

**MOMENTS OF LAUGHTER (1988)**  
for female voice and two-channel audio

By Hildegard Westerkamp

*Moments of Laughter* is dedicated to my daughter Sonja whose voice forms the basis for this piece. I composed this work when she was eleven years old and at that time wrote the following text.

Sonja's voice has accompanied my life for many years now and has brought me in touch with an openness of perception, uninhibited expressiveness and physical presence that I had long forgotten.

I have made recordings of her voice since she was born and from the age of four on, she has made her own recordings of stories and songs. *Moments of Laughter* utilizes these for the audio portion of the piece, tracing musically / acoustically the emergence of the infant's voice from the oceanic state of the womb: from the soundmakings of the baby to the song and language of the child. According to Julia Kristeva, moments of laughter are those moments in infancy and early childhood in which the child recognizes the "other" as distinct from the "self". They are the first creative moments that speak of recognition of self and place. The child expresses these moments with laughter.

A female voice interacts with the 2-channel audio, performing live. It tries to find its own language and music on the one hand, and imitates, reacts to, and plays with the child's voice on the other hand. It moves through a variety of characters in search of a confident, strong voice. *Moments of Laughter* explores the edge between the "wilderness" and natural flexibility of the child's voice and the cultural formations and extended vocal techniques of the female voice.

*Moments of Laughter* was commissioned by the Vancouver New Music Society with the financial assistance of the Canada Council, and was first performed by Meg Sheppard. The poem "DADADO" was written by Norbert Ruebsaat.