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## Line songs (The Cathedral Band)

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*Line Songs*

The Cathedral Band  
Monroe Street Music  
MSM 60106

Available at:

[www.monroestreet.com](http://www.monroestreet.com)

*Line Songs* is the result of a series of improvised performances that took place at the mini[]max festival in Brisbane in July /August 2002. It is the brainchild of the American composer William Duckworth and graphic artist Nora Farrell and is part of a series of works under the general title *Cathedral* which, according to the CD booklet is “an ongoing generative work of music and art for the web.” It involves online performances and online audience participation via a virtual instrument known as PitchWeb.

This performance (or compilation of performances) involves members of the Cathedral Band including Duckworth (PitchWeb), Stuart Dempster (trombone, toys and didgeridoo) DJ Tamara (records), AJ Sabatini (chronicler), plus a number of distinguished Australian musicians including Simone de Haan (trombone), William Barton (didgeridoo), Tenzin Choegyal (vocals and Tibetan folk instruments), Sulagna Basu (vocals) and Warren Burt (PitchWeb, plants and electronics). All the performers (with the exception of Sabatini, in my view) make impressive contributions to this intercultural project.

Even so, the CD exhibits some artistic unevenness and tends towards blandness in its ambient approach. At the outset, against a mix of synth pads, didgeridoo drones and contrasting contributions from trombone we hear a slow and stately Hindustani improvised vocal line. Track two features call and response between an Indian vocal melody and trombone line performed over a dance groove supplied by the DJ. Unfortunately the banal drum groove detracts from the rich timbre and phrasing of the singing. A new groove throughout the next movement works better because the drums are blended more effectively with rhythmic contributions from the didgeridoo players and inventive playing from the trombone players. Track four features a repetitive ostinato behind Tibetan and Indian melodic material and improvised contributions from the instrumentalists. The texture becomes messy and the use of spoken text is quite distracting. Generally the spoken texts interspersed throughout the CD are pretentious and performed with off-putting mannerisms. Track six is an appealing (but cheesy) ambient soundscape with didgeridoo, synth pads and trombones overlaid with environmental recordings featuring Australian birds, notably the pied butcherbird. The next two tracks use a variety of densely organised edgy musical components that contrast refreshingly with the ambient qualities of most of the other movements. The CD concludes with powerful and moving singing from Tenzin Choegyal against a background instrumental texture reminiscent of the slow music of Arvo Pärt.

Considering that the performances on *Line Songs* seem to involve a large component of free improvisation it is to be expected that the overall result will be somewhat uneven and unstructured as a listening experience. None the less there is enough detail in the individual performances and in the densely layered textures to sustain repeated listenings.

