

Murmurations

by Anna Batson

My process:

I wanted to explore the idea of contained and uncontained sound reacting in different environments – combining conventional instruments with my field recordings.

Searching for a **pulse** – searching for the lost, the uncontained...
...stretching between comfort, discomfort, both wet, arid and airy ramblings between walls, ceilings, floors, tiles and open skies.

...Joan Lyneham.....so what happened?...

I spend the piece moving between contrasting environments held by threads and drones.

I begin with a recording of a wailing, leaking toilet cistern which had screamed and leaked for 5 days before it was possible to get a plumber. All the more it had chosen to howl in the special room in the house for the best singing acoustics. I moved between singing harmonies with it and then contemplating smashing it with a mallet to silence it. Months later I find the recording I made for posterity.

I imagine Lyneham exploring the acoustic possibilities of a bathroom. The hard, tiled surfaces, porcelain, the running of water, the rhythms of a persistent drip. The shape of a roof, the effect of soft furnishings, the inaccuracies of ears, the endless possibilities....

I used a fragment of a rehearsal I'd been in for Schubert's Octet...stretched a little and juxtaposed the sweet harmonies with the rudely screaming toilet. For a while I laughed at their differences. Then it became beautiful. I imagined listening to musicians in the theatres within the spaces and from a distance – a young Lyneham pressing her ear to the windows, doors and walls...exploring, imagining, designing, absorbing.

Surfaces: slide, found, float, scrape, skitter, crunch, hammering...

The rain begins to smash my car windscreen – the first trip out after months of isolation. I try to find a pulse in the pattering of the heavy downpour. The hammering of the droplets merge with the sounds of Greater Horseshoe bats I recorded in huge numbers on a bridge in Buckfastleigh.

Their echolocations were captured on my bat detector and slowed down enough to be audible. Thousands of bats passed by, feeling their sonic path through the fading light and **dissipating** into the darkness above the waters of the River Dart. Who better than bats to live by the science of sound?

Bats and bells then duet as they **disrupt** one another. A clamouring... I then use a close-up recording of tiny clams opening and closing on Portwrinkle harbour beach. They were there in their hundreds, like tiny headphones. I imagine the feeling of covering and uncovering my ears to change the sound I hear or the sound as ears are covered and uncovered by water. Water and air....

Wetness and dryness combine as my feet then shuffle through dry leaves in a wooded valley in the Dordogne, France. I was trying to get closer to the thousands of starlings that were making their way into the trees above. A deafening murmuration. Not a murmuring, but a screaming cacophony of tiny winged voices.

Human voices then search for a pulse amongst the birds. Their singing is joined by metal 'singing bowls' with their larynx-less voices...I search for a harmony with the still-wailing latrine. The murmuration of starlings settle alongside the comforting lungs of an old chapel organ. These were designed to accompany voices and not overpower them, to travel on ships and between different chapels and homes. This one was made in Chicago in the late 1800's. The foot-pumped bellows breathe inside the heavy wooden container alongside the tiny clams the size of fingernails. Open / close.

The piano searches around in a circular pattern of notes, gradually dissipating like the fading of memory...searching the sky for walls and surfaces and eardrums for the sound to bounce on. Crickets stridulate their legs as the organ's lungs slow into silence.

A cricket's face stares at me from Lyneham's notebook...

All field and home recordings captured on a Zoom H1n recorder by Anna. Composed / produced using Audacity to apply some basic effects and sequence the recordings and shape the piece.