

## Observatory to feature in New Music Award contest

SOUND artist Robert Jarvis has been shortlisted for the New Music Award for a groundbreaking sound-art work to be based in Northern Ireland.

Entitled 'aroundNorth', the piece will be a musical composition inspired by the movement of the stars around the Celestial North Pole - and will take the form of a permanent sound installation based in the grounds of the Armagh Observatory!

The composition will make use of astronomical parameters, such as star size, brightness and distance from Earth, to give voice to the stars and our changing perspective of them as the Earth rotates on its axis.

The sounds will be triggered as the stars cross equally spaced lines of longitude emanating from Celestial North. As each star crosses one of the lines, it will trigger its own unique sound corresponding to properties such as its brightness, distance from Earth, and size.

The composition will also introduce its listeners to an orchestra of new and mysterious sounds as the different stars are given their own voice as musical instruments in their own right. By translating the stars' individual spectral harmonics into their instrumental equivalents, 'aroundNorth' will be able to call upon a number of new sounding instruments and offer its audience a hitherto unheard stellar orchestra.

More than just another new musical composition, "aroundNorth" will not only be inspired by its subject matter,

but will play in synchronisation with the rotation of the Earth and the apparent movement of the stars, thus making a very real connection between its listeners and the wider Universe.

As it plays, the work will also provide blind and partially sighted people with a first-time encounter and experience of the beauty and wonder inherent in the stars and their celestial patterns.

Robert Jarvis - who grew up in County Armagh - said: "In terms of my own development as a composer, the composing of 'aroundNorth' will be a major challenge, bringing together the disciplines of astronomy, computer programming, musical synthesis, and of course music composition.

"I'm excited about the possibility that the piece could also bring new information to the fore: new ways of appreciating astronomical data for the scientific community; new paths for composition for interested musicians; as well as a groundbreaking development for the visually impaired as, for the first time, it will be possible to actually listen to the changing perspective of the stars irrespective of one's eyesight, the time of day, or local light pollution."

Professor Mark Bailey, of Armagh Observatory, said: "This project will provide a unique musical experience for the listener and a novel connection between the sky and the Earth, of interest to all."

Its location in the Observatory's Astropark - visited by more than 50,000 people every year - will

ensure it has a continuously changing audience whilst resonating with an important objective of the Astropark, namely, to bring 'heaven' down to Earth!"

Now living in England, Robert Jarvis works as a sound artist creating compositions that seek to encourage people to rethink their environments and to question how they relate to their surroundings.

He has twice won the British Composer Awards in their New Media Category - in 2005 and 2006 - and was previously shortlisted for the New Music Award in 2008 for his 'Echolocation' sound installation.

The Performing Right Society (PRS) for Music Foundation is the UK's leading funder of new music across all genres. Its New Music Award is music's equivalent of the Turner Prize for visual arts. It recognises and celebrates leading innovators in the UK; it provides investment, support and profile for exceptional and pioneering music creators; and, allowing total creative freedom, the Award is open to absolutely anyone working in any genre and artistic context.

The award encourages creators to push the boundaries of their artistic practice, extending the possibilities of music regardless of which genre they work in.

This biennial award offers a £50,000 prize to a musical idea that has not yet been realised, and is open to anyone based in the UK.