**John Psathas - ‘Voices at the End’**

*Prologue - Mitote*

*Part 1 – Business as Usual – Predator*

*Part 2 – The Great Unravelling – Unravelling*

*Part 3 – The Great Turning – Ichi-Go Ichi-E*

*Epilogue - Chrysalis*

Born in New Zealand in 1966 the son of Greek immigrant parents, John Psathas is a genre-crossing composer whose formidable quantity of music draws on a broad spectrum of classical, jazz, rock and electronica. Film scores and music with digital audio also form part of an eclectic work list that reference an impressively wide cultural framework. Acclaim came early on with *Matre’s Dance* (1991), a high-octane duet for percussion and piano that later secured his international reputation through championship by Evelyn Glennie. Indeed, percussion has been a central stimulus for the composer who has subsequently found expressive outlet in a Double Concerto for percussion, piano and orchestra and *Djinn,* a concerto for marimba.

*Voices at the End* is described as a digital and acoustic hybrid concerto for six pianos, audio track, and video. Its digital audio landscape comprises a pre-recorded soundscape of recitations, singing and instrumental performances created by Psathas in collaboration with the multi-media artist and composer [David Downes](https://sounz.org.nz/contributors/1033?locale=en). Of *Voices at the End*, Psathas observes it ‘tackles the uncomfortable condition of perpetual growth and its ruinous effect on our shared environment but offers hope in the form of the work being done to ensure the survival of our species’.

The workwas originally inspired by the 2015 film *Planetary,* a provocative documentary byauthor and environmental activist Joanna Macywho investigates our cosmic origins and poses questions about potential ways forward for us, and our planet’s future. She suggests our prospects can be shaped in three ways: the first, which she calls ‘Business as Usual’, is to ignore thereality of our planet and maintain economic and industrial development. Secondly, she considers the cost of our inertia in ‘The Great Unravelling’. A third narrative, ‘The Great Turning’, is to encourage an environmental shift from an industrialised society to one that promotes sustainability. Macy proposes a kind of revolution to secure our survival.

These narratives form the three central panels of this five-movement work. Implicit in the work’s title *Voices at the End,* each movement ends with a single voice or multiple voices. In the prologue, we hear the *Mahābhārata* (one of two great Sanskrit epics of India); in ‘Business as Usual’, massed crowds chant in unison. In ‘The Great Unravelling’, the voice of the natural world reasserts itself after our demise, and in ‘The Great Turning’ we hear humanity's interstellar message taken deep into outer space. Children’s voices conclude the ‘Epilogue’.

The work opens with a ‘*Prologue - Mitote*’ of abbreviated rhythmic patterns and sparse textures that draws inspiration from Don Miguel Ruiz’s spiritualist text ‘The Four Agreements’ comparing the human mind to a fog where people communicate but cannot understand one another. This yields to a spoken passage from the *Mahābhārata* expressing a desire to live regardless of danger.

*‘Business as Usual’* is a movement of accumulating tension marked by aggressive, pulsing rhythms. On to these Psathas maps a digital accompaniment of explosions, a roaring bear and massed unison chanting capturing the notion of a world driven by insatiable, predatory forces bent on wilful destruction. Respite from this frenetic intensity arrives in the gradual reawakening that is *‘The Great Unravelling,* its dramatic force derived from the juxtaposition of an Armenian love Song (sung by Briar Prastiti) and accumulating piano sonorities that culminate in explosive sound effects and atmospheric bird song. *‘Ichi-Go Ichi-E’* "One time, one meeting” - a Japanese four-character idiom that describes the concept of  treasuring meetings with people. Often translated as "for this time only,” "never again," or "one chance in a lifetime.” The term reminds people to cherish any gathering that they may take part in, emphasising the idea that many meetings in life are not repeated. Ruminative piano textures convey a sense of peace for the brief movement ‘The Great Turning’ and form an appropriately calm background for a speech from the 1977 Voyager 1 space mission to communicate our world story to extra-terrestrials.

Bringing the work to a rhythmically propulsive close is *‘Epilogue - Chrysalis’* a pianistic joyride described by Psathas as ‘celebrating the acceptance of diversity and cultures of compassion, while conjuring powerful and positive forms of socialised energy’. Overlayed on to its calm final bars are the sounds of children playing, hope cherished in their distant, if innocent voices.