

Over Lunan



Soundtrack / Radio play / Live Performance – Choir, Marimba, Trumpet, Sound

Our world is formed and connected by the sea. Thousands of years ago, these coastlines were shaped by cataclysmic events; in Mesopotamia too, mythical floods gave rise to stories

of the Apkallū – half-fish, half-human sages who emerged from the sea to bring wisdom to our ancestors, living in what became known as the ‘cradle of civilisation’.

Thousands of years later, those same lands lie decimated by war and the world’s oceans are rising again... what would the Apkallū say if they returned to speak for one last time?

Commissioned by Hospitalfield and Arbroath 2020+1, **Over Lunan** was a multifaceted project inspired by Babylonian mythology.



RADIO DOCUMENTARY

Revealing the discoveries of journalist Charlie Ross who spent a summer in Lunan Bay on the north east coast of Scotland, investigating the area’s history and mythology, and the natural forces that have shaped this coast through millennia.

LIVE PERFORMANCE

*An extraordinary promenade performance in the dunes of **Lunan Bay in Angus, Scotland**. The special open-air production ran from 9 – 19 September 2021.*

ATRA-HASIS

Beach soundscapes and choral works sung from portions of the ancient flood myth poem Atra-Hasis.

INITIAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Behind the scenes details of the initial development of the project and the application of spatial audio tools in the processes of composition.

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Live Performance

A ritualised choral performance at Lunan Bay, Angus.

A perfect crescent running for nearly two miles. To the north end lie deeply formed sand dunes, their height testament to the actions of more ancient seas; Here we are offered protection.

Lost in time. In Mesopotamian creation stories, after mythical floods, half fish-half human sages, emerged from the sea to bring wisdom to the region long reputed as the 'cradle of civilisation'.

Thousands of years later, the same lands lie decimated by war, while the world's oceans are rising again... what would the Apkallū say if they returned to speak for one last time?

A commission by Hospitalfield and Arbroath 2020 marking the 700-year anniversary of the Declaration of Arbroath.

[In collaboration with Aproxima](#)



Reviews

[SCOTSMAN-PRESS-Over-Lunan -Spectacular-event-recalling...on-Scottish-beach-dunes- -The-Scotsman](#) [Download](#)

[Smokie-hot-action-and-goosebumps -a-car...ath- -Scotland-holidays- -The-Guardian](#) [Download](#)

Over Lunan



Initial Research and Development

Funded by Creative Scotland an initial R&D period took place in March 2020 hosted at the [Hospitalfield arts centre](#).

I was approached by Aproxima to work with the New Music Ensemble at St Andrew's university, to compose a soundtrack underpinning an immersive theatrical experience realised as both live performance and radiophonic work.

The project builds upon [previous collaborations with Bede Williams](#) and connects with my work as part of the pan-European research network [Reconfiguring the Landscape](#).

The main challenge of the work is to evoke a dramatic ritualised setting against which theatrical activities can unfold. Initial R&D activities undertaken at Hospitalfield, Greenwich and St Andrew's.

A specific site, the beach and dunes of along Lunan Bay in Arbroath acts as a point of inspiration and departure. These constantly fluid and evolving dunes reflect a diversity of time and duration. The entire coastline is in flux, and this notion of impermanence and evolution forms an integral part of the experience within the final performance.

Initial choral sketches, written in Akkadian, were performed by the choir of **St Salvator's** chapel St Andrews. The libretto features incantations centring around the great and mighty flood wave, a reference to both the mythic 'great flood' and the **storegga slides** which decimated the coastal regions around the North sea around 8000 years ago.

kaššu – is Akkadian for massive, mighty and powerful flood waters, which this musical sequence (bars 26-30) seeks to evoke.

not strict tempo but gradual and long Full Score 3
swirl and recede
mp < mf f f mp > pp

26 ♩=20
a ssh u > a ka shu > a ka sh u t'sch
mf < f f f
a a shu a shu ka sh u a
p gliss. f mf
big crescendo ka a shu a shu a uoo ooh u a
p f mf
ka a u o u o ka sh u

These choral materials were then layered and combined with other instrumental recordings, such as those made in the studios and stairwells of the Old Royal Naval College at the University of Greenwich, with the trumpet player **Bede Williams**.

And guided marimba improvisations performed by Cameron Sinclair and Angus Farquhar recorded up in Hospitalfield's historic painting studios.

Combined, these materials formed the basis of the initial musical sketches which were intended to underpin the theatrical experience. These instrumental sounds were combined with field recordings from the Lunan bay location (ocean waves and wind whistling through the dunes) and edited into multichannel soundscapes to evoke impressions of narrative trajectory.

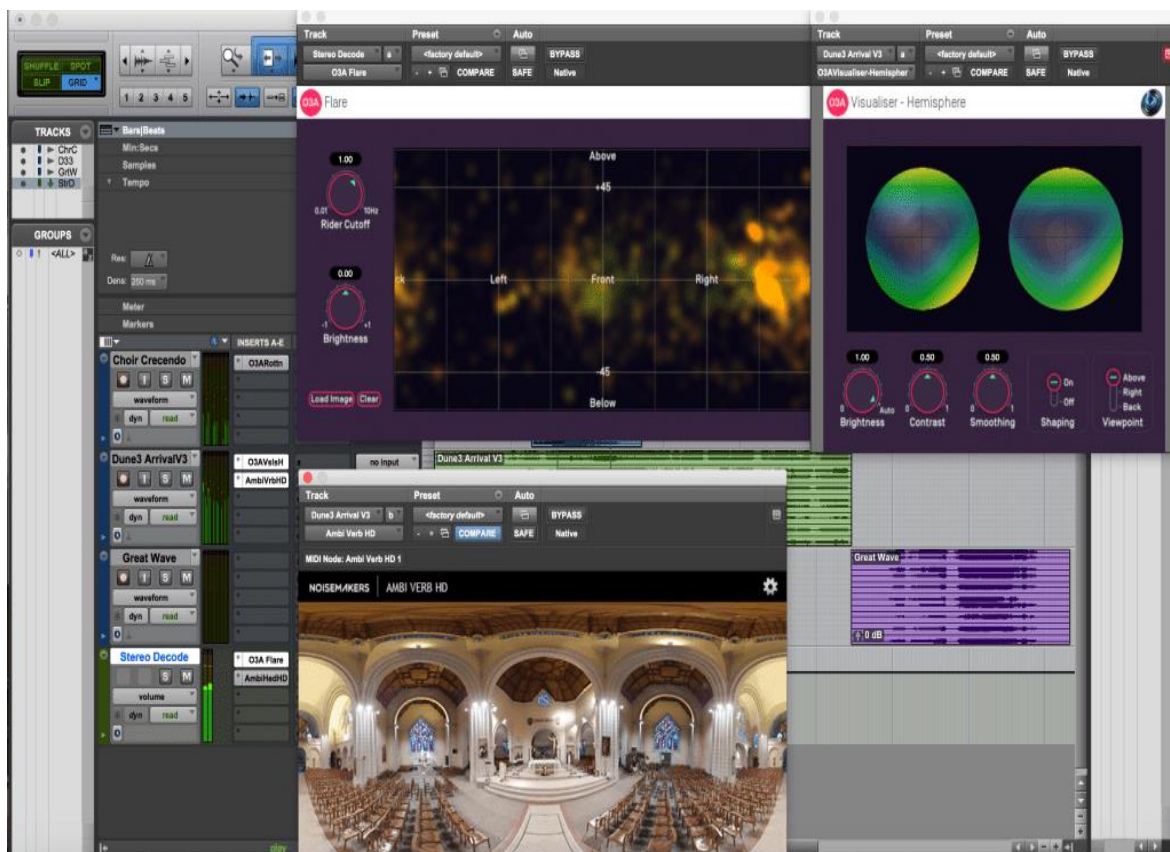


The physical experience of walking into the amphitheatre-like dunes, along pathways through the grasses, conveys a clear physical narrative. We were clear that to reflect this sonically we would require an immersive and spatial approach to audio. Less fixed on temporal progression and development and more on smooth spatial progression. We experimented with populating the dunes with loudspeakers to enable a spatial reproduction of audio. Complemented with sound design elements and recordings from libraries these elements were combined and edited into evocative multichannel soundscapes.

[Binaural stereo audio (listen on headphones for full spatial effect)]

Spatial Audio – Acoustics and Ambisonics

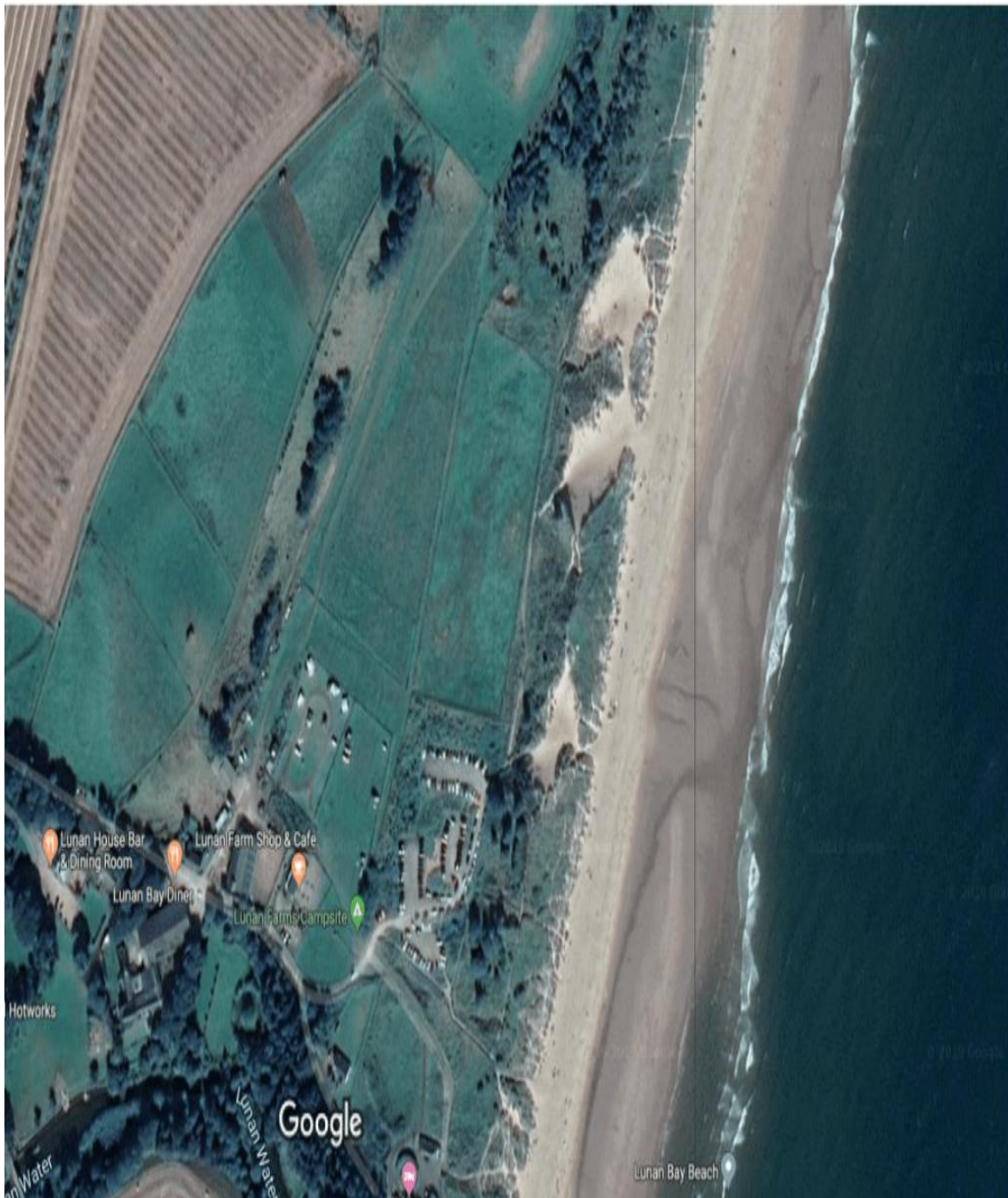
All recordings encode spatial images which document the acoustics and spatial characteristics of the location in which sonic activities took place. Each location possesses its own sonic characteristics and affordances which define and shape the listener/audiences experience.



[Pro Tools screenshot showing 3D Ambisonic soundfield]

Nowhere is this more apparent than in live site-sensitive productions. Discussions within [Reconfiguring the Landscape](#) have raised questions of spatial identity, resonance and the experience of space as dynamic. The importance of spatial experience and soundscape has only been heightened by lockdown in the pandemic.

In positioning work within a physical location one must respond to the affordances of space and site, working with the existing soundscape and the limitations of topography. Additionally, one must accept the fluid motion of the audience in and through this space. Therefore, unlike traditional concert or studio presentation there must be an openness to the musical forms which enable the passage of the audience member to chart their trajectory through the piece.



[Lunan Bay Dunes]

This requires a spatial approach to composition. One that embraces the physicality of sound and the natural modulations which occur through phase adjustment and relative intensity as audiences navigate and pass through a space. Temporal extension therefore became a key compositional methodology employed within the work, with recorded materials stretched extended and transformed to enable audiences to immerse themselves within an established soundfield which they modulate themselves through their physical positioning and orientation.



Thorough documentation and study of the space was therefore a key part of the development of the work. The physical act of walking around, into and over the dunes modulates and filters the natural soundscape, pulling the audience closer or further from the natural sounds of the surrounding environment. Field recordings taken from this location and its sonic unfolding have been key informants guiding the structures and development of the projects soundscapes.

Relocation and Radiophonics

For a work so embedded in the landscape, there are significant questions of access and engagement. The full theatrical production can never be experienced outside of the dunes, but even before lockdown we had discussed questions of legacy and how audiences might still gain an experience of the event and space outside of the theatrical run of the work. One proposition was to transpose the location into a purely radiophonic sound based work.

Multichannel impulse responses were taken of physical spaces so as to be able to experiment and respond to the acoustic as well as create virtual approximations of the space for testing and composition. These also informed subsequent design of loudspeaker array and configuration. Utilising ambisonic microphones it is possible to capture a 3D rendering of a physical the soundscape, and or to construct an entirely designed soundscape. These can then be rendered out in a standard and accessible stereo format, with the spatial information **encoded binaurally** for headphone listening.



[3Dio binaural microphone setup]

This enables the experience of space and place to be communicated and transcoded into the work, broadcast for engagement across diverse audiences. Global lockdowns amidst the pandemic have highlighted how important access to media can be over digital formats and how listening has become a key aspect of peoples experience in lockdown (evidenced by the number of press articles on **the uncanny quiet and listening**).

A radio version of the work needs to transport the listener to the beach location, establishing the natural environment, before beginning the transformation and overlaying of the dramatic remodulation of the space. The experience should still be extended and allow listeners personal exploration but, what is lost in physical location can be counterbalanced through the additional levels of compositional control and clarity of sound materials, allowing for close proximity of materials, greater dynamics and greater exploration of sound textures.

Future Developments

In the summer of 2020 project director Angus Farquhar and dramaturg Purni Morell, acquired an additional [Creative Scotland Open Fund](#) grant to support the development of the script and to adapt the live performance plans of the project into a radiophonic work for broadcast. This process has been ongoing through into autumn and has included negotiations with various broadcasters for the final exhibition of the project.

In autumn, I submitted an [Arts Council England Grant](#) to support the development of the musical components of the work, including the appropriate fees for professional musicians, to undertake our own sonic R&D activities and socially distanced recording sessions.

In tandem with the R&D this ACE project seeks to document and reveal the behind-the-scenes creative work which underpins the UK creative industries and our world leading theatre and musics.



[Still

from previous documentary film "[Immersive Hyperreal Soundscapes](#)"]

Through this project I will continue to explore the sonic possibilities available, collaborating with world leading musicians in an open compositional partnership and I am keen to broaden the musical palette of the final piece through the introduction of additional flute textures (expanding on work with the flute and its extended sonic

possibilities as part of the **Evegeni Bauer** "**Child of the Big City**" project) bridging between the breath of the voices and the trumpet instrumentation.



[Photograph from the dress rehearsal of "*Child of the Big City*" performance at the Byre Theatre (April 2019)]

The musical materials and sound design will be integrated with the voice parts (performed by **Robin Liang**), into the realisation of both the radiophonic work, and future theatrical live performances.

An additional creative Scotland grant is pending to support the development and realisation of these live performances which, if successful, will take place in May 2021.