

# Soundscape

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## CANACOUSTICA: CANADIAN PERSPECTIVES ON ENVIRONMENT AND SOUND

### Reviews

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Review of Jennifer Schine's film documentary *Listening to a Sense of Place*  
(16:22 minutes) & radio documentary *The End of the Line*

Reviewed by Giorgio Magnanensi

*Every sound was a voice, every scrape or blunder was a meeting – with Thunder, with Oak, with Dragonfly. And from all of these relationships our collective sensibilities were nourished.* (Abram 1996, ix)

Every sound is a voice – listening, sensing and being – harmonizing our nature within nature. This is the poetic and beautiful truth we discover listening to Billy Proctor's voice, his stories and his love for his place in *Listening to a Sense of Place*, an award-winning short film by Jennifer Schine co-created with Greg Crompton. Jennifer's documentary and the Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC) radio piece for the program, *Outfront*, focus on Billy Proctor and Echo Bay in the Broughton Archipelago of British Columbia's Central Coast. There is no sentimentality in Jennifer's impassioned research based on her M.A. thesis work at Simon Fraser University's School of Communication under Barry Truax.

There is no romantic or exotic voyeurism in analyzing what it means to embody a harmonized identity within ourselves and our space when the sonorous world of *every voice* is feeding our own life, opening our senses, while we become resonating bodies in the reverberant landscapes of a pristine ecosystem.

*Listening to a Sense of Place* shows us how to discover the meaning of "*une écoute poétique de la nature*," a beautiful metaphor that Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers used more than thirty years ago to define new models of participation of the human being to the world (*La Nouvelle Alliance* 1979, 353–393). Jennifer's approach, foregrounding acoustic-based field research through the visual medium of film and the personal essay form of radio, resonates and enhances that very way of listening, and shares the awareness of the creative interaction occurring between scientific and cultural fields. With accurate methodology and scholar-





Fig. 2. Billy and Jenni on Boat

ship, Jennifer's work substantiates awareness of vivified models of thought and disrupts disciplinary borders: spaces open to diverse experiments in the domains of education, research, performance and creation. This is the power of sound-based research crossing and maintaining its integrity in film and radio genres.

In the soundscape of Echo Bay, revealed by and through Billy Proctor's stories, activities, objects and voices, we appreciate the enhanced quality of a place in which we feel embedded and where the sensory experience and the creative energy of a living existence converge. Attentive listening and Jennifer's *memory soundwalks* extend the concept of soundwalk methodology to include audio recording of participants' reflection of memories and stories while walking or moving through a particular place imbued with personal meaning for them. All these are not just beautiful activities that subvert the usual dichotomies of culture and nature, body and mind – they are energizing tools to acknowledge human possibilities that are often imagined but rarely defined or fulfilled. As expressed in Jennifer's work, a consistent practice of active listening can determine the gradual definition of a living *compositional* system. As a living system is a cognitive system, listening to and composing our life within this process is a process of cognition.

An agent of this sensuous world, Billy has been always listening while the world also perceives itself through him. Musical categories of Harmony and Counterpoint, while they might seem *abstruse* to some, are here resounding in the pure clarity of an embodied life of a person. This is especially present in the documentary film

and radio piece precisely because Jennifer is a practiced listener and soundscape researcher who grounds these sensibilities profoundly in both mediums. I like to think that the same word *persona* is actually rooted in a sonorous meaning, as “*person*” might as well mean “*through sound*” (Latin *per sonum*); and Jennifer's work reinforces that we are all *personae*, through sound.

Jennifer's sound-thinking and Billy's embodied and sensuous life are invitations not to treat reality as if it were a full presence, absolute, but to let flourish inside us a love for diversity, for the unexpected, for a λόγος (logos) whose inspiration goes back to Heraclitus' thinking: a λόγος that is in constant motion, that draws strength and life from its own contradictions, and invites us to oppose ourselves to an ontology that considers everything as emanating from a sole source. To compose our own

life means to put things together, to create and welcome relations, memories and resonances, it means *entendre* and *comprendre*, and to be able to listen ourselves to a higher level of sharing: a *sense of place* that wishes to be also resounding. Jennifer's work clearly and creatively positions itself at the core of a worldwide movement of artists and researchers who are actively at work finding ways to address and solve ecological problems and her film and radio piece instruct as well as inspire in these ways.

## About the Author

GIORGIO MAGNANENSI is a composer and conductor. He is artistic director of *Vancouver New Music*, *Laboratorio Arts Society* and lecturer at the School of Music of The Vancouver Community College. [giorgiomagnanensi.com](http://giorgiomagnanensi.com)

## References

- Abram, D. 1996. *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. New York, NY: Random House Inc.
- La Nouvelle Alliance, Métamorphose de la science*. 1979. Paris: Gallimard.
- Link to film, “Listening to A Sense of Place.” <http://summit.sfu.ca/item/13703>
- Link to CBC piece, “The end of the line.” <http://www.cbc.ca/player/Radio/Living+Out+Loud/ID/2625495018/>
- Link to audio piece, “Conversations with Billy Proctor.” <http://front.bc.ca/events/conversations-with-billy-proctor/>



Fig. 1. Video Shoot