

The Mammal Halls

***Jon Hassell*, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Oschin & Family Hall of African Mammals**

Jon Hassell’s unique musical hybrid, blending global musical instincts and technologies to create what he describes as a “Fourth World,” has influenced generations of musicians such as David Byrne, Brian Eno, and Daniel Lanois. Using a conversation between two Masai tribe members, Hassell blends the harmonies

of language with digital rhythms. The piece not only captures the musicality of language but also evokes an imaginary dialogue between the Masai and the African landscape.

***Matmos*, North American Mammal Hall**

Employing their signature sampling of unorthodox sources as part of their experimental electronica, M.C. Schmidt and Drew Daniel structured their piece according to the layout of the North American Mammal Hall. Traversing the gallery in a counter-clockwise fashion, visitors will hear elaborate digital manipulations suggestive of the habitats in the hall. Banjo, harmonica, and field recordings (i.e. contact microphones on hair, the sound of antlers and sniffing, etc.) are among the sources used to create the composition and in many cases re-create the unique sounds made by the kind of animals in the dioramas, from the American Bison of North Central Wyoming to the Stellar Sea Lions inhabiting the rocky shores of Año Nuevo Island.

The E. Hadley Stuart Gallery, Gems and Minerals Hall

Stephen Hartke

Sonic Scenery: Music for Collections presents a world premiere work by classical composer Stephen Hartke, commissioned for the Museum's Gems and Minerals Hall. The piece will be his first environmental composition. While a few of Hartke's previous works were influenced by ancient stone inscriptions, the greater reason for selecting the hall was because of his son—Stephen Hartke, a Museum member for more than ten years, and his 12-year old son Sandy are frequent visitors to the Gems and Minerals Hall where they enjoy talking about Sandy's earth science classes. Hartke uses a percussion ensemble made up of marimba, soft symbols, vibraphone and Indian bells modulated by water to evoke natural processes, the gradual layering and brilliant color resulting from mineralization.

David J, The E.C. Hixon Gem Vault

As visitors meander towards the mid-section of the Gems and Minerals Hall, they enter a plush-red vault with black-granite walls to experience "Eyes and Stars" by David J, formerly of rock bands Bauhaus and Love and Rockets. David J explores chatoyancy, an inner reflection that creates a narrow band of light on the surface, as displayed in the Cat's-Eye chrysoberyl of NHM's Gem Vault. Rendered with keyboard and synthesizer, "Eyes and Stars" evokes the gems' ethereal shimmer.

The Dinosaur Hall

***Nobody and Mystic Chords of Memory*, First Gallery**

Founder and radio programmer of the internet-radio collective Dublab, Nobody (a.k.a. Elvin Estela) is a regular NHM visitor and DJ. Nobody wanted his commission, entitled “Blue Dissolve,” to reflect the environmental awareness conjured by viewing the fossils of a now extinct Plesiosaur, an ocean reptile that ranged 7 to 50 feet in length. In collaboration with Mystic Chords of Memory, Nobody used piano, acoustic guitar, and harp combined with electronic synthesizers and samples to help visitors envision the languid movements of massive marine reptiles unencumbered by modern-day environmental hazards.

Languis*, Second Gallery; **Instrumentation Recorded Onsite at NHM, Los Angeles*

Known for shaping mental images with melodies and moods, Languis recorded much of their instrumentation after visitor hours in the Museum’s Dinosaur Hall to produce a uniquely sonorous landscape for the gallery’s dinosaur fossils and recreations. Strings, autoharp, keyboards, and drums were recorded live at NHM and layered digitally in the band’s studio. The abstract sounds and atmospheric melodies created while recording within the Museum reference the sense of imagination and mystery that comes from encountering a 70- million year old Carnotaurus.

***Nels Cline*, Third Gallery**

Renowned guitarist and member of the band Wilco, Nels Cline created a dramatic interpretation of the Dinosaur Hall by layering electric and acoustic guitars, Hungarian zither, marxophone, piano harp, and various Turkish instruments. By looping and reversing the layered strings electronically, Cline facilitates a Museum visitor’s imaginary journey back to the Jurassic Era. As one wanders, other themes explore the tension and conflict of a time when dinosaurs roamed the earth.

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Related Events and Activities

NHM’s Public Programs department presents two First Fridays events in conjunction with this exhibition: opening night on February 3 and a follow-up March 3. For information, visit www.nhm.org/firstfridays.

Self-Guided Exhibition

All visitors must purchase a general admission ticket to the Museum in order to experience the exhibition. A personal audio system may be rented for a \$3 at the blue rental booth by the South Entrance to the

Museum.. An illustrated guide will provide pictures, a map, and comments by participating composers revealing insights into their methods and sources of inspiration. A companion *Sonic Scenery* CD will be available for purchase at the Museum.

Exhibition Catalog

A full-color catalog published by The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County will present both *Sonic Scenery* and the earlier *Conversations* exhibitions as two new approaches to Natural History Museum exhibition presentation and experience. The catalog, available in March 2006, accompanies the exhibition and is available in the Museum Store for purchase or available online at www.nhm.org/sonicscenery.

General Information

The Natural History Family of Museums serves more than 1 million families and visitors annually in Los Angeles County and is a national leader in research, exhibitions and education. The Museum is L.A.'s second oldest cultural institution, the first to open its doors to the public in 1913, and has amassed one of the world's most extensive and valuable collections of natural and cultural history – more than 33 million objects, some as old as 500 million years.

The Museum is located at 900 Exposition Blvd., Los Angeles. Tickets are \$9 for adults, \$6.50 for children. For more information, visit the museum's website at www.nhm.org or call (213) 763-DINO.

Credit

Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County

NHM Organizers

Fully developed by NHM Public Programs Department
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