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**ANNOUNCING THE PASSING OF AN IMPORTANT  
COMPOSER AND MUSICAL INTELLECT**

**JOHN JOSEPH BURKE**

May 10, 1951 - January 18, 2020

[TORONTO, ONTARIO, JANUARY, 2020] Toronto, Ontario – It's with a very heavy heart that I write about the passing of my dear colleague and friend of many years, the brilliant Canadian composer John Burke.

John's extraordinary musical gifts were spotted in early grade school, and his musical journey began as a little boy with an intensive involvement in chant and sacred choral music at St. Michael's Choir School in Toronto. Upon graduation from the choir school, John studied composition at McGill University, privately in France, and at the University of Michigan where he earned a doctorate in composition. He taught at McGill University, McMaster University, and the University of Victoria.

John received many important commissions and performances of his work by such organizations as La Société de musique contemporaine du Québec, Les Événements du neuf, New Music Concerts, Vancouver New Music, the Esprit Orchestra, the CBC Vancouver Orchestra, the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, the Lafayette String Quartet and many others. His many awards and prizes include the prestigious Jules Léger Prize for New Chamber Music. John received a Chalmers Arts Fellowship and many other grants that underwrote extensive residencies in places such as Bali, India, South Korea, Japan and other regions of the globe.

In John's experience as a cathedral chorister he had internalized a function for music as the facilitation of a spiritual process and not solely as an aesthetic expression. This was undoubtedly a source of his interest in the transformative power of myth and ritual and prompted his explorations of the role of music and consciousness and the relationship of sound and states of consciousness. His explorations included work with shamanic teachers in the Amazon and Andes.



John's first composition to reflect the influence of these new ideas was his work *Remember Your Power* which he wrote in 1997 when living in Vancouver, and which was performed by the esteemed Vancouver based pianist Jane Hayes.

A prominent component in John's exploration of the effects of sound and music on consciousness was his work with the contemplative practice of walking the labyrinth, especially the medieval design found at Chartres Cathedral in France. He produced many high-profile labyrinth events across Canada, including at Harbourfront Centre in Toronto for the 2010 International World Music Festival: What is Classical? For this occasion, the world premiere of Burke's *Heiratikos* was performed by Ensemble Vivant, whom John had requested perform this work. The subsequent recording "*Mysterium, Music for the Labyrinth*" performed by Ensemble Vivant, was produced by John Burke.

Along with his musical genius, Dr. Burke was an erudite, supremely intelligent, highly spiritual, generous man, with a quick wit and wonderful sense of humour.

John had travelled to Toronto on December 6, 2019 to hear Ensemble Vivant in concert at Hugh's Room Live. Included on the program was my performance of John's Art Tango, *La Despedida*, which he had given to me as a present. It is significant that this was the last live performance of his music that he heard before his passing. He treasured this experience and gift, as do I. It also seems significant that *La Despedida* means *The Farewell*.

John died peacefully at his home in Marmora, Ontario. He is survived by his Mother, Camilla Cain. His passing is a loss to the music world and to those who loved him dearly.

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**A Tribute Concert to John Burke: A Celebration of His Musical Life**, is being organized by pianist Catherine Wilson, which will be held later in 2020. Details to follow.