

Shannon: Shannon Soundscape

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As a commuter student who does not live on campus, I elected to sit on my back patio for this listening exercise. While I had initially thought that staying relatively close to my house would be somewhat redundant in terms of what I would hear, I was actually pleasantly shocked to hear just how many sounds, be it human or nonhuman, actually ring out on my street in a given moment. Looking back, I think I had just never taken the time to actually listen to them.

I live near many trees, so the sound of birds chirping, or squirrels climbing is always pretty constant. These sounds today, though, were a bit different. I noticed that two birds, neither of which I know by name, were simultaneously chirping. Their tones, however, drastically differed. One was high-pitched, whereas the other had a much lower, somewhat monotonous tone. I was initially listening to each separately, as though each was its own separate sound, but given what the Chapter One discussed regarding polyrhythmic melody, I elected to try listening to them together as one entire piece. When I listened in this manner, I was pleasantly surprised to hear how nicely each tone complimented the other. There was a repetition to it, but it had pretty clearly spaced intervals, as I counted about three seconds in between each tone inflection on the part of the higher-pitched bird.

Once these sounds stopped and there had been a few seconds of relative quiet, I heard a brash, high-pitched whistle of a bird and/or other animal that I actually could not identify. In all honesty, the sound resembled that sensation of ringing that a person might get in their ear at random types of the day that those around them may not hear in the way that they do, with a slightly lower pitch. While I found myself frustrated that I couldn't figure out exactly where the sound was coming from, it was interesting to reflect on the fact that my situation at this moment had me feeling the exact same way I usually feel when I know the basic melody of a song but I am unable to remember the artist who performed it. Prior to last week and paying attention to our discussions about soundscape ecology, I never really considered the possibility that nonhuman sounds could create the same types of reactions in me that humanly organized music does.

There were also a fair number of voices and conversations in my soundscape. Although I was a little ways from my house, I could still hear my mother quite clearly as she asked my sister to put in the oven the chicken she intended to cook before going to work in the afternoon. It was

amusing to me, though, to hear my sisters nearly robotic “yes” in response to each task that she requested be done along with this one. It made me think of a couple older R&B songs from the 1960s and 1980s: “Say it Loud” by James Brown and “Very Special” by Debra Laws. Both songs are well-known for their use of call-and-response and given how repetitive my sister’s responses were, it was almost as if both of their voices were apart of their own call-and-response pattern. This repetition was also complimented by the sound of my ten-year-old brother teaching himself how to play “Mary Had a Little Lamb” on his recorder. He has managed to learn a few scales, so it was really nice to hear him run through those.

I live down the street from a fire station off of a main road, so the sound of sirens is always a constant presence in my acoustic niche and today was no different, as these were in full force. I decided to listen today, instead, for the sound of actual cars coming down my street rather than only fire trucks. For some vehicles, this sound was much smoother than others depending on the speed in which they came down the hill on which my house sits. I missed listening to a few, though, because I could not really hear when an airplane flew over. In any respect, my typical soundscape remained relatively unchanged, but I was able to see just how nuanced sounds are present once I made the conscientious effort to listen for them.