

Oscar van Dillen

DRONE  
SCAPE 5

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# Dronescape 5

**Dronescape 5** is the fifth in a series of albums, containing new, digitally created, compositions by Oscar van Dillen. The works on this album were composed November-December 2020.

All works, cover art and booklet of this album were created by Oscar van Dillen.

## **Dronescape**

The title Dronescape suggests the contraction of the terms *Drone* and *Soundscape*, inferring a music which might at first sight be mistaken for ambient only. But not at a hearing: there is mostly a friendly and pleasant surface character to most compositions, but careful listening will reveal less obvious details and sounds, sometimes surprising, at other times perhaps disturbing.

In music, a *drone* (or *bourdon*) is understood to be a continuous sound, interval or chord, usually an accompaniment to a modal structure (melodic music based on a particular scale). Special instruments exist, dedicated to playing the drone only, such as the *tanpura* and the *swar peti* from India. Instruments are found all over the world that include drones within the melodic instruments themselves, such as the *taraf* strings on many Asian string instruments, but also the drone pipes next to the *chanter* in bagpipes, or the hurdy gurdy, and its predecessor the *organistrum* with their drone strings. Aboriginal didgeridoo music can be considered to consist purely of a rhythmized drone. Traditionally, drones with their sustained pitches are used as a harmonic support to the melodic music performed. In the Dronescares by van Dillen the music itself has become rhythmized drone and soundscape at the same time, foregoing the traditional compositional hierarchies of theme and accompaniment, by using the following musical elements, in order of prominence: 1. sound 2. harmony 3. rhythm 4. melody. This non-prominence of melody stresses the absence of a traditional theme and accompaniment-oriented music, instead the work moves towards a more inclusive

approach. This does not mean there are no developing linear structures, but rather that in a way the album can perhaps be regarded as being semipermeable to outside additions, whether coincidental and random (such as happening when listening outdoor or with windows opened), or improvised, or composed, or even as a large *minus one recording*, open to be supplemented by the listener, whether in imagined or performed future additional music.

## Dronescape 5

Similar to the other Dronescape releases, this album too can be considered to be an **Electronic symphony**, the 5th by Oscar van Dillen. This one-part work is called **Myrmecology**. This release features the composition in three sections for easier playback (and because modern digital streaming media surprisingly still cannot handle such large tracks at the time of this release):

Total duration: 2:00:08

1. Myrmecology (section 1) – duration 35:43
2. Myrmecology (section 2) – duration 30:17
3. Myrmecology (section 3) – duration 54:08

*Myrmecology* consists a variety of simultaneous rhythms, working as polyrhythms, in six proportional *tempi*. These rhythms make up a variety of cycles by means of moving, changing, and developing, *ostinati*. Furthermore, these polyrhythms are enhanced by use of both *binary* (also *quaternary* at times) and *ternary* feel, as well as of

*microtiming*. *Microtiming* is the rhythmic equivalent of the harmonic concept *Microtuning*, but the first is related to minute but precisely controlled differences in *timing*. The inspiration for this treatment of rhythm and polyrhythm can be found in various worldwide music traditions originally stemming from the African continent, many of which are using rhythm and (micro)timing as a means of emotional expression, as opposed to other traditions using (micro)tuning systems and/or harmony for emotional expression. Rhythm in this way becomes a polyphony in its own right, and in *Myrmecology* this is explored, over its two hours duration.

When using microtuning, an interval like a third has a certain width of possible intonations, expanding its possible expressions beyond that which a keyboard instrument (except perhaps the *fluid piano*) can express. In a parallel way, microtiming allows for a certain width of each beat and accent, leading to denser and spatial, *hoquet-like* results in packed passages. Some traditional examples of this phenomenon can be perceived when studying the *rela* technique in Hindustani tabla playing,

and also the subtle yet stable and slightly offbeat interlocking patterns of *Iya*, *Onkonkolo* and *Itotele* of Yoruba Batá music.

There are 6 perceivable tempi in *Myrmecology*: 56 bpm and its "octaves" (double tempo) 112 bpm and 224 bpm. Because the 56 bpm layers are always performed with a (microtimed) ternary feel, this implies the triplets inferring a 168 bpm. As there are two higher octaves emerging of the 56 bpm, thus 2 lower octaves of the 168 also emerge: 84 bpm and 42 bpm. This is not mere number theory, but these describe *the actual tempi perceived* in certain passages, due to the resulting interlocking polyrhythms. The microtiming also ensures that occasionally simultaneous *ternary* and *quaternary* subdivisions can be heard. The tempo of the basic beat, like the central tone of a certain harmony, can move around, while still using the same building blocks; in the case of harmony these can be the twelve chromatic tones, in the case of rhythm these can be the various simultaneous subdivisions of beats in correct proportion.

Tempo, more popularly called beat, is therefore something one hears and feels subjectively. Tempo is a relative, not necessarily an absolute phenomenon, even though much music treats it as absolute. In notated music, the sheet music can be misleading about the resulting effect, this is true for tonal centre or key as well as for tempo and metre, technically: as key- and time-signature. In obvious cases it would be considered simply wrong to notate a waltz in C major with 5 sharps and in 4/4 time, even if the right notes carry naturals and all fit within the bars. The case becomes more complicated (and interesting) in music in which more than one key and/or more than one beat or metre can be perceived – here one reaches the limits of single meaning in writing (which in literature has its parallels in the works of Samuel Beckett and Italo Calvino, in philosophy Gilles Deleuze etc.) and musical notation loses its absolute character. Notation should in our 21st century music therefore always be considered to be a *practical manual for performance* rather than the attempt at absolute *graphical representation* of the sound of the music the 20th century avant-gardists wanted it to be.



An interesting fact is that the sense of tempo connects to our sense of heartbeat, in itself something of a biological ternary metre. The range of possible tempo, which means, that musical speed which we can humanly perceive, roughly corresponds to the heart rates our bodies can endure: more or a less range from 40 bpm to 240 bpm. With the aforementioned tempi this music realizes, one sees that more or less the whole range is explored over time: 42, 56, 84, 112, 168, 224 bpm are the six proportional tempi which emerge. In the transitions to another basic tempo feel, one can experience the music as a mirror for one's own musical hearing itself, possibly a bit similar to the mental mirror of understanding John Cage's *Mesostics* offer. As meaning in language is completely relative (there is no such thing as Plato's absolute *logos*), thus meaning in music, more specifically here: meaning even in the sense of such a basic and primal thing as the tempo itself, is also relative to the things which happen and are heard, simultaneously and sequentially. Metre is 100% relative. A remarkable fact about western musical notation before the invention of tonality, is that this was a relative *mensural notation* up to about the year 1600: the

rhythmical values of the notes could only be determined when carefully considering them in their context.

One can only experience time truly when takes a relative lot of it, so for these processes to be at all clear, a certain duration of the music and a certain patience of the audience are needed, rare commodities though they seem in our over hasted age.

**Myrmecology**, the title of the work, reflects on the resulting acoustic rhythmically polyphonic superorganism. It is therefore also inspired by the works of E.O. Wilson. The composer found, in particular in his books *The Ants*, and *Superorganism*, but also especially in his recent works *The Origins of Creativity* and *Genesis*, food for thought about who we are as a species, as a human superorganism. The music does not depict crawling ants, but rather explores the very fabric of thought and meaning, connected to the simultaneous existence of a variety of individual interpretations within a greater coherence overall, by means of music. Expressed in rhythm, metre, and timing.



*ants drawn by the composer*

## **Dronescapes**

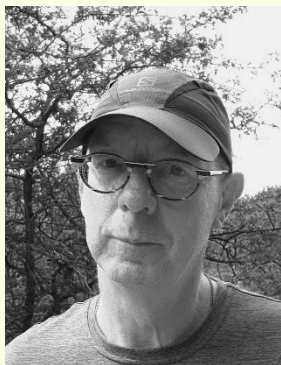
More Dronescapes will be released on OIJ Records when completed. A word of warning: after careful listening, the world around you may not sound the same any longer.

## Oscar van Dillen

Oscar Ignatius Joannes van Dillen

('s-Hertogenbosch 1958) is composer and performer of music, professor of music at Codarts University for the Arts in Rotterdam, as well as visual artist. A polyglot and an erudite world citizen, he is also one of the pioneers from the early years of Wikipedia, having been founding president of Wikimedia

Nederland and serving as a trustee of the Wikimedia Foundation. Van Dillen has studied a wide variety of musical traditions with many renowned teachers. His music education having started at the age of 7, and performing both classical and rock music in his youth, van Dillen first studied North-Indian classical music (sitar, tabla, vocal) with Jamaluddin Bhartiya at the Tritantri School in Amsterdam and bansuri with Gurbachan Singh Sachdev at the Bansuri School of Music in Berkeley, California. Next, he studied classical and jazz flute at the Sweelinck Conservatory in Amsterdam. He took composition lessons from Misha Mengelberg. As a flutist, he was taught by Lens Derogée and Dieks Visser, and followed masterclasses from Pierre-Yves Artaud, Geoffrey Gilbert and Barthold Kuijken.



After his following postgraduate studies of medieval and Renaissance music with Paul Van Nevel in Leuven (Belgium), he studied classical and contemporary composition with, among others, Dick Raaymakers, Diderik Wagenaar and Gilius van Bergeijk at the Koninklijk Conservatory in The Hague, with Klaas de Vries, Peter-Jan Wagemans and René Uijlenhoet at the Rotterdam Conservatory and with Manfred Trojahn at the Robert Schumann College in Düsseldorf, where he also received lessons in conducting from Lutz Herbig. As a composer he furthermore followed masterclasses from, among others, Isang Yun, George Crumb, Jan van Vlijmen, Marek Stachowski, Zbigniew Bojarski and Gerard Brophy.

A founding member of the Rotterdam School of composers and the author of its manifesto, he currently works as professor of music at the Codarts University of the Arts Rotterdam since 1997, teaching composing, arranging, world music composition, music history and music theory in the Jazz-, the Pop-, the World music, the Classical music and the Music Education Academies of Codarts.

Oscar van Dillen is the inventor of *original world music composition*, combining strictly composed with improvised classical and folk traditions, and their techniques and mentalities for creating music: a new and contemporary form of art music.

He is also founder, composer, and artistic director of the Olduvai Ensemble for which he especially creates original world music compositions.

Van Dillen is a member of Nieuw Geneco and the Dutch-Flemish Society for Music Theory. As of 2020 his scores are published by Donemus. He collaborates with Donemus in publishing his recordings on OIJ Records.

Next to his fulltime work as composer, musician and pedagogue, van Dillen is also a visual artist. As composer, he has been a regular member of various juries, among which the yearly composition prize juries, in the Val Tidone Festival Competitions, since 2013.

Oscar van Dillen's personal website can be found at [www.oscarvandillen.com](http://www.oscarvandillen.com)

OIJRECORDS can be found at [www.oij-records.com](http://www.oij-records.com)

Donemus and Donemus Records can be found at [donemus.nl](http://donemus.nl)

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