

Sound in the Land – Music and the Environment: A Festival Celebrating the Earth

By Dr. Carol Ann Weaver

We hope to listen to the earth differently, finding new ways to create musical responses to our beautiful planet stressed by climate change. We are already part of the earth's ecology so our music is part of a wider global sound.

(Carol Ann Weaver, Artistic Director and Coordinator, Sound in Land)

“Sound in the Land 2014 – Music and the Environment,” a festival/conference held June 5–8, 2014 at Conrad Grebel University College/UW, explored ways of hearing the earth and listening to the environment. The event was endorsed as an official WFAE conference, featuring WFAE President Eric Leonardson, as well as other WFAE members including Sabine Breitsameter. The event also related closely to WFAE’s Canadian affiliate, Canadian Association for Sound Ecology (CASE) featuring CASE Board members Eric Powell, Matthew Griffin, and Carol Ann Weaver. There were 116 conference registrants with 300-plus additional attenders at individual concerts and/or conference sessions. All materials can be readily accessed at the conference website which also includes the complete conference booklet, with all concerts and conference sessions fully annotated.¹

The third in a series of highly successful events, “Sound in the Land” combined concerts – choral, vocal, chamber, orchestral, soundscape, multimedia, and folk/jazz – with workshops, academic conference sessions, nature/sound walks, and singing as we explored ecological understandings of music and sound, both locally and globally. This event brought together musicians, environmentalists, ethnomusicologists, writers, and artists into a setting, which blended music, various arts, sciences, soundscape studies, ethnomusicology and ecomusicology. The focus of “Sound in the Land” was the environment and our relation to it, both sonically/musically and ethically. This proved to be extremely timely due to our increasing awareness of climate change, over-population, soil/water/air contamination, shrinking natural habitats, and endangered species.

Of greatest significance for “Sound in the Land” was the keynote address delivered by R. Murray Schafer, internationally renowned WFAE founder and creator of the term and concept “soundscape.” His address, given in dialogue with Eleanor James, brought to the fore some of the cornerstones of his widely influential thinking about sound, the environment, and work with his own Wolf Project, a ritual event which takes place in Ontario’s Halliburton Forest.² Unlike celebrities who show up only for their address, Schafer, along with James, graced the entire festival, attending and participating richly in all events. During sonic artist Natascha Rehberg’s sound installation, for example, Schafer spontaneously directed a group listening exercise; during Canadian cellist Leanne Zacharias’ sound/space/improvisation workshop, he was found seated on the grass,



Fig. 1. Murray Schafer, Leanne Zacharias (cello), Carol Ann Weaver, Michelle Bunn (with microphone), Eric Powell (kneeling), et al, Improv Workshop at Sound in Land, June 7, 2014

clapping a pulsing rhythm with his own two shoes! (Fig. 1.)

Another keynote address – equally important, informative, and inspiring – was given by the foremost South African carnivore researcher Gus Mills, who presented and discussed natural sounds from the Kalahari Desert, including rarely heard cheetah calls, hyena whoops, and other ambient sounds unique to this part of the world. His address was framed by a cappella vocal music from South Africa, including the famed “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika”, sung lustily by two University of Waterloo-based choirs. Also, South African marabi-styled music was performed by an Afro-beat band.

A strong and remarkable component of “Sound in the Land” was the sheer amount (and quality) of music by soundscape and environmentally focused composers and sonic artists from Canada, USA, Germany, Switzerland, and beyond. These were presented in a series of orchestral, chamber, choral, soundscape, gamelan, and folk/jazz concerts, occurring both indoors and outdoors. Featured works included environmental pieces by the lake by R. Murray Schafer,



Photo by Alan Morgan

Fig. 2. Canoe birds at Columbia Lake, Dawn Concert, Sound in the Land, Sunday, June 8, 2014



Photo by Jennifer Konkle

Fig. 3. Good Hearted Women singers, Dawn Concert, Sound in the Land, Sunday, June 8, 2014

Jennifer Butler, and Emily Doolittle. Soundscapes were presented by Eric Leonardson, Nicholas Cline, Emily Doolittle, James Harley, Cam McKittrick, Ursula Meyer-König, Felix Deufel, Yannick Hofmann, Natascha Rehberg, and Klaus Schüller. Orchestral, chamber, choral and/or African-themed music was performed by Janet Peachey, Larry Warkentin, Carol Ann Weaver, Alberto Grau, Peteris Vasks, Larry Nickel, Carol Dyck, Esther Wiebe, and others. Prominent improvisers included Mark Hartman (violin), Tilly Kooyman (clarinet), Leanne Zacharias (cello), Mary Wing (flute), Karen Ages (oboe), Heather Carruthers (bassoon), Debra Lacoste (trumpet), with improvisatory vocalists Peg Evans, Bonnie Brett, and Rebecca Campbell. One of the most spectacular events was the visually and musically stunning multimedia piece, *Earth Songs*, by internationally acclaimed Korean sonic artist Cecilia Kim. This piece brought together artists and musicians from Korea and Canada, as it combined traditional Korean music with poetry by Canadian environmentalist poet John Weier and evocative vocals by Canadian singer Rebecca Campbell.

Besides the Korean troupe, other performing ensembles included Waterloo Chamber Players Orchestra, Inter-Mennonite Children's Choir, Mino Ode Kwewak N'gamowak (Good Hearted Women Singers), Rockway Collegiate Combo, UW University Choir, Tactus Choral Ensemble, Skyros String Quartet, Sound in the Land Festival Choir, and Dawn Concert Chamber Ensemble. The Grebel Gamelan (of Balinese tradition) led by ethnomusicologist Maisie Sum performed both instrumental and vocal music, including the spectacular "Kecak" – monkey chant. As well, 14 folk music groups performed throughout the festival.

Presentations ranged from soundscape theory to cultural and ethnical meanings of environmental sound. Studies dealt with sonic aspects of natural and human-adapted environments. Essay presentations included topics of ecomusicology, ethnomusicology, acoustic ecology, biology, environmental studies, environmentally themed ritual and worship practices, ethics, and consciousness-raising.

Several conference essay submissions relating specifically to acoustic ecology were discussed. German scholar, ecomusicologist, and WFAE member Sabine Breitsameter from Dieburg, Darmstadt presented research on soundscapes and on Canadian pianist Glenn Gould's innovative 1977 documentary "The Quiet in the Land" (Gould 1977). This documentary on Canadian Mennonites introduced the concept of "polyphonous audio aesthetics of 'contrapuntal radio'" to radio soundscapes (Breitsameter 2015). Dr. Breitsameter brought along six German students who also presented on soundscapes and sonic studies. WFAE President Eric Leonardson spoke about acoustic ecology, suggesting "ethical listening offers ways to

balance information with intuition and reflection, bringing the hope of recovery for various endangered species, and for our beleaguered planet" (Leonardson 2014, 13). Biologists/bird experts Lyle Friesen and Gus Mills presented highly complex calls of North American and South African birds, respectively, showing these sounds to be part of a natural landscape we need to preserve. Composer and sonic researcher Emily Doolittle similarly explored unique sonic properties of the much-admired Hermit Thrush. Large tracts of space and time were sonically accounted for within Virgil Martin's study of 100 years within rural regions of Waterloo County, Ontario, providing a fascinating array of changing environmental soundscapes due to technology and cultural practices. Poet John Weier humorously provided a similar, though highly specified, sweep of rural soundscapes from Ontario's Niagara region, within a recent twenty-year span. Other prominent sonic studies led us to Balinese gamelan gecko evocations by ethnomusicologist Maisie Sum, to Estonian regilaul singing by conductor, musicologist Mark Vuorinen, to Mexican Old Colony and Manitoba Plautdietsch (Low German) "songscapes" by Judith Klassen and Doreen Klassen, respectively.

Workshops and installations featured improvisatory vocal sounds by sonic artist Wendalyn Bartley, improvisatory dance movements in response to nature by dancer Diane Chapis, Schafer-esque listening exercises by cellist Leanne Zacharias and educator Douglas Friesen, and an interactive sonic tour to the city of Darmstadt by German sonic artist Natascha Rehberg. A dawn chorus sound walk, led by biologist Lyle Friesen, took attendees to natural forested areas to hear the songs of nesting birds, including the elusive Wood Thrush, now designated as a threatened species in Canada.

The Sunday morning Dawn Concert at nearby Columbia Lake was certainly one of the most grounding, encompassing, spiritually centered, memorable, and engaging events of the entire festival. Organized by Schafer specialists Tilly Kooyman and Rae Crossman, this event featured music and ritualized drama from Schafer's *Princess of the Stars*, with singers standing in moving canoes (Fig. 2). A dancer and roving musicians performed earth-themed music while circling areas of the grassy and treed lakeshore. Singing and greeting of the four directions by Mino Ode Kwewak N'gamowak (Good Hearted Women Singers – a First Nations group) evolved into a continuous circle dance (Figs. 3 and 4) which encompassed everyone gathered, providing full closure to this evocative, celebrative event. It is only correct that we listen to those who have first lived on this land in order to discover new ways to hear, respect, and honour this sacred earth.

There are many ways to listen to the earth. This festival/conference represents one of many other like-minded events which are bound

to grow exponentially as our planet becomes increasingly stressed by global warming, with the loss of species and habitats, and rapidly expanding human populations. Various comments allowed us to know this event was making a unique impact. Writer for *Alternatives Journal*, Michelle Di Centio, comments, “Everyone involved [at “Sound in the Land”] should be congratulated for providing a unique, informative and positive way for people to explore the environment by changing how they hear the world around them” (Di Centio 2014, par. 9). Writer Rae Crossman, in an email to the author, remarks, “The overall atmosphere of the festival/conference was stimulating and inspiring . . . can’t ask for more than that. And so many diverse elements in such a short time, yet with an overall sense of unity and community.”³ And composer/pianist Keenan Reimer Watts, also in an email, writes, “The environmental theme of this festival was a great way for people from all over the world to come together and create music and conversation that drew us together in a common cause. It was an inspiring and moving event, one that I look forward to attending again in the future!”⁴

As we engage an even broader spectrum of people to help listen to the earth, we may well consider the words of Al Gore in his book, *The Future*. Though he primarily addresses global warming and planetary degradation, Gore’s words can also apply to sonic matters and acoustic ecology. He describes two unknown paths, one which “leads toward the destruction of the climate balance on which we depend, the depletion of irreplaceable resources that sustain us, the degradation of uniquely human values, and the possibility that civilization as we know it would come to an end. The other leads to our future” (Gore 2013, 374). Thus, we go forward – there is no other alternative!

About the Author

CAROL ANN WEAVER, composer, pianist, writer, is Professor Emerita at Conrad Grebel College/University of Waterloo, as well as Secretary of Canadian Association of Sound Ecology (CASE), Chair of the Association of Canadian Women Composers (ACWC), and is founder/artistic director of *Sound in the Land – Music and the Environment 2014*. Her music and soundscapes are often Africa-influenced. Her music is heard in North America, Africa, Europe, and beyond.

Endnotes

1. The conference website <https://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/sound-land-2014> provides further context, links, visuals, and a conference video. A complete list of presenters, events, and short abstracts can be found on the Conference Booklet link, https://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/sites/ca.grebel/files/uploads/files/sl14_booklet_program_0.pdf (both accessed Jan. 21, 2015).
2. One of the most inclusive and poetic accounts of Schafer’s Wolf Project is “Notes from the Wild: An Account in Words and Music of R. Murray Schafer’s And Wolf Shall Inherit the Moon” by Rae Crossman, found at <http://www.tnq.ca/article/notes-wild-account-words-and-music-r-murray-schafers-and-wolf-shall-inherit-moon> (accessed Jan. 21, 2015).
3. Rae Crossman, email message to the author, June 18, 2014.
4. Keenan Reimer Watts, email message to the author, July 1, 2014.

References

- Breitsameter, S. 2015. “The Ordering of the Sounds: On the Homogenization of Listening in the Age of Globalized Soundscapes.” In C. A. Weaver, D. Klassen and J. Klassen (Eds.), *Sound in the Land – Music and the Environment*. Waterloo, ON: Conrad Grebel Review, Forthcoming, Fall, 2015.



Fig. 4. Circle Dance, Sunday Dawn Concert, *Sound in the Land*, Sunday, June 8, 2014

Di Centio, M. 2014. "Music and Mother Earth," June 18. *Alternatives Journal: Canada's Environmental Voice*. Accessed January 21, 2014. <http://www.alternativesjournal.ca/community/blogs/aj-special-delivery/music-and-mother-earth>

Gore, A. 2013. *The Future: Six Drivers of Global Change*. New York, NY: Random House.

Gould, G. 1977. "The Quiet in the Land." In Russ Germain (Producer), *Ideas*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, March 25.

Leonardson, E. 2014. Abstract for "Acoustic Ecology and Ethical Listening." *Sound in the Land – Music and the Environment Conference Booklet*. https://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/sites/ca.grebel/files/uploads/files/sl14_booklet_program_0.pdf (January 21).

Additional Links

"About Sound in Land." 2012. *The Record*. <http://www.therecord.com/living-story/2601058-university-of-waterloo-professor-helps-document-evolution-of-mennonite/>

Alternatives Journal. 2014. <http://www.alternativesjournal.ca/community/blogs/music-and-mother-earth-0>

Canadian Mennonite, 18: 13 (2014, June 23). <http://www.canadianmennonite.org/reader/4198>

CBC news, KW. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/andrea-s-five-fun-things-to-do-this-weekend-june-7-8-1.2665948>

Hill, V. and Reid, R. 2014. "Arts & Life," *The Record*, Thurs. June 5, D3. <http://www.therecord.com/whatson-story/4558271-sound-in-the-land-celebrates-nature-and-music-with-dash-of-mennonite-culture/>

Mennonite World Review. 2014, April. <http://mennoworld.org/2014/04/14/music-conference-to-celebrate-the-environment/>

Pointner, E. 2015. "Sound in the Land Report Back." *CMC Notations*, Winter, 20-29.

http://issuu.com/canadianmusiccentre/docs/cmc_w2015_hr/21?e=10808708/11476911

UW Bulletin, 2009. <http://www.bulletin.uwaterloo.ca/2009/may/28th.html>

WholeNote (Southern Ontario Arts Publication). 2014. Archived. <http://us1.campaignarchive2.com/?u=e00350ccdb1199290928ff746&id=e9639e2951>.

World Federation of Acoustic Ecology endorsement. <http://ericleonardson.org/whatsnew/tag/world-forum-for-acoustic-ecology/>

Reviews

Review of Jennifer Schine's film documentary *Listening to a Sense of Place* (16:22 minutes) & radio documentary *The End of the Line*

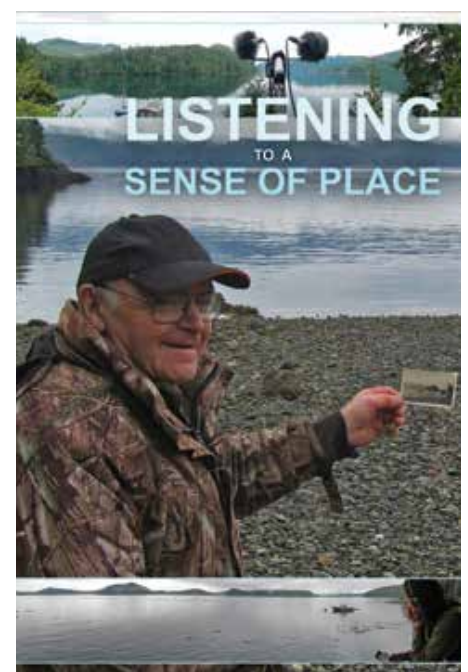
Reviewed by Giorgio Magnanensi

Every sound was a voice, every scrape or blunder was a meeting – with Thunder, with Oak, with Dragonfly. And from all of these relationships our collective sensibilities were nourished. (Abram 1996, ix)

Every sound is a voice – listening, sensing and being – harmonizing our nature within nature. This is the poetic and beautiful truth we discover listening to Billy Proctor's voice, his stories and his love for his place in *Listening to a Sense of Place*, an award-winning short film by Jennifer Schine co-created with Greg Crompton. Jennifer's documentary and the Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC) radio piece for the program, *Living Out Loud*, focus on Billy Proctor and Echo Bay in the Broughton Archipelago of British Columbia's Central Coast. There is no sentimentality in Jennifer's impassioned research based on her M.A. thesis work at Simon Fraser University's School of Communication under Barry Truax.

There is no romantic or exotic voyeurism in analyzing what it means to embody a harmonized identity within ourselves and our space when the sonorous world of *every voice* is feeding our own life, opening our senses, while we become resonating bodies in the reverberant landscapes of a pristine ecosystem.

Listening to a Sense of Place shows us how to discover the meaning of "*une écoute poétique de la nature*," a beautiful metaphor that Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers used more than thirty years ago to define new models of participation of the human being to the world (*La Nouvelle Alliance* 1979, 353–393). Jennifer's approach, foregrounding acoustic-based field research through the visual medium of film and the personal essay form of radio, resonates and enhances that very way of listening, and shares the awareness of the creative interaction occurring between scientific and cultural fields. With accurate methodology and scholar-



Listening to a Sense of Place: DVD Cover Art