Susan Lubetkin: How it started

I studied bowhead whales living in the Arctic for my PhD at the University of Washington and then went on to do post-docs in statistics and in oceanography. I remember sitting in one biological oceanography seminar after another, and realizing that no matter where the research started, it nearly always ended with a discussion of what was happening with climate change. While all the data were compelling to me and to the other scientists in the room, there was a general feeling that the message was still too abstract, distant, and subtle to have any impact without being presented in a more immediate and personal context. I’m a cellist in LUCO - I know how powerful music can be for communicating huge themes and emotions. Something clicked for me, and I sent Christophe Chagnard an e-mail with the subject line “totally nuts, probably impossible, poorly formed idea ... and a dinner invitation.” I told him that I had an idea for a symphony about climate change. I even went so far as to suggest some themes for individual movements, which was a stretch since I don’t write music at all. Luckily for all of us on two counts, Christophe said yes to writing this piece, but he did so by taking a completely different musical path than the one I so naively suggested in that first message.

Christophe Chagnard: What it is now

Terra Nostra (“Our Earth” in Latin) is a multimedia symphony about climate change. It is an evocative combination of orchestral music, poetry, and photography, intended to heighten awareness of the effect of human activity on our eco-system. It is intended to invite a broad discourse and inspire concrete initiatives.

Terra Nostra is highly programmatic, filled with themes and quotes that depict precise images and phenomenon. The architecture of Terra Nostra is based on a timeline spanning from the
Big Bang through present time, and on to an unknown and alarming future. Following the formation of the earth, the evolution of the human species is depicted through a series of well-known musical quotes. The Industrial Revolution heralds a new era, which brings about a dramatic change in the aesthetics and mood of the music. Drought and its many consequences are followed by population explosion, melting of Arctic sea ice, rising CO₂ concentrations, and air pollution. *Terra Nostra* concludes with a palindrome, ending as it began.

Because it is the next generation who will be dramatically affected by the steadily accelerating changes in our climate and environment, *Terra Nostra* includes a poem by 18-year-old Emily Siff, who had complete creative freedom in expressing her convictions. The poem is embedded within the symphony, and is read in three two-minute segments. To intensify the audience experience, 130 provocative photographs and short videos are precisely synchronized with the piece and are projected on a large screen above the orchestra.

**David Woolley-Wilson: Where we’d like to go next**

**Short term**

We would like to refine the visual component, secure rights to all the images, and get *Terra Nostra* professionally recorded by a nationally recognized orchestra. Once the images, poetry, and new recording of the music have been finalized, a DVD and online version of *Terra Nostra* will be made available and used in educational or community settings to create broad exposure to *Terra Nostra* and its powerful message.

**Long term**

Next *Terra Nostra* will be promoted throughout the region, across the country, and around the globe. We will encourage live performances of *Terra Nostra* by community, university, and professional orchestras and make educational presentations in schools, universities, and civic organizations to reach new audiences and create dialogue about climate change.

**Dream big**

With your support we can submit *Terra Nostra* for consideration for awards like the Grammys as a ground breaking musical composition on climate change and to the Oscars as a compelling short documentary.

**How to get involved**

Become a Friend of *Terra Nostra* through Sustainable Seattle (SustainableSeattle.org, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization) or contact:

- Christophe Chagnard  chagnard@gmail.com  (206) 898-4499
- Susan Lubetkin  lubetkin@uw.edu  (206) 719-4730
- David Woolley-Wilson  dkww09@gmail.com  (510) 599-6402