



### **The SMP podcast #3 (July 27th) - Listening and Difference**

-insert audio (skating in Yellowknife)

Hello, this a recording I made last winter in Yellowknife in the NorthWest Territories. It is of a friend and I skating on a very very cold day. I believe it was minus 35 degrees celsius or maybe even colder. I think that some of you live in places without snow or ice and some of you live in places, like me in Toronto, where skating would sound quite different. How would you describe these sounds? How do they feel to you?

(So, I'm Doug Friesen and) This is the third podcast of the The Sound Museum Project. I started the project introducing R. Murray Schafer and Pauline Oliveros, moved on to what sound and listening offers that other senses might not. Thank you for your reflective posts, your sounds, and your comments on the posts of others. As I mentioned in the first podcast, I am much more used to facilitating these conversations collaboratively and in person with a group. I very much appreciate your posting and have tried to take your contributions into consideration while preparing these podcasts. This week I want to reflect on my continued learning about sound/listening and difference. That we do not hear the same sounds in the same way and what we might learn from exploring these differences.

Music is often thought to connect us, to bring us together, a universal language. When we perform music or go to performances, we hear the same sounds. Our bodies are connected by waves of air particles to both the instruments making the sounds (which includes voice of course) and also to each other. We assume that we are having a similar experience, that we are harmoniously connected to each other through this, and if someone feels left out, that they might just not “get it” yet. Yet is a pretty important part of this assumption.

Although I had begun to question this idea of music as a universal language—it seemed there were more and more musical practices I just did not know anything about—I still believed that at the very least we hear sound similarly. That similar sounds were heard similarly unless hearing was impaired in some way. Schafer's sound education, and later Oliveros' *Deep Listening* practices seemed, to me, a way to try to avoid deciding on one Music, normally that descended from the Western Canon, as *the* starting point to music education and continued singular focus. I want to put in a quick reminder that institutions of music education, include more than public or private classrooms; conservatories, community music programs, private lessons, performing ensembles all pattern what is valued as music and what is excluded or othered.

Schafer (2005) says in his book *Hearing* that “Music is the whole sounding universe. We are all simultaneously listeners and performers and composers of the universal symphony” (p. xii). Because of my excitement to see music education as a way to interact with and transform our daily lives, along with my hope to not centre Western Music, I bought into this idea of a “universal symphony.” However, I have begun to realize and learn that listening itself is patterned by our experiences, backgrounds and institutions. We are taught what to hear and what to ignore, what sounds good and what does not, what sounds are annoying and

which are beautiful, when and what to pay attention to, and what is not important to focus on. Sound studies researcher Brandon LaBelle (2010) states that, “[t]he seemingly innocent trajectory of sound as it moves from its source toward a listener...is a story imparting a great deal of information fully charged with geographic, social, psychological, and emotional energy” (p. xvi).

Reflecting on the use of inclusionary choir music at a Truth and Reconciliation Commission event, Ethnomusicologist and Stó:lō Scholar Dylan Robinson warns us about, “conflating the collapse of distance with the collapse of difference” (2014, p. 282). That although sound, sounding, and listening may indeed be physiologically embodied similarly, each of these bodies, according to their histories, positions, and experiences hear and feel these performances differently.

How do you hear and feel a fire truck siren? I’ll give you a moment to imagine this.

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Panicked? Concerned? Annoyed? Thankful?

What about a police siren?

...

How does hearing the finale of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony or a familiar hymn feel in your body? Can you now imagine either of these?

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Are you moved? Transformed?

Can you imagine a very different response than yours to this same music? Perhaps by someone who has never heard a hymn or an orchestra? Or perhaps to those whose grandparents were made to sing this same hymn in residential schools that took Indigenous kids from their families and homes?

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Even if I can imagine hearing sounds and/or music differently I have come to realize that I must still be careful not to think I can fully empathize with how someone else may be hearing and feeling the same experiences. I cannot know what it is like to hear and feel for someone else. Empathy seems to be something I should constantly strive for but never feel like I have fully attained. I have also had to learn to be aware of who, in the exchange of listening and reflection stands most to gain and who might be positioned at a loss. From time to time I get to do listening and sound workshops with students from schools that I do not know well...and perhaps more importantly, they too do not know me. I once asked two groups of students from two drastically different neighbourhoods -one affluent, one not- to name and describe daily sounds of their lives. I can be honest and say I was thinking myself quite clever with my Socratic plan to reveal/illuminate how we all hear differently. Students of school A were completely unable to imagine or to even process the daily sounds listed by a student from school B; gun shots. Uncomfortable laughter and disbelief from school A led to this student standing up and pointing into the air, mimicking the sound, in order to clarify. Silence followed. I did not know what to do. I did not know these students well and it seemed that delving deeper into this drastic difference at that moment would maybe advance the learning of one of these groups but quite likely at the expense of the other.

I do hope that this Sound Museum Project might illuminate that we each hear differently. I am truly thankful for your involvement and interest and hope, but I do not assume that you have gained from these experiences as much as I have. Please let me know if you do not feel that way.

-Here is a recording I made while travelling and teaching. Please listen. What do you notice? What do you hear? What do you feel? How does it feel familiar? How does it feel unfamiliar?

-insert audio (Lima, 2018 Universidad Catolica)

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I have come to realize that I did not need to go so far to notice very different soundscapes. Here is a recorded sound walk from one neighbourhood in Toronto.

-insert audio (Davenport and Dufferin)

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This one is 15 minutes later, same time of day in another/nearby neighbourhood.

-insert audio (Annex)

...

Ethnomusicologist Beverly Diamond states that “Divergences among the stance of different listeners can be contentious but might also be potentially productive moments where dialogue might begin” (2016, p. 245). I do believe or hope this to be true but perhaps a relationship of trust built upon a sharing of vulnerability must come first. And along with this a critical reflection of who might stand to gain most from these moments of exchange. How can we attempt to empathetically listen together and to each other without furthering patterns of power and cultural capital imbalance?

I do believe that Schafer, who I know and can speak about in a deeper way than Oliveros, was truly attempting to explore this. In the late 60s he states that; “Ultimately somewhere work might begin on a much-needed history of aural perception to show us how different periods or different musical cultures actually hear *different* things when listening to music” (Schafer, 1993, p. 56). When asked to reflect on music education in Canada he said, “Sometimes I think that music programs in Canada are crippled by affluence” (Schafer, 2006). He told me once that high school band, in particular, seemed to be the ultimate colonial demonstration; instruments made by extracted metals and marching in an obedient singular rhythm to impress royalty. He also once wished with me that all the instruments could be taken away for a year so music educators could question what we are offering that is not a part of this colonial tradition. However, in his search for further and further disruptions of this he strove to find what a “Canadian music” might be. What might be considered “ours”? Through these explorations he not only appropriated musical practices (...) but also made some racist statements about the musical practices of Canada’s indigenous people(...). These mistakes parallel the systematic racism that many of our institutions of music education continue to be a part of. Secondary and post secondary music educators may have become hipper to what not to say and do but many (most?) of these same institutions continue to uphold white European art as *the* standard to which all else is below. Truly! I do not think having Ghanaian drumming as an elective course for training music teachers does anything to change that the Orchestra and the Choir are still at the very centre of these hugely powerful institutions.

How might we access and use Oliveros’ and Schafer’s work to productively disrupt this? Is this even possible?

These two composers can very easily be placed, after John Cage, upon the 20th century development of the Western Canon rather than considered disruptions of it. It does seem that their pedagogies have indeed felt truly disruptive and destabilizing to many folks. Is it possible to use and adapt their work to change our practices of music learning and making rather than place them neatly into positions of unquestioned privilege in the Western Canon? Can listening deeper to the world around us and each other make music lessons, performances, ensembles, and classrooms more inclusive, less dominant, less power imbalanced, more inductive, creative, personal, and connected to our daily lives? And, if Schafer and Oliveros can offer productive disruptions of power asymmetries and control in music education, can their ideas make it into formal institutions of music education without falling to institutional gravities of technical training and indoctrination?

A friend of mine, Neil Dalhoff, is making a documentary about Schafer. He and I, along with Matias Recharte, travelled to Peru for a music education conference last year and had a chance to interview the amazing and hugely influential Violeta de Gainza, who has been the Spanish translator of Schafer's books since the sixties. In this interview she placed him alongside Orff, Dalcroze and Kodaly...alongside what are most often considered the greatest music methods/pedagogues of the 20th century. She then stated that each of these pedagogues are great creators, but only one of them, Schafer, creates creators. This statement greatly excited me as I have often encountered much resistance to Murray's suggested practices in Canada. I could not believe my ears that someone, a leader in music education in Latin America and internationally, would place Schafer alongside others who are more normally raised on a pedestal. The confirmation I felt from this is still important to me. However, upon further reflection, placing Schafer upon this pedestal has also caused me much concern. Especially now learning about his mistakes. I do not think Murray himself -although maybe happy to finally receive praise rather than criticism- would suggest his methods should be followed without a critical inquiry into the experiences at hand, the interactions therein, and the bodies, histories and positionalities present. Rather, he seemed to want the exercises to be collaborative disruptions to any system. Even to disrupt his own pedagogy and thinking. Recalling his own schooling; "It seemed to me that too much time was devoted to answering questions that no one had asked while the real questions slid by unanswered (Schafer, 2006).

Being a middle class white male settler makes it easier for me to be disruptive of norms. As it did for Schafer. Can my position actually bring about productive disruption or am I always in danger of perpetuating the power and control that leads to systemic heteronormativity, sexism, and racism?

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-insert "At the End" by Evan Cartwright

That was a piece by a former student of mine. It includes a recording, perhaps affected, of a park in Toronto.

Music critic and scholar, Kodwo Eshun frames sound through Afro Futurism and coined the term "sonic fiction" to reference how funk musicians and DJs remix the past in order to change the present and transform the future, therefore messing with the notion of a linear time all together (1998). His book, *Sonic Fiction: More Brilliant Than the Sun* has been a major source of humble learning for me. In it he notes that Cage may have been the first to include record scratching in a composition, but it was the DJ GrandMaster Flash who saved this act from being too clever, too privileged, too distant and exclusive of larger practices of embodied music making (p. 02/017).

For this week let's pursue this concept of sonic fiction. Let's listen but then interact with and transform the sounds around us by re-listening/remixing the recordings we have made (or new ones if you prefer). Use your intention to find music around you (melodies, rhythms, grooves, or just something you think sounds really great) and then re-listen, re-mix, remake these sounds. You may just add an effect -echo, delay, reverb, distortion, compression but you may also make edits to the recordings, layer and overlap them, make a form or a groove, add an instrument...honestly whatever you feel comfortable with. You may already have a Digital Audio Workstation like Garageband, Fruity Loops, or Logic that you can load your sounds into but you can also use <https://www.soundtrap.com/>. I'll post a link and these instructions along with the audio and script of this podcast. I will also post some questions for us to discuss.

After this week I am hoping to interview those same ten folks that I did at the start. I will send them a schedule to see what works best. I will take a break from writing and posting podcasts but I would absolutely love and be honoured if folks were interested in continuing this project in September. I can post more podcasts, challenges, questions but it would be amazing if any of you might be willing to record some reflections and challenges for us. We do not have to follow this same format. From the introductory

interviews and from posts and reflections I can see and hear that many of you would have much to offer the rest of us.

End with “At the End” by Evan Cartwright <https://evanjcartwright.bandcamp.com/releases>

**Cited** (more on the [resources page](#))

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