

SOUND IN THE LAND – MUSIC AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

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Sound in the Land – Music and the Environment, the festival/conference held in June 2014, was the first event to pair specific genres of music and musical performance with scholarship in varied fields of music, environmental sciences, and creative writing. Musical genres represented at the Waterloo, Ontario based event included contemporary classical—choral, orchestral, chamber, soundscape, multimedia—and jazz, folk, and traditional musics of Bali, Korea, and North America. Scholarly approaches came from fields as disparate as ecomusicology (music and the environment), soundscape construction, Mennonite and cultural studies, faith-based and ritual music studies, and several sciences.

As a sequel to Sound in the Lands 2009 (which explored Mennonite music across cultural and musical borders and boundaries), and Sound in the Land 2004 (which dealt with Mennonite musical styles and ethnic expressions); Sound in the Land 2014 was *both* a festival with multiple concerts, performances, and workshops *and* an academic conference with papers and presentations exploring sound and the environment from different perspectives, locally and globally.¹ As one composer-participant expressed it, “People from various disciplines and backgrounds were united to discuss and, most importantly, to experience sound and the land through which it resonates.”²

Keynote speakers for Sound in the Land 2014 were R. Murray Schafer, a world-renowned Canadian composer and founder of the World Forum

¹ *Sound in the Lands: Mennonite Music across Borders*, ed. Doreen Helen Klassen and Anna Janacek (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2011); *Sound in the Land: Essays on Mennonites and Music*, ed. Maureen Epp and Carol Ann Weaver (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2005).

² Evan Pointner, “Sound in the Land Report Back,” *Notations* (Canadian Music Centre), Winter 2015, 24.

for Acoustic Ecology (WFAE)³, and Gus Mills, a foremost South African carnivore researcher and writer. Internationally acclaimed Korean media artist Cecilia Kim presented her multi-media piece, *Earth Songs*, while other musicians, composers, and presenters from Germany, Switzerland, South Africa, the United States and Canada made their own valuable contributions to the program. Given that Sound in the Land 2014 connected with sonic ecology studies, one of the fastest growing, cutting-edge areas of musical study today, the conference was endorsed by WFAE.

This issue of *The Conrad Grebel Review* presents selected conference essays that help document the interdisciplinary nature of the emerging field of ecomusicology. When Al Gore, in *The Future: Six Drivers of Global Change*, observes that today's global civilization is "colliding with the natural world and causing grave harm to important natural systems on which our continued thriving as a species depends,"⁴ we are reminded that we are part of the earth's ecology and that our music is part of a wider global sound. Sound in the Land 2014 provided an understanding of the ecology of our planet, the music of our environment, and music and sound as partial indicators of our planet's health and well-being. At its core the conference sought to find Mennonite perspectives on all such matters. As attendee Wendalyn Bartley noted, the event served to "draw attention to the Mennonite legacy of the host college Conrad Grebel and its commitment to promoting nonviolence and justice. Expanding that perspective to include peace and balance for the earth makes this festival such a landmark event."⁵

While Sound in the Land 2014 involved settings with live music, soundscapes, sound walks, singing, worship, and workshops, this publication contains the academic papers and creative writing that best represent the event themes. The papers move from exploring the nature of sound and silence, to listening to sounds in global Mennonite contexts, to hearing sounds in the natural world, and conclude with works on sounds in ritual contexts.

³ World Forum for Acoustic Ecology: <http://wfae.proscenia.net>, accessed February 12, 2015.

⁴ Al Gore, *The Future: Six Drivers of Global Change* (New York: Random House, 2013), 281. Both this book and Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* (New York: Rodale, 2006) directly influenced and inspired Sound in the Land 2014 – Music and the Environment.

⁵ Wendalyn Bartley, "Sound, Music and Nature's Song," *The WholeNote* 19, no. 9 (2014): 16.

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Section I, *The Silence of Stone: Perspectives of Sound*, describes the origins, scope, and context for the 2014 event and contains essays that explain basic building blocks of sonic awareness. This section, taking its title from Rae Crossman's poem "The Searching Sings," uncovers how mysteries inherent in silence become *song*. Sonic artist Matthew Griffin's "Conversation with Carol Ann Weaver" provides historical background on previous Sound in the Land events as well as the 2014 offering. The interview focuses on the opening welcome, which included a composite conference soundscape; live music by Korean traditional players and Tilly Kooyman with dancer Dianne Chapatis; comments by biologist Gus Mills, Grebel President Susan Schultz Huxman, and WFAE President Eric Leonardson; and poetry by Cheryl Denise Miller.

My welcoming comments as organizer are presented in "Notes toward Silence," which explores notions of silence within human and environmental worlds. Keynote speaker and writer R. Murray Schafer, who coined the term "soundscape," provides an essay, "Sound Around," which asks probing practical and philosophical questions—both time-honored and strikingly new—about the nature and meaning of sound. German ecomusicologist Sabine Breitsameter examines the nature of soundscape, societal ways of listening, and the increasingly reduced diversity of urban sounds in "Ordering of Sounds: The Homogenization of Listening in the Age of Globalized Soundscapes." Both Breitsameter and Eric Leonardson acknowledge the primacy of Schafer's work. Leonardson's "Acoustic Ecology and Ethical Listening" cites Schafer as founder and leader of the World Soundscape Project and discusses the contributions of other prominent figures such as Hildegard Westerkamp, Barry Truax, and Bernie Krause. From their combined work, new ways of listening have emerged that are impacting sonic studies and the approach to environmental sound, internationally.

Section II, *Mennonite Soundscapes from Appalachia to Africa, Mexico to Canada*, is prefaced by an ode to blossoming redbuds by Indiana poet Ann Hostetler. The essays that follow travel to and from Africa, Mexico, the United States, and Canada, bringing new colors, contexts, and soundscapes within each setting. In "Appalachia to Africa and Back: A Mennonite Soundscape Remembered," Kathleen Kurtz describes unique ambient sounds from places where she has lived, creating a sonic journey deeply rooted in her

Mennonite past and present. In “Sounding Spaces: *Lange Wies*, Community, and Environment,” ethnomusicologist Judith Klassen explores sounds, sequences, and sonic meanings in High German hymn-singing as found in architectural spaces such as Old Colony Mennonite churches in Mexico. Further contextualization of cultural and religious values of certain Russian Mennonites (those who emigrated to North, Central, or South America from Holland via Ukraine) is presented as an innovative verbal soundscape in Canadian pianist Glenn Gould’s 1977 radio documentary, *The Quiet in the Land*. As discussed in Sabine Breitsameter’s “Ordering of Sounds,” this documentary demonstrated “contrapuntal radio” techniques, creating a kind of verbal fugue. In “‘What you intended to say’: Howard Dyck reflects on Glenn Gould’s *The Quiet in the Land*,” ethnomusicologist Doreen Helen Klassen explores the nature of this documentary by interviewing Dyck, who figures prominently as a ‘fugal subject’ within Gould’s work.

In “Listening to the Land through Rudy Wiebe’s Fiction,” Ann Hostetler explores literary allusions to both sound and the land in works by Canada’s leading Mennonite novelist. Virgil Martin focuses on an Ontario Mennonite soundscape from 1914 to the present in “Exploring the Changing Soundscapes of Waterloo County.” Poetically noting sonic changes in technologies, farming techniques, and cultural practices, he also describes changes in the natural environment throughout the last century, naming and describing typical bird and animal sounds and patterns. Also based in Ontario is poet-writer John Weier’s “Six Mennonite Stories; or, the Plough and the Poet; or, What the Skunk Said,” which rounds out this cultural polyphony with a touch of humor, narrative, fiction, and metaphor as he recalls growing up on a farm in the Niagara peninsula.

Section III, *Hearing the Natural World: Patterns, Prices, Sounds*, begins with a John Weier poem evoking the feeling and sound of an African desert. African cheetah and hyena specialist Gus Mills offers an in-depth sonic tour of the natural world in “Kalahari Soundscapes: The Functional Significance of Large Carnivore Vocalizations,” where lions, cheetahs, and hyenas become primary vocalists. Complementing that piece and explaining the human costs of doing wilderness studies, Margie Mills outlines beauties, pains, and joys in “The Price of Living with Nature.” She discusses life in Kalahari and Kruger wilderness areas and her work with Mozambican

women refugees. Natural patterns of birdsong are discussed in biologist Lyle Friesen's "Lust and Domain: The Nature of Birdsong," in which he focuses on musical variations, functional roles, and the process by which certain North American birds learn to sing. Composer-theorist Emily Doolittle concludes this section with an exhaustive study of pitch parameters of the musically fascinating Hermit Thrush in "Music Theory is For the Birds."

Section IV, "*Attending to the Sacred*": *Ritual, Song, and Angel Wings*,⁶ begins with phenomenological and scientifically-based speculations related to interspecies communications, before dealing with music in ritual, worship, and consciousness-raising settings within environmental rubrics. Ethnomusicologist Maisie Sum details how natural environmental sounds are captured in Balinese gamelan music in "Inspiration, Imitation, and Creation in the Music of Bali, Indonesia." Theologian Trevor Bechtel discusses sonic interaction between humans and animals, citing anecdotal evidence and scientific studies. He suggests that through attentiveness to such animal activities we may discover "a new reality of harmony between species." Environmental scholar Joanne Moyer, in "Let Earth Rest': A Consumption Sabbath Tent Revival Meeting to Inspire Simplicity and Environmental Action," describes the role of music and hymn singing at a pro-active environmental ritual that invited everyone in, regardless of ethnic or cultural background. For Moyer, hymns become part of a larger song for the earth and its healing, well-being, and splendor. In "Singing New Stories: Provoking the Decolonization of Mennonite Hymnals," social sciences professor Geraldine Balzer asks whether Mennonite hymns reflect Canadian geography or any aspects of indigenous Canadian, rather than European, culture. If words can become wordless, John Weier's poem "Blue Green Planet," the last element of this section, sings as a paean to our planet.

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While we all have much to learn about the environment and are asking questions about how to address issues plaguing our beleaguered, beautiful

⁶ The first part of the title is derived from Hildegard Westerkamp's soundscape composition, "Attending to Sacred Matters," on *Into India: A Composers' Journey*, compact disk (Earsay 02002, 2002). "Angel Wings" is derived from John Weier's poem, "Blue Green Planet (12.4 Tablature)," which appears elsewhere in this issue of *The Conrad Grebel Review*.

planet, I hope the dialogues occurring at Sound in Land and presented here will continue to take us, along with our particular cultural and spiritual roots, outward to a wider global community where we can find ways to work together as a unified family for the good of this sacred earth, our home.

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