

Guide to the Joe Catalano Papers, 1952-1998

Finding aid prepared by Karma Pippin
Special Collections, F.W. Olin Library, Mills College

Contact Information:

Special Collections, F.W. Olin Library, Mills College

5000 MacArthur Boulevard

Oakland CA 94613

Phone: (510) 430-2047

Fax: (510) 430-2278

Email: jbrown@mills.edu

URL: http://www.mills.edu/LIBRARY/LIB_SVCS/LIB_COLL/Special.html

Processed by:

Karma Pippin with the assistance of Marin Hood

Date Completed:

December 2002

2002 F.W. Olin Library, Mills College. All rights reserved.

Descriptive Summary:

Title: Joe Catalano Papers, 1952-1998

Source of Acquisition: Donated June 2001 by Wendy Jeanne Burch

Extent: ca. 22 linear feet

Repository:

Special Collections, F.W. Olin Library, Mills College

5000 MacArthur Boulevard

Oakland CA 94613

Administrative Information:

Access Restrictions: Open for research.

Publication Rights: Contact the Special Collections Curator, F.W. Olin Library, Mills College, for copyright information and permission to publish.

Preferred Citation: [item], Joe Catalano Archive, 1952-1998, Special Collections, F.W. Olin Library, Mills College.

Biographical Facts:

Joe Catalano was a native of New York State. He was born in Elmira on November 29, 1952, and most of his early years were spent in Buffalo. He attended St. Joseph's Collegiate High School there, received a B.A. in Music at the University of Buffalo, and obtained his M.A. in Musicology at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. He moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1985, as did Wendy Jeanne Burch, and they were married on July 2, 1988 in San Francisco. Catalano was deeply committed to contemporary music and to the arts community in the San Francisco Bay Area and elsewhere up to his early death in San Francisco on May 27, 1998. In addition to his diverse musical activities, he held several posts in branch libraries in the University of California library system: Biosciences Library (head of serials processing), Astronomy/Mathematics/Statistics Library (operations manager), and Music Library (circulation supervisor). In this last position, he was leader in the Digital Music Network Project (which he dubbed "Musilan"), a system of delivering music listening assignments via the network, for which the team won a Distinguished Service Award in 1997. He was a composer, producer and performer of great versatility and extensive eclectic inspiration. He wrote music for the concert hall, the theater, film, and gallery spaces, using, among other instruments, piano, harpsichord, electronic drones and harmonics, sounds of the natural world, harmonic singing, the didjeridu, and an instrument he invented, the Spirit Stick, which was a bowed, one-string instrument with a little round ceramic drum that he electronically enhanced in performance with small contact microphones and played with a violin bow and chopsticks.

One of his early compositions was in the form of a dialogue between suits of playing cards. His first major work, a collaboration with Jeff Noonan, *It's In the Cards* (1985-1987), was an evening-length multimedia, multi-artist musical performance work based solely on contributions of mail art. Many of these musical scores are unique large hand-drawn examples of graphic art, and Catalano also incorporated musical notation into computer graphic designs, as for *Five Terrestrial Projections for Guitar and Other Instruments*. He was a member of the Mills College Didjeridu Ensemble, based at the Center for Contemporary Music at Mills College, and of the Strawberry Creek String Band, in which he played guitar and didjeridu.

Beginning in St. Louis in the early 1980s, Joe Catalano was actively involved in fund-raising musical events and poetry readings on behalf of social justice issues and in events that promoted other artists. In 1992 he proposed, and curated through 1996, an annual *High Tides: San Francisco New Music Festival of Bay Area Composers*, sponsored by the Intersection for the Arts in San Francisco, that featured new works by Bay Area composers and sound artists. In addition, he and his wife Wendy sponsored *The Homestead Series*, a grass-roots poetry, music and performance series which they organized and held in their home every three or four months for many years. Wendy, who has had similar evenings since Joe's death, intends to continue this tradition under a new name.

Joe Catalano believed that music had the power to enlighten and transform. He studied with Pauline Oliveros, attending her Deep Listening™ workshops, where he absorbed her sense of music as sonic meditation.

In 1992, Catalano conceived and organized “Pauline Oliveros: Four Decades of Composing, A Celebration,” a six-city live, interactive teleconferenced concert of experimental music, poetry and performance art between The Intermedia Research Foundation in New York; The Parlour, Kingston, New York; Houston, Texas; The Interarts Consortium, U.C.S.D. La Jolla; The Electronic Café, International, the Los Angeles area (Santa Monica); and San Francisco Bay Area (Quiet Cat Studio, Oakland). Fifty performing artists participated, including Oliveros, in this event that incorporated the six seminal cities in her career.

In a different sphere, he collaborated with John DiStefano to create music for Kwan and Iger’s theater production *Pins and Noodles*, which premiered in November 1993 at the Center for the Arts, Yerba Buena Gardens in San Francisco, a work that was transformed into a film that premiered in the PBS series POV in May 1997.

Catalano repeatedly explored the relation to music of mathematics, geometry and astronomy, and incorporated into his compositions the cosmologies of ancient or distant cultures. He was drawn to large-scale time structures, the archeological remains of ancient civilizations, the enduring natural world, extended geologic periods, and the nature of large bodies of water with their very slow currents in the deeps; perceptions of these he made available to the listener in site-specific meditative soundscapes or sonic environments, performances of eight or nine hours.

Five Terrestrial Projections for Guitar and Other Instruments was conceived as a set of five chamber pieces highlighting the guitar with different combinations of other instruments. The first score is based on musical material derived from a magic square of nine notes; the next is formatted into two squares; the third is built on the Fibonacci number series found in the growth patterns of many trees, plants and animals; the fourth takes its musical structure from the celestial siting rings at the Pre-Columbian Cahokia Mounds; and the last, the guitar solo, takes graphic and musical inspiration from Ptolemy’s *The Almagest*, Copernicus’ *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*, and Book Five of Kepler’s *The Harmonies of the World*, examining the relationship between scientific world models and truth.

In *Yesterday ForeTold/ Ayer PreSagio* (1992), produced with visual artist Charles Rose at the Mission Theater/ Teatro Mision in San Francisco, music was combined with changing visual projections, performance, and highly ritualized narration. Its temporal form is a reenactment, within the performance time (5 hours, 16 minutes and a few seconds), of the Mesoamerican 52-year calendar – the first full cycle of the

Mayan/Aztec calendar wheel, the *xiuhmolpilli* (itself based on two unlike calendars, one sacred and one secular) – by proportioned calculations within a structure of musical sections. Visual projections by Charles Rose use Mayan, Aztec and Western scientific astrophysical images. The performance incorporates the dramatic recitation of original texts from the *Codex Florentino*, the manuscript written by Fray Bernardino Sahagun's students from Mexican eyewitnesses to the conquest of Mexico by the Spanish. These consist of eight dark omens said to have been experienced by the inhabitants of Mexico City ten years before the invasion of Cortez in 1519. Each section of this Spanish text is followed by its translation into Nahuatl and English, the latter delivered by poet Wendy Jeanne Burch. The work is both a meditation upon a civilization's vastly different perception of time and its presentiment of its own demise at the hands of a hostile and alien culture.

Catalano's immense, ongoing and final set of projects was *As Oceans Curve* and *An Arc of Gathering: The Mississippi River at Minneapolis/St. Paul, St. Louis/East St. Louis, and New Orleans/Algiers*, the latter in three parts, each in six river stages. These complex works are a series of site-specific sound installations that are a meditation on different aspects of the physical and psychic nature of the world's oceans and the Mississippi River, as well as the physical space in which the pieces are performed. These are nine-hour performance/installation pieces built up from the elements of the history, geographical location and exact physical dimensions of each performance space.

An Arc of Gathering, Part I, The Mississippi River at Minneapolis/St. Paul, which premiered in March of 1997 at the Red Eye Theatre in Minneapolis, was to be Catalano's last performance.

Joe Catalano had also collaborated with his wife, poet and musician Wendy Jeanne Burch, in the piece *Traffic Prayers*, a meditation on the *bardos* of the Tibetan Book of the Dead. They performed this at the Stoa Gallery in Petaluma, one of several guest stations contributing to the Mills College campus performance of Pauline Oliveros's *NonStop Flight: 30 Years of the Center for Contemporary Music* in 1996. *Traffic Prayers* is an ongoing project of Wendy Jeanne Burch's, as it continues to evolve from her text.

The couple worked to establish a California chapter of the Pauline Oliveros Foundation, and on November 12, 2000 the Pauline Oliveros Foundation Bay Area (POFBA) was announced by Oliveros at the home of Wendy Jeanne Burch.

Arrangement:

This collection consists of ten series: Series 1. Research and Study: Musicology and related numerical systems; Series 2. Research, Reflection, Synthesis. Subject files; Series 3. Works: Original compositions, productions, projects and appearances; Series 4. The Arts Community. Professional associations, funding organizations, assistance, recording and performing copyright regulations and other practical issues; Series 5.

Publicity; Series 6. Audiovisual Material; Series 7. Photographs. Family, places, performances; Series 8. Correspondence; Series 9. Personal material; Series 10. Oversize flat material. Some series further divided into subseries.

Scope and Contents:

Series 1. Research and Study: Musicology and related numerical systems

This series consists primarily of graduate study toward a Masters of Fine Arts degree. Subseries 1. Class assignments (1980-1981), arranged chronologically; Subseries 2. Class and ongoing notebooks (1978-1985), arranged chronologically, then alphabetically; Subseries 3. Card index of works, composers, librettists, and instruments; Subseries 4. Thesis: *The Chigiani Music Manuscripts: A descriptive catalogue*. (1982-1983); Subseries 5. Scores: Other composers (photocopies), two boxes by composer, one box by period; Subseries 6. Scores: *Yokinogo. An Actor's Revenge*. Music by Minoru Miki, libretto by James Kirkup (1981; MS photocopy in four binders).

Series 2. Research, Reflection, Synthesis. Subject files and workbooks. This series consists of scientific and cultural background material, artistic and reflective pieces, personal papers, notebooks and formal writings on music. Subseries 1. Subject files (mostly photocopies of printed material), arranged alphabetically; Subseries 2. Personal notebooks, journals and sketchbooks (1985-1998), arranged chronologically; Subseries 3. Personal calendars, astrological and poetic and literary material, North American arts, myths, texts, studies (reproduced and mailed; 1985-1997), arranged chronologically or by subject.

Series 3. Works: This series consists of original compositions, productions, projects and appearances. Subseries 1. Scores (MS): Early original compositions and arrangements, arranged alphabetically; Subseries 2. Scores (MS): Music for plays; Subseries 3. *It's In the Cards* (1985-1987); Subseries 4. *Five Terrestrial Projections* (1983-1990); Subseries 5. *Yesterday ForeTold* (1985-1992); Subseries 6. *As Oceans Curve* (1991-1995) and *An Arc of Gathering* (1996-1997), with several ordered sequences – by piece; by subject; by venue and date; Subseries 7. *Pins & Noodles* (1993-1998); Subseries 8. Pauline Oliveros' projects (1971-1996); Subseries 9. High Tides New Music Festival (San Francisco Festival of New Music by Bay Area Composers), Intersection for the Arts; Subseries 10. Other projects and productions, including: Maiytreya: Harmonic Convergence; other Intersection for the Arts events; Subseries 11. Teaching and speaking: Image and Sound Workshop and other occasions.

Series 4. The Arts Community. This series consists of material relating to professional associations, funding organizations, other assistance, recording and performing copyright regulations and other practical issues. Subseries 1. Arts organizations, music societies, galleries, museums, music and art on the Internet, arranged alphabetically by association; Subseries 2. Funding: Grants, fellowships, and prizes (not received), arranged alphabetically by association (grants received are filed with the musical work

receiving the grant in Series 3); Subseries 3. Recording and performing copyright and other practical issues.

Series 5. Publicity. This series consists of advance announcements, performance programs and post-performance mentions and reviews. Subseries 1. Programs and flyers (1971-1997), arranged by city and date; Subseries 2. Newspaper clippings and reviews (late 1960s-1997); Subseries 3: Events: Other performers (1979-1997).

Series 6. Audiovisual Material. This series consists of music on diverse recording media, arranged alphabetically mostly by work. Subseries 1. Audiocassettes; Subseries 2. Digital audiocassettes; Subseries 3. Videotapes (*Arc of Gathering* and *As Oceans Curve*; *Five Cities* and *It's In the Cards*; *Pins & Noodles*, *Yesterday ForeTold*, and Memorial performance); Subseries 4. Reel-to-reel; Subseries 5. Other formats.

Series 7. Photographs. This record group consists of family photos and snapshots of places and performance venues (1932-1996), arranged chronologically.

Series 8. Correspondence. This series consists of two kinds of correspondence. Subseries 1. Mail Art. Publications, announcements, events, reviews, and samples of others' works; supplies, mailing lists (1985-1992; also used as a multimedia art form in *It's In the Cards*); Subseries 2. Correspondence: Miscellaneous (1986-1997).

Series 9. Personal Material. This series consists of some milestones, tributes and remembrances on a variety of occasions. Subseries 1. Diplomas and degrees (**Academic**); Subseries 2. Recommendations, commendations, mentions (Recognitions); Subseries 3. Memorabilia, memorials, obituaries (Memorabilia).

Series 10. Oversize Materials. This series consists of diverse materials separately organized and housed. Posters (flat storage and oversize box), scores, flyers, artwork, maps and charts (flat box). Also consists of initial sketches, original and revised drafts, vellum masters, paste-ups, transparencies and copies of scores and maps with some related artwork. Examples include Joe Catalano's major musical works: *Five Terrestrial Projections for Guitar and Other Instruments*; *Yesterday ForeTold*; *As Oceans Curve*; *An Arc of Gathering*; Communal Projects; Pauline Oliveros 6-City Celebration; "Listen Deeply, Music Surrounds You," and Intersection for the Arts (founded 1965) 30th Anniversary.