

# WFAE Newsletter

## World Forum For Acoustic Ecology: September - October, 2007

### Volume 4, Number 5 WFAE Newsletter

#### ✦ WELCOME: Gary Ferrington, Editor



Welcome to the September-October edition of the WFAE Newsletter. This online publication is a supplement to *Soundscape, The Journal of Acoustic Ecology*, which is published by the [World Forum for Acoustic Ecology](#). Our mission is to offer a bimonthly summary of events, announcements, opportunities, and news from the WFAE Board, Affiliates, and other sources in the field of acoustic ecology.

This edition of the newsletter includes our first feature article 'Bauhaus and Soundscape Studies - Exploring Connections and Differences' by Hildegard Westerkamp. We hope to offer future articles about acoustic-ecology written especially for the newsletter as well as those reprinted from sources not generally available to most readers. We hope you enjoy this addition.

#### ✦ IN THIS ISSUE

- [WFAE Affiliate Organization Reports](#)
- [Up Front News: Sound bites from the press](#)
- [Soundscape Studies](#)
- [Calendar of Events](#)
- [Eartoon](#)
- [Resource Guide](#)
- [Opportunities](#)
- [Contributions: How to post your news](#)
- [Newsletter Archive 2004-Present](#)
- [Feature Article: Bauhaus and Soundscape Studies - Exploring Connections and Differences](#) By Hildegard Westerkamp

#### David Watson An...



'Slap Happy" an Installation on the East River New York for the Citysol event by David Watson and Andrea Callard ([NYSAE](#) - ASAE)

#### ✦ WFAE BOARD AFFILIATE ORGANIZATIONS

- American Society for Acoustic Ecology (ASAE): [contact-asae@wfae.net](mailto:contact-asae@wfae.net)
- Australian Forum for Acoustic Ecology (FAE): [contact-afae@wfae.net](mailto:contact-afae@wfae.net)
- Canadian Association for Sound Ecology (CASE): [contact-case@wfae.net](mailto:contact-case@wfae.net)
- Forum Klanglandschaft (FKL): [contact-fkl@wfae.net](mailto:contact-fkl@wfae.net)
- Japanese Association for Sound Ecology (JASE): [contact-jase@wfae.net](mailto:contact-jase@wfae.net)
- Suomen Akustisen Ekologian Seura (Finnish Society for Acoustic Ecology): [contact-fsae@wfae.net](mailto:contact-fsae@wfae.net)
- UK and Ireland Soundscape Community (UKISC): [contact-ukisc@wfae.net](mailto:contact-ukisc@wfae.net)

#### ✦ WFAE AFFILIATE WEB SITES:

- American Society for Acoustic Ecology ([ASAE](#))
- Australian Forum for Acoustic Ecology ([FAE](#))
- Canadian Association for Sound Ecology ([CASE/ACÉS](#))
- Forum fuer Klanglandschaft ([FKL](#))
- Japanese Association for Sound Ecology ([JASE](#))
- Suomen Akustisen Ekologian Seura (Finnish Society for Acoustic Ecology), ([FSAE](#))
- UK and Ireland Soundscape Community (UKISC). John Drever <[ukisc@wfae.net](mailto:ukisc@wfae.net)>
- World Forum For Acoustic Ecology ([WFAE](#))

#### ✦ WFAE MEMBERSHIP

- Become a member of a WFAE Affiliate organization. Download a [membership](#) form today.

#### ✦ BACK ISSUES.

Issues of this publication dating back to 2004 are archived [online](#). Back copies of *Soundscape, The Journal of Acoustic Ecology* are also available.

[TOP](#)

# WFAE Newsletter

## World Forum For Acoustic Ecology: September - October, 2007

[Home](#)

### WFAE Affiliate Reports

---



#### **AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR ACOUSTIC ECOLOGY (ASAE)**

ASAE Board Representative, Steven Miller, has an interview online discussing a number of topics relating to sound art, acoustic ecology, and art/science collaborations. You can download or listen to it over the web - it's about half an hour in duration. Access sound file at [TalkShoe](#).

#### **Chapter Report: New York Society for Acoustic Ecology**

City Sol 2007 wrap-up...the July event was a great success for participating NYSAE members and was well-attended by the public-at-large. Members Andrea Williams, David Watson, Andrea Polli, Andrea Callard and Todd Shalom created site-specific installations, performances and guided sound walks. You can see some of the documented material online at [YouTube](#) or [Flicker](#).

Tune Out(side))) wrap-up...also a July event, in upstate NY at the free103point9 Wave Farm, NYSAE members Andrea Williams, Edmund Mooney and Jonny Farrow performed their sound piece called SOUNDBOX 1. Centering on an 18 x12 x 12 plexiglass box, the trio created contained soundscapes that were transmitted via low-powered FM transmitters across 30+ wooded acres. Audio and video documentation is to follow. Some photos of the performance can be [viewed online](#).

New Giant Ear))) shows on free103point9 are from July -- David Watson's second installment of "Religious Spaces." The August show will feature selections from City Sol and Tune Out(side))). The September show will have a "Back to School" theme and will focus on the work of sound artist/performer/educator Loren Chasse.

*Autumn Leaves: Sound and the Environment in Artistic Practice*, a Vibro/Double Entendre book edited by Angus Carlyle, includes in its pages a section on NYSAE's NY Soundmap and other projects. This book aims "to draw together a number of different perspectives on how the environment is made audible through sound." Check you local bookseller or follow this link for more info on the scope of the book. [More Information](#).

NYSAE members out and about... Andrea Williams and Todd Shalom are planning to travel to the Amazon with Francisco Lopez in November for a two-week Mamori SoundLab artist residency/workshop. And Andrea Polli is off to Antarctica this December to collect data concerning climate change...Safe Travels!

Submitted by Jonny Farrow, [NYSAE](#)

**No Reports This Month:**

---

**AUSTRALIAN FORUM FOR ACOUSTIC ECOLOGY (AFAE)**

---

**CANADIA SOCIETY FOR ACOUSTIC ECOLOGY (CASE)**

---

**FINNISH SOCIETY FOR ACOUSTIC ECOLOGY (FSAE)**

---

**FORUM KLANGLANDSCHAFT (FKL)**

---

**JAPANESE ASSOCIATION FOR SOUND ECOLOGY (JASE)**

---

**UK AND IRELAND SOUNDSCAPE COMMUNITY (UKISC)**

---

# WFAE Newsletter

## World Forum For Acoustic Ecology: September - October, 2007

[Home](#)

### WFAE Up Front News

---



**Stories From The Heart of The Land** (NPR). Radio producer Jay Allison has developed a radio series that explores how people are shaped by landscapes and how we, in turn, shape those landscapes. [Download and listen](#) to audio files from the series.

**Single gene may hold key to perfect pitch.** Musicians and singers work for years to develop their sense of pitch, but few can name a musical note without a reference tone. Only 1 in 10,000 people have perfect or absolute pitch, the uncanny ability to name the note of just about any sound without the help of a reference tone said researcher Dr. Jane Gitschier of the University of California, San Francisco, whose study appears in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. [Read More.](#)

**New York Adjusts Volume Control** (BBC News) The City That Never Sleeps is giving those yearning for a bit of peace a helping hand - New Yorkers are adjusting to a new noise code. Noise is the biggest cause of calls to the city's 311 Quality of Life hotline and under the new law, officers will be dispatched to investigate complaints. [Read More.](#)

**Drummers clash with new Harlem residents.** (Associated Press-Yahoo News) On Saturday nights in summer, hundreds of fingers pound out mesmerizing rhythms on African drums — a ritual repeated for decades in Harlem's Marcus Garvey Park. This year, the drums have a counterpoint: the complaints of "new Harlemites." [Read More.](#)

**In Africa, Decoding the "Language" of Elephants.** (National Geographic) Studies at Amboseli by more than a dozen researchers have produced a comprehensive picture of elephant family life, behavior, and communication. The project has collected an extraordinary amount of data on individual [Read More](#)

**Maestro Gives New Meaning to Traffic Jam** (NY Times) The purpose of the test was to check not the bridge's soundness but its sound. The rather bizarre scene on the Franklin D. Roosevelt Mid-Hudson Bridge near Poughkeepsie was part of Mr. Bertolozzi's audacious plan to transform the span into an orchestra, compose a piece for it, then actually perform the work live with a small army of percussionists. [Read More](#)

**Digital Music Project Races to Save Tibetan Folk Songs** (National Geographic) A grassroots effort is under way to collect and digitize hundreds of folk songs before the tunes and their traditional meanings fade from living memory. [Read More.](#)

**A Wider Range Of Sounds For The Deaf.** (Science Daily) More than three decades ago, scientists pursued the then-radical idea of implanting tiny electronic hearing devices in the inner ear to help profoundly deaf people. An even bolder alternative that promised superior results -- implanting a device directly in the auditory nerve -- was set aside as too difficult, given the technology of the day. [Read More.](#)

**New Technology Uses Sound to Find Land Mines.** (National Geographic) The "nonlinear seismo-acoustic" land mine detection system, as it is called, can distinguish mines from other buried debris because of a "bouncing effect." [Read More.](#)

**Whale Fears Silence US Navy Sonar.** (BBC) The US Navy has been ordered not to use mid-frequency sonar equipment during training exercises off the coast of California until the end of 2009. A federal judge ruled in favour of campaigners who argued that the devices harmed marine mammals in the area. They said noise pollution from sonar disorientated whales, causing them to become stranded on beaches. [Read More.](#)



# WFAE Newsletter

World Forum For Acoustic Ecology: September - October, 2007

[Home](#)

## Soundscape Studies

---



This section is devoted to reports on past and current projects related to acoustic-ecology. Project coordinators and researchers are encouraged to write and submit information about their work. Links to existing online documents are also welcome.

**Soundscapes Within Urban Green Spaces: Their Restorative Value.** By Sarah R. Payne. Her dissertation asks, "Can 'urban sounds' in parks be restorative, or are only 'natural sounds' beneficial? How are sounds classified by the public? Which combinations of sounds are more conducive to providing a restorative experience? University of Manchester. [Read More.](#)

**The Sounding City.** By R. Murray Schafer. In this lecture (including MP3 sound files) Schafer speaks about the soundscape of the modern city. He notes that he left Vancouver in 1975 to live in the countryside of central Ontario and has never returned. When he makes short visits to cities both in Canada and on lecture tours abroad, he is nothing more than a soundscape tourist. But that is actually significant because a tourist is often more perceptive of the environment than a native inhabitant, who has grown weary of the daily soundscape and tries to shut most of it out. Concordia University. [Read More.](#)

**Growing an Interdisciplinary Hybrid: The Case of Acoustic Ecology.** By Marcia J. Epstein. The author presents a case for the theoretical development of interdisciplinarity to include inherently interdisciplinary fields of study, or "interdisciplines." These are primarily emerging fields for which there is no single "home base" in an academic discipline. As an example of such a field, the emerging science of Acoustic Ecology – the study of sound and its effects on health, cognition, culture, and the environment -- is analyzed according to a variety of methodological parameters. A case is then presented for the necessity and utility of collaborative work between the sciences and humanities in such interdisciplinary fields. University of Calgary. [Read More.](#)

# WFAE Newsletter

## World Forum For Acoustic Ecology: September - October, 2007

[Home](#)

### WFAE Calendar

---



#### **September 15-18, 2007**

##### **XXI IBAC - International Bioacoustics Congress CIBRA, University of Pavia,**

The XXI International Bioacoustics Congress will be held in the historical buildings of the University of Pavia, Italy, where Spallanzani in the 18th century studied the ability of bats to fly in the dark. The Congress is organized, for the third time, by CIBRA, the Interdisciplinary Centre for Bioacoustics and Environmental Research, University of Pavia.

The subject of bioacoustics is principally a marriage between the fields of biology and physical acoustics. Given its multidisciplinary nature, the Congress aims to bring together, in informal settings, biologists from different specialists (ethnologists, physiologists, taxonomists, ecologists, etc) with engineers, sound archivists and amateur sound recordists, to foster discussion and exchange of ideas.

During the Congress the 2nd European workshop on animal sound research and libraries will be held. The workshop will be organized by CIBRA for the European Network of Bioacoustic Collections for Taxonomy, Systematics and Conservation. The network was created based on the agreement of experts who attended the 1st workshop at the Fonoteca Zoological (Madrid), 27-30 September 2006, to foster co-operation among institutions, researchers and interested amateurs to safeguard animal sound recordings and to optimize their use as a resource for research and nature conservation. Further information on the Congress will be published on the [CIBRA web page](#) at and on the official [IBAC web page](#).

#### **Sept 29th - Oct 31, 2007**

##### **SOUNDplay 2007 - Toronto, ON, Canada**

SOUNDplay is a meeting point for experimentation in new media and sound art pushing the boundaries and encouraging new fusions of image, sound and text.

Plans are in the works to feature two world premieres in SOUNDplay 2007 by François Girouard and Monique Jean as well as a Toronto premiere of David Lang's "Elevated" co-produced with CONTACT and Pleasure Dome. It will once again include a weekend of concerts and screenings co-presented with Pleasure Dome along with gallery installations in the month leading up to the final weekend of performances. Weekend of performances October 26, 27, 28. Performance pass \$25/\$20 gets you into all SOUNDplay performances (3 concerts) e-mail [naisa@naisa.ca](mailto:naisa@naisa.ca)

Source: [New Adventures in Sound Art](#).

#### **Ear to the Earth: A unique festival of environmental sound**

##### **October 12-13 and October 16-20**

##### **New York, New York**

John Cage, Andrea Polli, Madeleine Shapiro, Walter Branchi, Mark Moffett, Julia Calfee, David Monacchi, Bruce Odland & Sam Auinger, many others. Judson Church, 55 Washington Square South New York Friends Meeting House, 15 Rutherford Place

<http://www.emfproductions.org/year0708/e2eOverview.html>

<http://www.eartotheearth.org>

#### **October 19, 2007**

##### **Seminar Three: Senses and Infrastructure**

##### **Manchester, UK**

Registration is now taking place for the third seminar 'Senses and Infrastructure' in the ESRC funded research

seminar series 'Rethinking the urban experience: the sensory production of place'. Further details can be found [online](#) or download a [booking form](#).

**November 28-30, 2007**  
**Sound, Art, Auditory Cultures**  
**University of Copenhagen / Amager**

The aim of the conference Sound, Art, Auditory Cultures is to further interdisciplinary research in aural experience. Experience of our environments through sound, and development of methods for culturally and historically informed research in this experience, are the central topics to be discussed. [Conference web site](#).

**December, 2007**  
**Mamori Sound Project**

A 2-week workshop/residency for professional and semi-professional artists with previous experience in the area of sound experimentation and field recordings. It takes place at Mamori Lake, in the middle of the Brazilian Amazon, and involves theoretical/discussion presentations, field work and studio work. The project has a special focus on creative approaches to the work with field recordings, through an extensive exploration of natural sound environments. It does not have a technical character but is instead conceived and directed towards the development and realization of a collective project of sonic creation with the interaction of all participating artists. The deadline for application has been extended to mid-April. More information: Download attached [PDF brochure](#). Or, contact <franciscolopez (at sign) compuserve (dot) com> or visit [web site](#).

~~~~~

**June 24-26, 2008**  
**The 9th WSEAS International Conference on Acoustics & Music: Theory and Applications & APPLICATIONS**  
**Bucharest, Romania**

This event will be host by the Institute of Solid Mechanics of Romanian Academy, Department of Dynamic Systems C-tin Mille 15 Sector 1, Bucharest. Information online: <http://www.acad.ro/def2002eng.htm>

**September 10-13, 2008**  
**International symposium on architectural and urban atmospheres**  
**Grenoble, France**

The symposium on "Creating an Atmosphere" aims to bring together various ways of addressing the concrete nature and the creating atmosphere. Event being planned. More information: [www.cresson.archi.fr](http://www.cresson.archi.fr)

~~~~~

**On-Going - Artist Review Series: Immersivity, Art, Architecture, Sound and Ecology**  
**Goldsmiths College, London, UK.**

This program features transdisciplinary presentations facilitating critical exchange, discussion and review through an informal and supportive atmosphere; and guided by specific research interests. The general focus areas are: live art and mixed media performance; landscape & interactive architecture and sustainability; critical studies and philosophy; biophysics, acoustics, ecology and sound art. The guest review presenters invited are drawn from these backgrounds and disciplines. The aims of the artist review meetings are both to support the development of researchers or practitioners, through the sharing and review of recent practice including work-in-progress, and the Live Art Garden Initiative, an art, architecture and ecology project. Visit [web site](#) for dates, times and location; the series full program; and all further information. This project is supported by the Networking Artists' Networks Initiative (NAN) through a-n The Artist Information Co. It is co-organised by the Live Art Garden Initiative and Electronic Music Studios, Goldsmiths College.

# WFAE Newsletter

- World Forum For Acoustic Ecology: September - October, 2007

[Home](#)

**Eartoon By Tom Lamar**

---



EAR CANAL *Tom*

# WFAE Newsletter

## World Forum For Acoustic Ecology: September - October, 2007

[Home](#)

### Online Resource Guide

#### ✦ Web Sites



**Sound Junction (Scout Report)**. It's hard to learn about music without listening to it closely, and this multimedia website created by a group of organizations in Britain (including the Royal Academy of Music), provides a surfeit of music from all genres. Through interactive games, musical excerpts, interviews, and other such devices, the SoundJunction site is a great way for anyone to learn about music. A good place to start is the "What can I do on SoundJunction?" overview feature, which walks users through the layout of the site. After that, visitors may wish to look at the left-hand side of the homepage and click on through such areas as "Explore Music", "How Music

Works", "Music in Context", and "Composing and remixing". For budding Beethovens, there is the "Composer Tool", which allows users to create their own music. Music educators and those who are just generally curious will find that this site merits numerous return visits, and it may prove to be quite habit-forming, in the best possible sense of the phrase.

#### ✦ Recordings



**Soundscape Vancouver 1973 and 1996**. This is a 2-CD set of sounds recorded around Vancouver, B.C. (Canada) in 1973 and again in 1996.

The 1973 CD contains recordings of the ocean, harbor, music of various city quarters, all excerpts from a 2-record set originally published by the World Soundscape Project. R. Murray Schafer, director of that project, wrote: "The aim of the World Soundscape Project is to bring together research on the scientific, sociological, and aesthetic aspects of the acoustic environment. The Vancouver Soundscape is our first field study of an actual environment ..."

The 1996 CD contains Vancouver soundscapes created by 4 artists (Sabine Breitsameter and Hans-Ulrich Werner from Germany, and Darren Copeland and Claude Schryer from Canada). It's not only fascinating aural history, it's wonderful art.

All four compositions were composed during the Soundscape Vancouver '96 project at the Sonic Research Studio of Simon Fraser University from May 6 to June 5, 1996. A final concert (June 7, 1996) presented these works to the public. An 8-channel computerized diffusion system, developed by Barry Truax at Simon Fraser University using hardware and software developed by the Harmonic Functions group, transformed the conventional concert hall environment into an electroacoustically enhanced place for soundscape listening. Source: [Cambridge Street Publishing](#) and [CDmusic](#).

#### ✦ Publications

**Alain Corbin**

**Village Bells The Culture of the Senses in the Nineteenth-Century French Countryside**

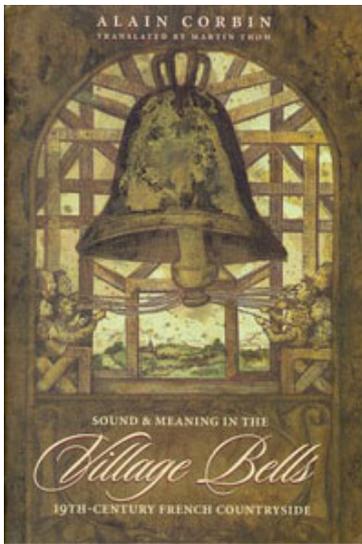
**ISBN: 0-231-10450-2**

**Columbia University Press**

**October, 1998**

Village Bells, Alain Corbin's exploration of the "auditory landscape" of nineteenth-century France, a story of lost sensory experiences and forgotten passions. In the nineteenth century, these instruments were symbols of their towns and objects of both ecclesiastic and civic pride. Bell-ringing served practical purposes of communication, marking both religious and secular time, as well as calling citizens to pray, assemble, take arms, or beware of danger. As Corbin shows, the bells also reflected the social, political, and religious struggles of the time. To control the bells was to control the symbolic order, rhythm, and loyalties of French village and country life.

Using church archives and local documents, Corbin forges a unique history of the role of bells from the aftermath of the Revolution to the dawn of the twentieth century. He charts how the First Republic (1792-1804) moved toward a more secular society, turning many bells into coins and cannonballs and seizing others as property of the state. A



gradual return to the religious use of bells occurred in the nineteenth century, even as their new secular roles were maintained. Corbin describes the battles over the marking of religious versus secular time, as calls to prayer, the celebration of religious feasts, and the marking of rites of passage—baptism, marriage, and death—competed with tolls indicating the passing hours or marking assemblies, elections, or republican holidays.

Thoroughly documented and recounted with intriguing narratives, *Village Bells* provides an original approach to nineteenth-century French cultural, social, and political history. As Corbin notes, the bells are no longer essential to our lives—their qualitative, sacred time and space replaced by the quantitative, secular measures of the clock—but by understanding their lost symbolic and practical importance we open a window onto the age in which they rang. (Source: [Columbia University Press](#))

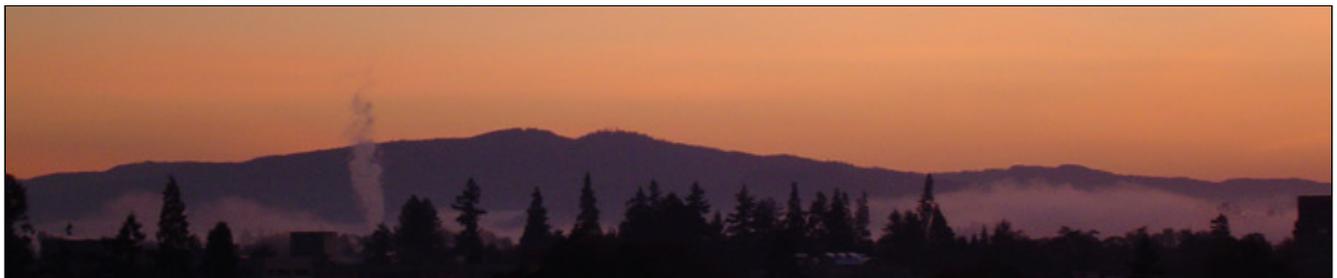
# WFAE Newsletter

## World Forum For Acoustic Ecology: September - October, 2007

[Home](#)

### Opportunities

---



#### **Deadline August 10, 2007**

#### **Call for papers, compositions, and round table discussions**

#### **Sound, Music, and the Moving Image**

#### **Institute of Musical Research Senate House, University of London 10-12 September 2007**

The conference theme is 'Sound, Music and the Moving Image', and we intend this in the broadest possible sense. Bringing together practitioners and scholars from various disciplines, the conference will provide the opportunity to reflect on and challenge prevailing approaches to the sound/music and moving image relationship, and also to propose new directions in this dynamic field.

We hope that submissions will reflect work being carried out in the widest variety of musical traditions, cultural contexts, and methodological approaches.

For more information please contact the conference conveners: [julie.brown@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:julie.brown@rhul.ac.uk) or [info@miguelmera.com](mailto:info@miguelmera.com)  
Further information, including registration details, will be posted on the [conference website](#).

#### **Deadline: August 23, 2007**

#### **Call for Papers**

#### **6th Annual Hawaii International Conference on Arts & Humanities**

#### **Honolulu Hawaii, USA**

The 6th Annual Hawaii International Conference on Arts & Humanities will be held from January 11 (Friday) to January 14 (Monday), 2008 at the Waikiki Beach Marriott Resort & Spa, and the Hilton Waikiki Prince Kuhio, in Honolulu, Hawaii. The conference will provide many opportunities for academicians and professionals from arts and humanities related fields to interact with members inside and outside their own particular disciplines. Cross-disciplinary submissions with other fields are welcome. [Conference Details](#).

#### **Deadline: September 30, 2007**

#### **2007 Call for Submissions on the theme "A Sonic Portrait"**

#### **New Adventures in Sound Art**

#### **Categories: Radio Art, Electroacoustic Music, Videomusic and Installation Art**

New Adventures in Sound Art (NAISA) invites artists of all ages and nationalities to submit works on the theme "Sonic Portrait" for consideration in 2008 programming for the annual Deep Wireless, Sound Travels, and SOUNDplay festivals, produced by New Adventures in Sound Art in Toronto, Canada. Artists may submit works in one or all of the following four categories: 1) Radio Art, 2) Electroacoustic Music, 3) Videomusic and 4) Installation. Full information [available online](#).

#### **Deadline: On-going**

#### **Call For Bibliographic Entries**

Maksymilian Kapelanski, author of the Leonardo On-Line Acoustic Ecology and the Soundscape Bibliography, is extending a call for bibliographic entries to authors of English written material pertaining to the fields of acoustic ecology, soundscape research, soundscape composition, soundscape education, and acoustic design.

The [current bibliography](#) needs expansion and updating. Kapelanski is asking authors to participate in the process by sending their bibliographic entries to him at [xkapelanski@yahoo.ca](mailto:xkapelanski@yahoo.ca), in the author-date format. Please write "Entry" in the subject line of your e-mail posting.

**OTHER OPPORTUNITIES****Spend 10 weeks off campus studying endangered killer whales in the wild!**

[Beam Reach](#) Marine Science and Sustainability School in Washington State is for you if you want to:

- Study endangered orcas in the wild
- Sail for 5 weeks on a biodiesel electric catamaran
- Work with experts in killer whale conservation and acoustics
- Learn about marine conservation and sustainability
- Learn in a small group and get lots of individual time with instructors
- Work on real science and your own research project
- Spend 5 weeks at Friday Harbor Labs
- Earn 18 credits from the University of Washington

You don't have to be a science major to apply; you just have to be interested in the marine environment and want to spend 10 weeks studying off campus. We are now accepting applications for our Spring 08 program (March 31-June 7, 2008). We do have a few spaces left in our fall 07 program: August 20 - Oct 28, 2007 [Dive In And Learn More](#).

**Accepting Submissions**

**SoundTransit.** SoundTransit is a collaborative online community dedicated to field recording and phonography. If you are a phonographer, you also [contribute](#) your recordings for others to enjoy. The [Creative Commons Attribution license](#) encourages the sharing and reuse of all sounds on this website.

In the "[Book](#)" section of this site, you can plan a sonic journey through various locations recorded around the world. And in the "Search" section, you can search the database for specific sounds by member artists from many different places. Enjoy [SoundTransit](#) online.

# WFAE Newsletter

World Forum For Acoustic Ecology: September - October, 2007

## Home

### Contributing News & Announcements

---

We welcome material about regional events, workshops, and conferences of interest to the acoustic-ecology community. All material will be reviewed and, if accepted, edited as needed. Please include web URL, e-mail address, and postal contact information for events.

Newsletter contributors are asked to send material to WFAE secretary at [contact\\_secretary@wfae.net](mailto:contact_secretary@wfae.net)

The WFAE Newsletter:

- Gary Ferrington - Online editor
- Robert MacNevin - Correspondent
- Hildegard Westerkamp - Correspondent

#### Copyright

This single phrase is the copyright notice to be used when reproducing any portion of this newsletter, in any format: From The WFAE Newsletter - Copyright 2007. <<http://www.wfae.net/newsletter/>>

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology. The WFAE Newsletter provides links to other sites as a matter of reader convenience and is not responsible for content provided from other sources.

#### Publication

The WFAE Newsletter is made available as an out reach service of the College of Education at the University of Oregon. It is edited by the Soundscape Journal Editorial Committee, Gary Ferrington coordinator.

Gary Ferrington, WFAE Secretary  
[contact\\_secretary@wfae.net](mailto:contact_secretary@wfae.net)

# WFAE Newsletter

## World Forum For Acoustic Ecology: September - October, 2007

### Home

## Feature Article: Soundscape Composition (1): Linking Inner and Outer Worlds

By Hildegard Westerkamp

Written for Soundscape be)for(e 2000, Amsterdam, November 19-26, 1999

The following thoughts were sparked by the large spectrum of pieces submitted to the Soundscapes voor 2000 competition of soundscape compositions. I listened to them all as a member of the selection jury. "Soundscape as a musical style" was the only theme or guiding idea that was given to participating composers and jury members alike. The absence of more detailed selection criteria and definitions made me thoughtful about the fact that, to date, there have been few attempts to define soundscape composition as a genre; to articulate its significance and position in relation to contemporary music, electro-acoustic composition and experimental radio production; to highlight its potential in enhancing listening awareness; and to understand its role in inspiring ideas about balanced soundscapes and acoustic ecology. The few written pieces that do exist, such as Katherine Norman's(2) and Barry Truax's(3) articles as well as Andra McCartney's dissertation (4), address many of the above ideas and create an understanding for the deeper issues underlying the creation of soundscape compositions. They raise awareness about the type of listening these compositions encourage in an overloaded sound world that challenges us to take a stance both as listener and composer. I have taken inspiration from their writings and will be quoting from some of them here, as their different ways of speaking about soundscape compositions create a broader base for discussing this relatively new genre of contemporary composition.

Since audio technology enables everyone who has access to it, to make good quality recordings of *any* sound in the world, the sound environment has become a huge and rich 'resource' for anyone interested in working with environmental sounds. *All*sounds can become part of a soundscape composition. But can a piece be called a soundscape composition just because it uses environmental sounds as its source material?

Soundscape composition as I discuss it in this context, exists exclusively in the electroacoustic realm. We can only hear it if we have sound equipment, loudspeakers and electricity. In other words, it exists in the same realm as all the voices, musics, and other sounds that we hear daily on radios, TVs, films, videos, CDs, websites in many private, public and commercial environments. Our *acoustic*environment, which in itself can be dense and noisy, is populated with these additional *electroacoustic*sounds. Although this situation is perceived as 'natural' and 'normal' by many, it can also have a disorienting effect and create a sense of unreality. Murray Schafer appropriately calls this a 'schizophonic' listening experience, which is characterized by the fact that the sound source always originates in another place than where it is heard and often produces a mood or atmosphere that is out of context of the listener's physical location. Whether that place is an urban centre or a remote village (with electricity), acoustic and electroacoustic soundscapes are intermingled randomly throughout any day of the year in many parts of the world and the listener's "sense of place" may become confused and uprooted.

How then does soundscape composition fit inside this sonic labyrinth? Does it not contribute to an even deeper disorientation in this growing sound maze? Or can it, in fact, create a meaningful place for listener *and*composer despite the fact that it is experienced schizophonically? In the face of wide-spread commercial media and leased music corporations, who strategically try to use the schizophonic medium to transport potential customers into a state of *aural unawareness*and *unconscious*behaviour and ultimately into the act of spending money-in the face of such forces the soundscape composition can and should perhaps create a strong oppositional place of *conscious*listening. Rather than lulling us into false comfort, it can make use of the schizophonic medium to awaken our curiosity and to create a desire for deeper knowledge and information about our own as well as other places and cultures. It is a forum for us as composers to 'speak back' to problematic 'voices' in the soundscape, to deepen our relationship to positive forces in our surroundings or to comment on many other aspects of a society. Rather than disorienting us, such work potentially creates a clearer sense of place and belonging for both composer and listener, since the essence of soundscape composition is the artistic, sonic transmission of meanings about place, time, environment and listening perception.

A soundscape composition is *always*rooted in themes of the sound environment. It is never abstract. Recorded environmental sounds are its 'instruments', and they may be heard both unprocessed and processed. Some soundscape works are created entirely with unprocessed sounds and their compositional process occurs in the specific ways in which the sounds are selected, edited, mixed and organized. These pieces lean towards what I would call soundscape narrative or document. Other compositions may be created pre-dominantly with processed sounds. But in order for these to be heard as soundscape compositions the abstracted sounds must in some way make audible their relationship to their

original source, or to a place, time or situation. Yet other compositions may be created with a combination of unprocessed and processed sounds. But whatever the continuity is or the proportions are between the real (unprocessed) and the abstract (processed) sounds, the essence of soundscape composition lies in the *relationship* between the two and how this relationship inside the composition informs both composer and listener about place, time and situation. A piece cannot be called a soundscape composition if it uses environmental sound as material for abstract sound explorations only, without any reference to the sonic environment.

In the soundscape composition ... it is precisely the *environmental context* that is preserved, enhanced and exploited by the composer. The listener's past experience, associations, and patterns of soundscape perception are called upon by the composer and thereby integrated within the compositional strategy. Part of the composer's intent may also be to enhance the listener's awareness of environmental sound. (5)

Soundscape composition is as much a comment on the environment as it is a revelation of the composer's sonic visions, experiences, and attitudes towards the soundscape. Audio technology allows us as composers to sort out the many impressions that we encounter in an often chaotic, difficult sound world. If "listening is as much a 'material' for the composer as the sounds themselves,"(6) as Katherine Norman claims, then daily sound impressions play a significant role in the compositional process itself. Equally one can assume for audiences listening to such compositions, that the experience of conscious soundscape listening in daily life would add significantly to the understanding of and involvement with a soundscape composition. Composers and listeners then share the activity of listening as an important ingredient for making sense of the sound environment as well as of soundscape composition.

In fact it *dependson* our listening participation and invites us - through our active, imaginative engagement with 'ordinary' sounds - to contribute, creatively to the music...As listeners, and composers, we may return to real life disturbed, excited and challenged on a spiritual and social plane by a music with hands-on relevance to both our inner and outer lives. (7)

Audio technology allows us to use environmental sound as a type of language that has its own set of meanings depending on the context within which it occurs or into which we place it in a composition. The soundscape composer may use it like a writer uses words in order to comment on the essential characteristics of a soundscape and heighten the listener's perception of it. Or alternately the composer may work with it like a caricaturist who exaggerates the contours, say, of a person's face and thus sharpens the viewer's perception of it; or like a landscape painter who deepens our understanding of and relationship to a place through a certain use of colour, light and shadow; or like a photographer who zooms in on the details not visible to the naked eye. In the same way the soundscape composer can draw our ears more deeply into the contours of sound, its colours and textures and into its details, and thereby enrich our perceptions of and change our attitudes towards our daily sound environment. This type of composition and what Katherine Norman calls a "real-world work"

...can be seen as a move *away* from the reality, but *through* the reality, that frames our experience of music.....While not being realistic, real-world music leaves a door ajar on the reality in which we are situated. I contend that real-world music is not concerned with realism and *cannot* be concerned with realism because it seeks, instead, to initiate a journey which takes us away from our preconceptions, so that we might arrive at a changed, perhaps expanded, appreciation of reality. (8)

The soundscape composition then is a new place of listening, meaningful precisely because of its schizophrenic nature and its use of environmental sound surces. Its location is the electroacoustic realm. Speaking from that place with the sounds of our living environments inevitably highlights the world around us and our relationship to it. By riding the edge between real and recorded sounds, original and processed sounds, daily and composed soundscapes it creates a place of balance between inner and outer worlds, reality and imagination. Soundscape listening and composing then are located in the same place as creativity itself: where reality and imagination are in continuous conversation with each other in order to reach beneath the surface of life experience

...real world-music, like poetry, is impelled by a desire to invoke our internal 'flight' of imagination so that, through an imaginative listening to what is 'immanent in the real', we might discover what is immanent in us. (9)

- 
1. When I speak of soundscape composition in this article I refer to tape pieces that are created with recorded environmental sounds. I neither speak of sound installations nor of musical compositions for acoustic or electroacoustic instruments that are composed for specific sites and may address soundscape issues.
  2. Katherine Norman, "Real-World Music as Composed Listening", *Contemporary Music Review*, 1996, Vol. 15, Part 1, pp. 1-27.
  3. Barry Truax, "Soundscape, Acoustic Communication and Environmental Sound Composition", *Contemporary Music*

Review, 1996, Vol. 15, Part 1, pp.47-63.

4.Andra McCartney, "Sounding Places: Situated Conversations through the Soundscape Work of Hildegard Westerkamp", PhD Dissertation, Graduate Programme in Music, York University, 1999.

5.Barry Truax, Acoustic Communication, Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1984, p. 207.

6.Norman, p. 2. 7.Norman, p. 2. 8.Norman, p. 19. 9.Norman, p. 26.

# WFAE Newsletter

## World Forum For Acoustic Ecology: September - October, 2007

[Home](#)

### Feature Article

---

## Bauhaus and Soundscape Studies - Exploring Connections and Differences By Hildegard Westerkamp

Aspects of this text were originally presented in two lectures at the Symposium From Bauhaus to Soundscape Goethe Institute Tokyo, October 1994, revised March 2002

### The Emergence of Soundscape Studies

From the very start of my work with R. Murray Schafer and the World Soundscape Project (WSP) in the Seventies it was clear that Bauhaus had had a strong influence on how Soundscape Studies emerged as a field of study and how it was defined. Schafer wrote that

The most important revolution in aesthetic education in the twentieth century was that accomplished by the Bauhaus. Many famous painters taught at the Bauhaus, but the students did not become famous painters, for the purpose of the school was different. By bringing together the fine arts and the industrial crafts, the Bauhaus invented the whole new subject of industrial design.(1)

Two aspects attracted Schafer to Bauhaus: the interdisciplinary nature of its training and design practice, as well as the connection that was made between craftsmanship and artistic production, functionalism and creativity. In our work as the WSP-most of us were composers and musicians-we made similar connections: the composer was perceived not only as the acoustic designer of musical sound in a composition, but also and most importantly as an acoustic designer of daily life. As a result we studied the many aspects of sound and applied it to real life situations. Rather than staying marginalized by producing inaccessible and abstract art music to small exclusive audiences, we thought of the composer as a valuable contributor towards dealing with issues of soundscape. Composers could become the socially conscious, sonic-architects or acoustic designers of our cities, buildings, and villages. It was precisely this-the vision of the artist/composer as a crafts person, as someone trained in all disciplines of sound, and as someone entirely connected to and useful in the real working world-that attracted me to the WSP And Schafer's vision went further:

An equivalent revolution is now called for among the various fields of sonic studies. The revolution will consist of a unification of those disciplines concerned with the science of sound and those concerned with the art of sound. The result will be the development of the inter disciplines acoustic ecology and acoustic design. (2)

In other words, not only did we as composers familiarize ourselves with the various scientific aspects of sound, but we also saw it as our task to bring together the various professions that were already dealing with acoustics, sound and noise. To date-25/30 years later-this vision of unification of disciplines that Schafer presents in the above quote has hardly taken root. Like the original members of the WSP, most people who are engaged in the field of soundscape studies or acoustic ecology nowadays are also composers, musicians, radio artists, and so on. The odd architect, geographer, town planner, psychologist, acoustical engineer, audiologist and others have indeed become involved. But these usually are exceptions, they are scholars and professionals who have dared to break the boundaries of their own specialization and want to move towards a more interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary approach to sound.

So in reality, there still can be no talk of unification of disciplines in the way Schafer had envisioned it. It remains as an important and continuing task to clarify to the specialized scientists of sound that any study and research of sound in the context of acoustic ecology simply has to leave the laboratory, has to occur in the "field". Likewise, many of those who already are embracing acoustic ecology as a field of study in its own right, need to understand that it cannot occur only within the limits of artistic production and that indeed knowledge of all aspects of sound, including the scientific ones, is urgently needed. It is the only way for meaningful and effective changes and exchanges to happen in a soundscape full of ecological problems.

Anyone concerned with the quality of the sonic environment cannot hide behind specialization-no matter whether it is located in the artistic or scientific arena- but must embrace all aspects of sound. Sound is the "voice" of a society, of a landscape, of an environment. If we understand the meanings of sound we understand what a place, a society is saying

about itself. If we understand the behaviour of sound we can hear how a society behaves towards its environment. If we listen to our own listening, then we can also hear how our own soundmaking in daily life influences the soundscape's quality.

The word soundscape is derived from landscape. Soundscape is the acoustic manifestation of "place", where the sounds give the inhabitants a sense of place and the place's acoustic quality is shaped by the inhabitants' activities and behaviour. The meanings are created precisely because of this interaction between soundscape and people. Thus, the sonic environment (or soundscape), which is the sum total of all sounds within any defined area, is an intimate reflection of—among others—the social, political, technological, and natural conditions of the area. Change in these conditions means change in the sonic environment.

My mother for example, who was born in Germany in 1907, remembers hearing the first car and of course the first air plane. She remembers when she first heard the radio, music on a record player or a sound film. Technological changes have been so rapid and so numerous in her life time, i.e. most of the twentieth century, that enormous changes in the soundscape have resulted. Most of us do not know what it means to experience such profound changes. And it is precisely because of these changes that the density of sound, noise and music has increased, that there is comparatively little silence in our lives, and that ultimately concern for the quality of the soundscape has become an issue. The soundscape and our experience of it, especially in urban or technologically modernized environments, is out of balance and it is for that reason that the terms sound ecology or acoustic ecology have taken root in our language and thinking.

Soundscape Studies has emerged at a time when noise pollution has become a recognized and wide-spread problem. Whatever actions have been taken against noise, the problem does not seem to go away. Measurements and legislation alone are not enough. Something else is needed: activating our ears, listening and finding ways of understanding the soundscape around us, our ways of relating to it. In other words, through soundscape studies we can begin to understand that the noise problem does not lie outside of us but is intricately intertwined with our relationship to our environment, to how consciously or unconsciously we listen and make sound. The profoundly enriching experience of working as a member of the World Soundscape Project was connected to the group's sincere effort to combine scientific knowledge with artistic, perceptual knowledge of sound. It was precisely in this combination of research, education, creativity and activism in which the energy of the WSP was located and which enabled us to produce in a relatively short time a number of pioneering documents and projects.

In addition we not only researched sound across many disciplines but also gathered cross cultural information from around the world as a way to understand differing ways of listening and soundmaking in other cultures. This has become particularly relevant in today's world of expanded tourism, travel, migration, refugee movements etc. Individual researchers in cultural studies have started to pay attention to soundscape work and acoustic ecology from that perspective. But the majority of cross-cultural sound exploration still tends to be stuck in the wonders of modern recording technology. Rarely does it reach beyond the recording of foreign soundscapes into in-depth study or analysis. The numerous CDs available now of natural and urban soundscapes from many countries of the world have become in the best case—interesting documentation, aural information, a story, a type of text from another place. In the worst case, they have become an imported product, a "neat" sound without any real meaning beyond the WOW experience, without any information about the places where the sounds originate, they have become an excuse for further non-listening, "new age muzak", or yet another object on our shelves. (3)

And yet, there is nothing wrong with recording soundscapes of other cultures, as long as it is done to increase our mutual understanding of each other and to learn to listen to each other. In today's context of global communication and corporate globalization, we must know more about and understand the language of sound in different cultures. Travel and emigration open our aural perception because our ears are alerted to the unknown, the undecipherable and at the same time they miss the familiar. Our need to decode the meanings of unfamiliar sounds and soundscapes makes us listen with attention. Nowhere is it clearer than on a trip that listening is a type of survival, an attempt to find orientation in a new place. And when we begin to familiarize ourselves with the soundscape of a new culture, we begin to feel a little more at home there, we begin to feel safer. Often at that point we tend to think back consciously and perhaps with nostalgia to the soundscapes we come from.

It is perhaps not surprising, given the expanded possibilities for communication across the globe, the increased trend towards travel and cultural exchanges, that in 1993, some years after the WSP ceased existing as an active research group, a new organization was formed: the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology (WFAE), an international association of affiliate organizations and individuals, who share a common concern for the state of the world's soundscapes. Like the WSP, it speaks of acoustic ecology as the study of the relationship between living organisms and their sonic environment or soundscape. It sees as its task to draw attention to unhealthy imbalances in this relationship, to improve the acoustic ecology of a place wherever possible, and to preserve acoustically balanced soundscapes. The underlying tone of these statements is one of care and concern for the sonic environment, of a felt relationship. Wanting to care for the acoustic environment in the deepest sense, creates the desire to listen to it and vice versa, listening to it creates a desire, or perhaps beyond that, it highlights the urgent need to care for it—just as caring for our children creates desire to listen to them and vice versa. Like the WSP, the WFAE's aims to combine scientific and artistic/perceptual knowledge of sound,

research and education, creative and activist work.

### **Bauhaus and Today's Soundscape**

Although Bauhaus may have had a strong influence on the early approaches towards soundscape studies and ideas of acoustic design, many of the outgrowths of Bauhaus design have not necessarily produced positive results in the soundscape itself. Let me back-track a little here.

Walter Gropius, architect and founder of Bauhaus was interested in creating beauty in his designs, derived from adapting form to a technological culture. The result was a kind of mechanistic design or industrial architecture. Bauhaus was to be a place that would provide a complete, homogeneous physical environment in which all the visual arts would have their place. And by learning practical crafts and by acquainting themselves with tools, materials and forms, and most importantly with the machine, designers/artists would better be able to solve the social problems of an industrial society.

Similarly, and as we have already seen, Schafer envisioned the World Soundscape Project as a type of umbrella for all the disciplines concerned with sound and music. By learning everything about how sounds and our aural perception function in society, we would better be able to solve the problems of the post industrial society with its environmental problems.

Bauhaus in its time context combined arts and utility, and wanted to bring aesthetics into machinery and industrial design. It did not strive to design luxury objects for the wealthy elite, but more to produce functional and aesthetically pleasing objects for mass society. Its result was-despite its short life span-a widespread acceptance of functional, unornamented design of objects for daily use. Just as Bauhaus wanted to strip architecture and visual design of its ornamental fluff or visual "noise"-wanted to exercise a type of cleansing from the clutter that a traditional society can create- so Soundscape Studies and Acoustic Design wants to strip the soundscape of its sonic overload, its noise and all the acoustic "perfume" that the Muzak Corporation, for example, has introduced into urban environments. The desire for the simple, clean line, the surface empty of ornament in Bauhaus can perhaps be likened to the desire for silence as a basis for soundscape acoustic design.

Bauhaus must be understood within the context of its time, when streamlining, stripping of the unnecessary, even depersonalization were a liberation from bourgeois mannerisms in design. In music something similar could be observed at that time where composers-such as Schönberg with his twelve tone approach to composition-wanted to cut through the clutter of Wagnerian musical density and arrived at a certain type of clarity, simplicity and transparency in their music; or perhaps ideologically more closely related, in the case of Eric Satie's composition *musique d'ameublement* (furniture music) where the act of listening to music as an art form was actively discouraged, indeed, where the musical sound itself was to function like the furniture of the place in which it occurred - as a backdrop to the social dynamics of the occasion. Little did he know that the Muzak Corporation some 15 years later developed exactly this idea in a socially completely different context (i.e. in factories and later in commercial environments) with such success that now huge segments of society all over the world have been conditioned not to listen. Little did he know that the wide-spread non-listening has become an ecologically dangerous habit. More about this later.

At the time of Bauhaus, standardization and in fact depersonalization were desirable in building design. But the new architecture that has developed out of this has become an international style of urban architecture, to be found anywhere in the world now where there is corporate money. In fact, the Bauhaus aesthetics which were very much in opposition to bourgeois aesthetics of the time, have been greatly utilized and exploited by capitalist ideology. When we look at some of the physical outgrowths today of Bauhaus design and its thinking, certain real problems emerge in connection with soundscape design and acoustic ecology. Steel frames and glass were synonymous with functional beauty in Bauhaus design. These along with concrete form the highly reflective surfaces of the highrises in modern urban centres nowadays. Acoustically these environments create the so-called canyon effect where the concrete, steel and glass serve as huge amplifiers of traffic sound, emergency sirens, exhaust sounds from buildings, and so on.

Although most likely not anticipated by Bauhaus designers, functionalism and efficiency in building design have been developed to great extremes during the twentieth century as banks and corporations have been erecting their tall towers. Artificial control of air and light has become an integral aspect of this type of building design, where no windows can be opened and natural light does not find access. Sonically this translates into electrical hums from artificial lighting and broadband sounds from air conditioning inside, and powerful broadband sounds from the buildings' exhaust systems outside. Modern cities are not only throbbing with amplified and reflected traffic sounds, but also with the "bad breath", as Schafer calls it, of highrise buildings.

So, the internationalism in urban design has not only resulted in visual but also in aural sameness: same materials, same structures, same sounds. A rather sinister acoustic extension of this sameness is the so-called functional music, the muzak mentioned above, that can be heard in many parts of the world for the express purpose to increase production and profit. Functional music was started by the Muzak Corporation in the US in the early thirties at the time when Bauhaus was closed down by the Nazi Regime. It came into its own during the war time weapons industry to speed up production.

It is mass produced and mass distributed. It absorbs, blends, melts various styles of music, music from different cultures into the uniform sounds of re-orchestrated background music.

Bauhaus in its original intent wanted to highlight the essence of industrial functional design as a type of freeing from the clutter of ornamentation and overburdened tradition and thereby wanted to revitalize urban design. Its internationalism at that time felt like a liberation from stuffy parochialism and the limitations of "place". The Muzak Corporation is the sonic representation of what happens when functionalism and international sameness are carried to the extreme: it ends up highlighting the blandness and meaninglessness of urban living by melting away the essence of musical, cultural vitality: the specific styles, the specifics that characterize music of a place or a culture. It in fact is a type of acoustic elimination of place. It takes music's connection to a specific culture out of its core and makes it a "universal" sound. It calls its re-orchestration work "acoustic design" and its background music "environmental music muzak." It has become the international sound of commercial environments.

Its orchestral sound and 15-minute stimulus curve have become synonymous with artificial building environments of glass, concrete, and steel. All sense of place is eliminated once one enters these buildings. Or rather all connection to the social, political and cultural reality outside of its walls is eliminated. Through the sound of muzak, and via telephone, fax and email one is connected only to other such buildings anywhere in the world, never to the street immediately outside. This, of course was never the intent behind Bauhaus.

Soundscape Studies emerged at a time when beauty was no longer located in functionalism. Too many damaging effects of industrial society and corporate thinking have turned people's perception of beauty and care towards the natural environment. Noise of industrial society is no longer attractive as the sound of progress. Acoustic design in the context of Soundscape Studies stands in direct opposition to the so-called acoustic design of the Muzak Corporation: it wants to work from the basis of an uncluttered, unmasked sound environment, from a place that can welcome new sound into its space either because it is quiet or because it is sonically so alive, energizing and varied that it has room for more sounds. The quietest natural places in the world as well as the busiest jungle soundscapes can give valuable cues for such acoustic design.

Any type of design in the sense of a Bauhaus of today would have to adapt to an environmentally conscious society and would want to be sensitive to its problems. Likewise as composers working from the base of Soundscape Studies we can no longer pursue Schönberg and other twentieth century composers' approach to composition as abstract musical language, but want to speak with the concrete language of environmental sound in the context of acoustic ecology and the problems of our sound environments. As organizers of sound we have a responsibility to design compositions as well as environments with a sense of care for our soundscapes.

### **Soundscape Brasilia**

I want to elaborate on the above ideas with the example of Brasilia here, because this city is a relatively new city (built in 1964), very much based on Bauhaus design principles. What happens to the soundscape of a city that has been designed from scratch, based on a master plan? Has sound figured into the design scheme?

In 1994 I was invited by the Goethe Institut Brasilia to conduct a soundscape workshop there. Although this workshop's emphasis was high-tech and production oriented and the aim was to produce a number of compositions about Brasilia's soundscape, composed by a group of people from Brasilia, the real emphasis and the most interesting part behind the high-tech production was our exploration of and gradual familiarization with the city's soundscape, its noise issues and its place within Brazilian cultural and political realities.

The idea of transferring the country's capital away from the coast has existed since the second half of the eighteenth century, as a way to populate, develop and secure Brazil's vast interior.<sup>(4)</sup> In the mid-fifties during the presidential campaign of Juscelino Kubitschek it was finally proposed as a concrete project and was realized shortly after. Brasilia is not even 40 years old. The part that looks like a bird on the map or rather like an airplane, is the so-called Plano Piloto, pilot plan. The master plan for Plano Piloto was designed by Lucio Costa. Oscar Niemeyer was the architect who designed most buildings and Burle Marx was the landscape architect. Plano Piloto has been declared a heritage site by UNESCO and any changes to it have to go through a rigorous review process. I will limit my discussion to this part of the city with the consciousness that Brasilia stretches beyond these boundaries and that the satellite cities that have sprouted around its peripheries in the last 30 years, are a direct result of the master plan. Generally speaking one can say that anyone or anything that does not fit into the master plan concept is accommodated in these cities.

The body of the airplane is made up of the Monumental Axis along which we find from east to west most government institutions, the cathedral, the hospital, commercial, hotel and bank sectors, the TV tower, the Kubitschek mausoleum, the military sector and the overland bus and train station. The wings of the airplane, called Asa Sul and Asa Norte, are made up of the Residential Highway Axis which moves from North to South. This is where most people live in three to six story apartment buildings. Where the two axes meet is the rodoviaria, the central bus station. This is the centre of Plano Piloto,

the "market square", where the work force from the satellite cities arrives and departs every day.

The crossing of two paths along the basic north-south and east-west directions, initially just a cross drawn in the earth, has grown into two huge traffic arteries with six lanes in all four directions. Compare the sound of the stick drawing this cross in the earth, and all the natural sounds accompanying this act, to the traffic sound that now occupies the centre axes through this city. This contrast is I believe the basic contrast today in the soundscape of Brasilia and surroundings.

On the one hand, it is very hard to get away from traffic noise within Plano Piloto. But on the other hand one does not have to drive very far to leave this behind and enter a very quiet, natural soundscape.

But visitors-and residents of Brasilia may not be fully aware of this-hear nothing but traffic from their hotel rooms. All hotels are located in the two hotel sectors and these are surrounded by large traffic arteries as well as smaller streets. As far as I could find out there is not one hotel room in the whole city that is free of this noise. Later at night when the traffic has subsided a little, another layer of sound emerges: the exhaust of every hotel's air conditioning system.

Traffic and the air-conditioning function like soundwalls, creating a barrier to hearing distance and quietness. Four weeks of this from my hotel room has undoubtedly taken its toll and influenced my perception of Brasilia. The overall traffic artery layout has been designed around the smooth flow of traffic, but very little seems to have been done to shield inhabitants from its noise. The obvious question then is, whether there was any thought of acoustic design in the grand design scheme of Plano Piloto.

As much as the Monumental Axis and the Residential Highway Axis may connect people between sectors or between home and work, acoustically speaking they form two enormous soundwalls that divide the city. The dimensions of the acoustic space that the traffic on these arteries occupy are much more extensive than their geographical dimensions. The traffic noise travels right across the expansive green spaces into hotel rooms, offices, churches, even schools, and many of the living areas. The eyes can see far but the ear cannot hear beyond the acoustic immediacy of the car motor. The Monumental Axis may offer many photo opportunities, but recordings made in the same place will offer little variation from the incessant traffic noise. Similarly inside the car, the driver is cut off from the outside soundscape. In fact, the windshield functions like a movie screen and the car motor and radio like the accompanying soundtrack. But because everything looks wide open one gets the illusion of space. Acoustically, however, one is closed in.

So, my point is clear. This city has exactly what other, not so consciously designed cities have-a lot of traffic noise. Meanwhile at the nearby lake one can find serene silence. It is obvious by now that Brasilia is a place of sharply contrasting soundscapes: traffic noise and natural sounds. There is very little in between. Human social contexts, like cafes or restaurants, appear in small isolated clusters, dotted all over the city, connectable only by car. That which defines a community acoustically is mostly lacking: the regular street, the small alleys, little squares, shady old trees, market places, neighbourhood cafes, those hidden corners that develop over time as a city becomes older. It is in those more intimate places where community develops, where culture first occurs, where people in their social interaction are protected from the larger noise of a city and can create small islands of undisturbed communication, a type of inner voice or village voice of urban culture and social life.

Some Superquadras, the residential areas, seem to function a little bit like small communities with their own acoustic characteristics. In many of them traffic noise is at a healthy distance and the foreground sound of people's voices, birds, crickets, cicadas are pleasant and varied. I was told, although I have not seen a written reference to this, that the height of the apartment buildings (six floors) was determined partially for acoustic reasons: communication between parent and children is possible as far as the sixth floor but not further. So, ideally, if the parent is not listening to radio or TV, or running the vacuum cleaner, the child can be heard calling from the outside up to the sixth floor and vice versa.

Superquadras, however, are vulnerable to outside sonic invasions. Schools attract car traffic and according to one resident a lot of car honking, when parents come to pick up their children at noon and at the end of a school day. Recent noise legislation (in 1994) tries to protect residents from some sonic intrusions, by giving strict guidelines to bars, restaurants, night clubs etc. about interior acoustic insulation and exterior noise levels. Residential areas are not to exceed 45 dB after 10 p.m. I have noticed that some of these restaurants are very close to apartment buildings and was told that some establishments have been closed down as a result of noise complaints. There are, however, superquadras, that are built close to roads where no noise legislation can protect from traffic noise, unless the roads are closed to traffic.

Another type of sound that acoustically defines a community is largely missing in Brasilia: every community tends to have its own signals and soundmarks that give voice to a community's belief systems, activities and activity patterns and that give inhabitants, often unconsciously, a sense of place. Visually the urban landscape of Brasilia is full of architectural landmarks, giving monumental shape to the master plan, but the soundscape is not defined by any significant soundmarks. In fact, the city does not signal anything but car alarms to the newcomer and therefore does not make our ears curious about its community life. I am told that the cathedral and some smaller churches have bells, but these are not prominent in the soundscape nor do they seem to be in people's consciousness.

So, if Brasilia is neither a city of prominent signals nor of small intimate community places, which acoustic qualities then give this city its character and its inhabitants a sense of place? What is its acoustic identity? The sounds that have kept my ears curious and exercised in Brasilia have been sounds from various crickets and cicadas which cut right through the density of traffic noise even in the hotel sector. There seems to be an endless variety of rhythms and resonances in these sounds.

Perhaps it is precisely the contrast between the anonymous international city sound of traffic and the cricket and cicada sounds specific to this place that characterizes acoustically what Brasilia still is: a pioneer venture, a master plan, modernist urban architecture with its claim to internationalism, cut into the Brazilian cerrado (bushland). It has in a sense "emigrated" into foreign, undeveloped territory, to start a new life, to transform social order and to negate and overcome underdevelopment in the rest of the country. The buildings are all there to attest to this ideal. But the soundscape reveals that the human psyche has not emigrated at the same speed. The international character of the city is only audible in the sameness of traffic noise, the worst aspect of internationalism.

I am told again and again that people who live in Brasilia really like the city. Apparently, in comparison to the conditions in other parts of the country, the conveniences and practical advantages outweigh the feelings of cultural estrangements and loss of community life. There is a certain freedom in a place of cultural anonymity. It reminds me of my own emigration from Germany to Canada: to be freed from those traditions that are restrictive means to have more freedom to move, both physically and psychically. One is free to invent a new life and to hear inner voices not tied to the voices of tradition. There is a liberation in that. But deep down the longing for those small nooks and crannies, those intimate places, those village and city squares with their fountains and old oaktrees, those bells that tell the time and make music, that longing stays. The memory of these places with their acoustic expressions define inner culture, emotion and imagination, they define one's sense of community. They are the base from which one hears Brasilia.

Old cities have the advantage of street and building structures, belief systems, traditions already in place, with their characteristic sounds or soundscapes. Noise has less of a chance to invade. There simply is no room for motorized vehicles in many of the narrow alleyways and streets. And if they do enter, like they did in many European city centres, the noise and pollution have become so unbearable that common sense has banned all traffic from many of these centres. As well, certain sounds or soundscapes that are sacred or significant in other ways, are not allowed to be disturbed or eliminated.

But if we plan a brand new city and drive into a natural environment with our noisy motors and all that that entails and do not spend the time to listen to this new place, then traffic noise and construction is there first before our ears have had time to adjust to nature's quiet and to listen to all that it entails. Silence then is not given a chance-as Ursula Franklin calls it-"as an enabling condition, that opens up the possibility of unprogrammed, unplanned and unprogramable happenings."(5) It is in those creative silences that that which defines a place and a culture is given a chance to be born.

More and more I am understanding the project Soundscape Brasilia as creating such a space for listening, for finding the silences and the sonic character of this city. I feel that the workshop participants have understood this right away and searched for that which speaks of Brasilia in an honest voice and they have found those sounds and soundscapes that mean Brasilia to them. It is pioneer work, as one has to listen through the noise of new world mythology into a vast world of possibilities where culture has barely presented itself or if it was there in the form of tribal cultures, where it has been masked just as much as natural soundscapes have. In this case the microphones have lent a new ear to Brasilia.

---

(1) Schafer, R. Murray (1977). *The Tuning of the World*. Alfred Knopf, NY. p. 205.

(2) *ibid.* p.205.

(3) Westerkamp, H. (1999): "Speaking from Inside the Soundscape," in: *From Awareness to Action, Proceedings from Stockholm Hey Listen! Conference on Acoustic Ecology, June 9-13, 1998, The Royal Swedish Academy of Music, Stockholm, Sweden.*

(4) Holston, James. (1989) *The Modernist City, An Anthropological Critique of Brasilia*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London.

(5) Franklin, Ursula. (1994) "Silence and the Notion of the Commons", *The Soundscape Newsletter*, Number Seven, January 1994, p. 6.

Hildegard Westerkamp is a composer, radio artist and sound ecologist. She presents soundscape workshops and lectures internationally, performs and writes. Westerkamp is a founding member of the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology and is Chair of the Soundscape: Journal of Acoustic Ecology editorial committee. [Read More](#).

[Top of page](#)

# WFAE Newsletter

## World Forum For Acoustic Ecology: September - October, 2007

### [Home](#)

### About the WFAE

---

The [World Forum for Acoustic Ecology](#) (WFAE), founded in 1993, is an international association of affiliated organizations and individuals, who share a common concern with the state of the world's soundscapes. Our members represent a multi-disciplinary spectrum of individuals engaged in the study of the social, cultural and ecological aspects of the sonic environment

The World Forum for Acoustic Ecology welcomes your participation in the growth and development of regional affiliate groups around the world. Learn more about becoming a member by downloading our [WFAE 2007 membership form \(PDF\)](#) or visiting the [membership](#) web page.

WFAE members receive the annual [Soundscape: Journal of Acoustic Ecology](#) (SJAE) .

We encourage you to become involved in on-going discussions through the WFAE sponsored [Acoustic-Ecology listserv](#). It is easy to join and participate with other ear-minded individuals regarding the soundscape environments in which we live.

Information:

- [WFAE Web Site](#)
- [WFAE Listserv](#) discussion group
- WFAE Secretary: [contact-secretary@wfae.net](mailto:contact-secretary@wfae.net)
- WFAE Membership: [membership-secretary@wfae.net](mailto:membership-secretary@wfae.net)
- [Soundscape: Journal of Acoustic Ecology](#) (SJAE)
- SJAE Editor: [soundscape-editor@wfae.net](mailto:soundscape-editor@wfae.net)

Gary Ferrington, WFAE Secretary  
[contact-secretary@wfae.net](mailto:contact-secretary@wfae.net)