

06.04.12.

Some thoughts that occurred whilst reading through Bernie Krause's new book - The Great Animal Orchestra.

Added to as more pages are read, left alone as it was left in the first place. Leaving contradiction to sit alongside itself as further layers of the book are uncovered, neither one nor the other parking claim to the immediacy it once possessed.

1. First of all I would like to ask what it means to have recorded: *'Fifteen thousand species and four thousand hours of wild soundscapes'*

2. Many passages focussed around their own onomatopoeia - a point of highly visible entry, bringing to the minds eye the modern day visual equivalents that inhabit an analogous auditory spectrum, inherently human, a surface means of communication and identification, arising, or perhaps sustaining from an anthropomorphic need to know, to smother in mind, or to feel closer to, assuming vocal and communicative bonds.

3. A bright foray into a hypothetical auditory history, the 'creation' of audition, where there were no human ears to hear and the pendulum of vibration swung uninhibited.

4. He has already proven, and I'm sure will continue to do so, that listening to nature is evidently a very fine thing, but, the arts need to listen to each other too.

5. The babel of voices this book can induce, wondering, what animals hear and don't hear, the melee, what sounds are if any vestigial, for all of its order - Krause's density of content leaves the coldest sceptic alone in their echoing maniac of a shell.

6. Regardless of my many feelings on the matters thus far covered, the book in question often succeeds in penetrating my reality, leaving me smiling in the shadow of a man whom has retained wondrous aspects of his childhood that many have lost.

7. Remarkable in the absence of the authors' opinion, the creeping obscurity leaves the reader alone with whatever degree of fascination they may possess.

8. For a specialist he uses a surprisingly well-trod language, evidently hoping to reach as many people as possible, an admirable premise in such a field.

9. Curious as to whether there will be any critique of the troubles and problems recording and playback can bring? The limitations...

10. And this whole, 'unified chorus', I need to try hard to read that with his enthusiasm rather than my distaste.

11. Often opens with monumental stories, the ones so very few of us have experienced outside of abstraction; this particular structure must be leading somewhere...

12. Hidden amongst the text are occasionally interesting points for the field recordist to consider: *"For that means it is extremely difficult to re-create those choral expressions from their separate abstract parts unless we are able to grasp the underlying infrastructure characterising how each component voice fits within an ever-changing bio acoustic composition."*

13. My ridiculous dislike for general and well-worn semantics could have easily stopped me from reading this book and learning what I have already done from such a venture. It seems a matter of treating the words and associations as old friends whose peculiarities make them who they are, in, voices to be listened to rather than overheard.

14. An unusual mixture of modern scientific terminology and animistic patterns, I've only previously encountered such expression in the writings of Barry Lopez.

15. His allegiance to the Vancouver Soundscape project of 73 can get a little tedious, using such terms as *'utter serenity'* with the alarming detachment of the learned idiot, often leaving you wanting him to return to those distant stories and leave any artistic connections on the other side of the closed door. Seems like he is somewhat cut off from a larger degree of contemporary field recordists, somewhat ironically...

16. Often reads like an auditory tourist guidebook, using far-flung locations to drop his reminiscences in auditory glue.

17. The assumption that rhythm and melody constitute the actuality of music... What of the opposites? Of hearing in states of difference? The well meaning but highly frustrating stance of the inherent meaning inside every act.

18. Would have enjoyed to read more about what he gets out of listening back to his old recordings, and what they mean to him now.

19. Reaching this book from, amongst others, the perspective of improvisation, something I cannot avoid, such statements as: '*In instrumental music, timing is everything, so it is with the natural world*', sticks awkwardly into my already cantankerous beak. There is far too much that can be inferred between my 'qualifying introduction' and the quote, but it still raises some interesting questions about what we sense in our surroundings, pre-packaged we drown in order and potential, that kind of thing. I recently listened back to a recording of John Cage's four6 that I was part of, and the moments of 'apparent structure' - performers rushing blindly towards pre-established patterns, briefly affecting the swell before disappearing soundlessly inside of it, where a typical charity flies proudly out of the bellows for reasons we all know, these are moments we are so many of us drawn to, I know the first time I heard this particular realisation played back my immediate reaction, even though I knew the moment arose through the various opportunities for a chance meeting that the score presents, was one of excitement and the tickled pink. But the chances to create something devoid of acquired characteristics, shall I say, retains great appeal.

20. This book reminds me that I can always hear myself, that so often I am the loudest sound I hear.

21. And what of an individual '*biophony*'? The cognitive and physiological. Is it a given that such noise and process have their place in pre and post listening?

22. Does ones mental state ever presuppose a landscape? Internal pre external - inseperable over time.

23. Little question, but, how can you write this book and ignore the existence of Music Concrète?

24. I find the idea of searching for the 'intricate' to be so often limiting, much is written here about listening, of course, but the everyday, no, not even that, the unextraordinary, the commonplace, mundane, the monotonous, are overlooked and apparently avoided in favour of the nonnative, the grandiose. Who can't begin to understand the dramatic appeal of a Gorilla beating out a rhythm on his barrel chest? But what of the tedious noise of a fly, or the inaudible sounds of human hair, what does this make up in the '*textural biophony*'? Please excuse me for avoiding the hysteric enthusiasm of the conceptual soloist in nature. Where is the romance to be found in the noise as parasites descend on a carcass?

25. The dominant creed of classification found throughout this book is unsettling me, that Krause, and many others, feel vindicated in stating that there are three main types of sound in the world - biophony, geophony, anthrophony, leaves me reeling into states of questioning not only his, but my own devices, why does this bother me so much? The staunch gate of the individual then relaxing into names, taxonomy and totality, the linguistic webs enabling ones hands to grow bigger and the necessary classification of collection - where and when does the hoarding stop? But why leave things be, indeed how, we are so mucky, we bathe in their spittle, shouting any old name and grinning like horses as we pummel what sticks and what is thrown back. Surely with naming comes a need to know more? It's a point of entry, a condition to be overcome, a self-initiated warm welcome where we're all invited inside to repeat the mistakes of the past with the best of intentions.

26. Degrees of certainty, striving to make sense, the exact opposite draws me to improvisation. An improvisation is a soundscape like everything else, and like everything else, is subject to infinite degrees of variance and perceived structure. However, it is the one 'thing' I have encountered that can in some way, disappear, the internal and external worlds cancelling each other out, if only for the briefest of moments. You can smell it. The names are different for all involved.

27. Is it really thought of as viable to educate through contradiction and segregation? Is it better to damage your hearing from the call of a pneumatic drill or the scream of a Gorilla?

28. I find myself wanting to treat this book lightly because of the matter it pertains to, and honestly, I have no beef with Bernie Krause, but the intense nomenclatures, nose to nose, grimacing nostrils drowning in each others sex, is far too much for me. What do these copious lists matter? (I comprehend the formic irony) We have to know something in order to understand? We have to understand because we have to help? We have to help because we are mostly to blame? We're to blame because we always need to know?

29. I'm sat at the kitchen table with the back door open and I've just scrawled a note, referring to the fact that for as long as I can remember, the vocalisations of various Gulls have made me feel uncontrollably jubilant. Is this the '*totemic sound*' that Krause considers in light of Murray Schaefer? Do I even care? I'm reading page 190, a particularly saddening quote about haemorrhaging in Beaked Whales due to the excessive use of sonar in oceans, during, I hear the clockwork sound of new born Blue Tits, hatched in the bird box around the corner. What to make of that...

30. Here we are, and finally, a short allusion to his leanings. I read through his words as implying listening to a field recording can embrace the imagination of listeners - sitting and listening, not through other ears, but through the subservient objectivity of microphones, we obviously hear things we normally miss, tiptoe towards an introduction, to develop a respect towards the organisms and the environment, always resounding, whilst, giving it a wide birth... Paying mind to its minds! '*A composite lens through which we may be able to finally confirm the incomparable value of our natural resources*'.

31. A summation suffused with hope is a hard task in his context, any consideration is easily refuted and thrown back into his smiling mouth - it seems like a large area of his decimated chest is focussed on this return - partially listening to choice, absently giving into dogged necessity, gripping to the last bastions of, not just auditory, but every conceivable, wilderness and its entire opposite, the posited and realised interconnections, the fleeting potential for anthropic removal and resulting brownfields, straining to hear over the deafening end.

Evidently I came to this book with an agenda not so hidden.

It obviously isn't meant for those who have experience in the field themselves, though it can evidently still prove interesting and insightful, but for those who have only a slight inkling and wish to know more, I highly recommend it, just be sure to look further once you finish.

Patrick Farmer.