Martin Wesley-Smith, Musical Activist

Martin Wesley-Smith is an Australian composer of orchestral, chamber and choral pieces, songs, and audio-visual works combining pre-recorded sounds, live performance and graphics. Multimedia art. He has been an activist since 1976, writing letters to newspapers, politicians etc, attending demos, and creating and presenting works about the Indonesian occupation of East Timor.

In 1977 Martin composed an audio-visual piece called **Kdadalak (for the Children of Timor)** with images by English photojournalist **Penny Tweedie**, who had been in East Timor in 1975. In 1978, he and his group **watt** presented this and other works in Hong Kong and at a major music festival in Tokyo (**Music Today '78**). In 1979 Martin presented it in Norfolk, Virginia, USA and at the University of Illinois at Champaign, Urbana, USA. In 1981 he presented it at the World Music Days of the International Society for Contemporary Music in Belgium, and in Amsterdam and Wageninen, Holland. In 1983 he put on a concert of his works, including **Kdadalak**, at the Festival d'Automne à Paris. All these performances, plus many in Australia, brought the reality of Timor's tragedy to audiences that, mostly, had previously been unaware of the situation there.

In 1984 Martin composed **Venceremos!** in response to Australia's Hawke Labor government reneging on its promised support for East Timor. This received various performances and was released on CD (*Wattamolla Red*, Tall Poppies TP072). 1986 saw **Silêncio**, an experimental multimedia work about the silence of Western governments regarding East Timor's plight. 1991: a chamber work called **Timor et Tremor**. 1992: **Balibo**, for flute & tape, played in many countries of the world and released on CD (*Spinning*, Tall Poppies TP069).

In 1991 & 1992 Martin provided material assistance to author **Michele Turner** for her book *Telling (East Timor: Personal Testimonies 1942-1992)*. In 1992 or so he arranged the Timorese traditional song **Kolele Mai** for choir then got a choir together to record it for **Peter Garrett** and the Australian band **Midnight Oil**, who then added extra material and released it as a single (Columbia 659412 2). In 1993 he put an English version of Xanana's poem **The Fighters Who Fell** to another arrangement of **Kolele Mai**. In 2007 he formed an *a cappella* vocal group called The Thirsty Night Singers that performed **Kolele Mai** dozens of times.

In the early 90s, Martin and his brother Peter became interested in the life and death of **Francisco Pires** (nicknamed "Quito"), a young East Timorese man in Darwin. In 1994 they wrote a full-length opera called **Quito** <www.shoalhaven.net.au/~mwsmith/quito.html>, which was produced that year by the Sydney Metropolitan Opera Company. In 1997 it became a radiophonic piece. This was released on CD (Tall Poppies TP111), was nominated for a Prix Italia, and won the 1997 Paul Lowin Composition Award (Song Cycle) and the ABC Classic FM Recording of the Year Award. A live-performance version for The Song Company was performed by them in Belgium and Holland. Martin then added graphics, making it an audio-visual piece that was performed in 1999 in Sydney, Malaysia and Portugal. He updated the graphics prior to performances in 2005 in Sydney and Kangaroo Valley and in 2007 at the Totally Huge New Music Festival in Perth, Western Australia.

In 1995 Martin composed an audio-visual chamber work called **November 12 1991**, performed at a **watt** concert in Sydney. He travelled to Berlin to present **Kdadalak** at a festival there (**Australie X**), and in Hong Kong. He also attended the APCET Conference in Manila that year.

1999 saw a choral piece about Timor called **Thank Evans** and the audio-visual piece **X** (for "Xanana") for American clarinettist Gerard Errante <www.shoalhaven.net.au/~mwsmith/x.html>. Sydney clarinettist Ros Dunlop took it up and has since performed it many times around the world. 2000: **Welcome to the Hotel Turismo**, an audio-visual piece for cello/bass clarinet and computer. 2002: **Kolele Mai**, for classical guitar, which was performed by Tim Kain at the Darwin International Guitar Festival and, later, released on CD. Martin and Ros did a concert in Darwin that included **X** and **Welcome to the Hotel Turismo**. They then went to Timor, performing in the Hotel Turismo in Dili as well as in various other towns. Later that year they went back, this time with others, doing more concerts. By then, Ros was totally committed to doing what she could to preserve Timor's traditional music and musical instruments. She has been there many times since and has published a beautiful book on the subject.

Ros and Martin have presented these pieces - plus Martin's **Tekee Tokee Tomak**, for clarinet & computer - in international tours to England, Germany, Holland, Hong Kong, Lithuania, New Zealand, Scotland, the USA etc, performing in venues as diverse as concert halls, churches, village squares, and coffee lounges (see, for example, <www.shoalhaven.net.au/~mwsmith/ttttour4.html>. Their most recent performance was last year in Northern Cyprus at an international conference on *Islands* (East Timor was portrayed as an "Island of Hope").

In 2000 Martin produced a concert by Timorese choir **Anin Murak** in the Sydney Town Hall for the Mary MacKillop East Timor Mission. Moving to Kangaroo Valley in 2000, he joined the **Kangaroo Valley-Remexio Partnership**. Since then he has organised more than a dozen concerts and film events to raise money for projects in Remexio and beyond. See, for example, <www.shoalhaven.net.au/~mwsmith/bk2003.html>. In 2005 he composed *A Luta Continua*, for baritone, girls' choir & orchestra, which was performed by the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and broadcast nationally on the ABC (see <www.shoalhaven.net.au/~mwsmith/alc.html>).

Last year Martin composed a piano piece, called ***Bondia!***, for **Ambre Hammond** to play in Timor when her **Girl Piano Truck** project happens. This year he has composed a piano duet (one keyboard, four hands) for Ambre to play with Timorese pianist **Antonio de Padua Martins Soares**.

Martin's twin brother **Peter Wesley-Smith**, a writer, is a long-time collaborator on various projects (e.g. *Quito* and *A Luta Continua*). On-going assistance comes from brother **Rob Wesley-Smith** ("**Wes**"). Although he is suffering from cancer, Martin's current treatment is stabilising him well enough for him to be planning two more fund-raising concerts for October this year.

Some use bullets to promote desired outcomes, others words. Martin, whose audio-visual materials are being collected by the National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra, uses multimedia art.

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What the critics wrote about ***Kdadalak (for the Children of Timor)***:

"The effect is both beautiful and wrenchingly sad. Whatever one chooses to call this work - audio-visual art? - it is a complete success."
Tim Morton: **The Virginian Pilot**, Tues Nov 13 1979

"An effective collage of image and sound, (*Kdadalak*) remains a piece of powerful political art."
David Vance: **The Sydney Morning Herald**, May 25 1982

"*Kdadalak* was one of the most remarkable fusions of sound and image that I've witnessed ..."
Nick Waterlow: **Nation Review**, 1977

"In *Kdadalak* electronic music whispers and thunders through the auditorium as pictures, taken by Tweedie in East Timor shortly before the Indonesian invasion in 1975, flash across a screen above the stage. Gradually the faces fragment and dissolve into increasingly abstract color patterns …"
David Lewis, **Asahi Evening News**, Tokyo, 1978

"It is an impressionistic opus that exploits the complexities of projection of transparencies and taped music … *Kdadalak* vivifies the ugliness of war. "
Grover Oberle, **The Ledger Star**, Norfolk, Virginia, Nov 13 1979

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