MUSEUM OF PORTABLE SOUND

GALLERY GUIDE

AUTUMN 2015

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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Sound is everywhere – sonic vibrations travel through air, water, most solid materials…we are constantly bombarded by sound's presence, yet somehow we who are able to hear are also able to edit what sounds we give attention to – and through the power of our own memories, we're also able to hear sounds from our own pasts, from the giant database of remembered sounds we carry with us every day in our minds.

Now there is a museum of sound that is also carried around every day – by me. Welcome to the Museum of Portable Sound, a museum that not only celebrates the portable devices we have used throughout history to listen to sounds, but a museum of sound that also only exists on a portable listening device! I hope you will enjoy your time wandering through our digital galleries, using this Gallery Guide to help find your way through our displays. We look forward to bringing the culture of sound to the world – one listener at a time.

JOHN KANNENBERG
Director and Chief Curator
Museum of Portable Sound

NATURAL HISTORY
BIRDSONG

Listening to birdsong is one of the world's oldest pasttimes. Poets, musicians, and philosophers have all extolled the virtues of listening to the music generated by our feathered friends. Along with the culture of birdwatching, bird listening is an activity that can, depending on the type of song, bring a sensation of calm or even agitation to listeners. Do you have a favourite birdsong?

TRACK INFORMATION

Actual Bird Record made by A Captive Nightingale (No. II), The property of Herr Carl Reich, of Bremen, Berlin (His Master's Voice, Cat. No. B 390, released in 1910)
Digital transfer of vinyl LP recording, 3.33
The first commercially released recording of birdsong in world history, this digitised track was donated to The Museum of Portable Sound in 2015 by the British Library Sound Archive.

Original record label of Actual Bird Record made by A Captive Nightingale, 1910, courtesy British Library Sound Archive.

TECHNOLOGY
RECORDING
FORMATS

When recordings of sound became portable, our listening experience changed completely: suddenly we were able to create our own personal soundscapes, handcrafted and sequenced to our own liking, with all of recorded sound now able to be experienced anywhere. As audio tape was replaced by the Compact Disc, recordings became more portable than ever, and we could begin to carry around small libraries of sound, offering more freedom of choice in the customisation of our sonic surroundings. The quest for ever smaller, more portable formats sometimes misfired: the MiniDisc, introduced in 1992 by Sony, was much smaller than the Compact Disc and was easily re-recordable, but never caught on with a mainstream audience. As we began using MP3s – purely digital files, unencumbered by a physical form – they also became easily accessible for free via peer-to-peer file sharing networks such as Napster in the early 21st Century. Our relationship with recorded sound and how we collected it changed forever. Do you collect digital sound files? Do you collect any physical recordings like LP records, cassettes, or CDs? Do you feel nostalgic for your old MP3s?

TRACK INFORMATION

The First CD: Track 1 - Claudio Arrau - Chopin: Waltz #1 In E Flat, Op. 18, 'Grande Valse Brillante,' 1980

Digital transfer of Compact Disc recording, 6.12

The first commercially released Compact Disc, released by Philips Classics in 1980.

The copy of Claudio Arrau's Chopin Waltzes held in the collections of The Museum of Portable Sound. This Compact Disc is available for inspection upon request. (Photograph by John Kannenberg)

The First MP3: Suzanne Vega - 'Tom's Diner (a capella),' 1987

Digital transfer of Compact Disc recording, 2.09

When German digital recording engineer Karlheinz Brandenburg of the Fraunhofer Institute was helping to fine-tune the compression algorithm of the MP3, the story goes that he used the a capella version of Suzanne Vega's song 'Tom's Diner' to help him hear what parts of the soundwaves of a recording were acceptable to strip away from the human voice in order for it to still sound 'natural.' The Fraunhofer Institute went on to declare Vega 'The Mother of the MP3,' bringing her to their offices for a major press event at which she politely suggested that MP3s didn't sound as good as CDs.

TECHNOLOGY
PORTABLE
AUDIO
DEVICES

With the advent of the MP3, early portable digital audio players like the MPMan, the Diamond Rio, and a trio of Jukeboxes (HanGo, Creative Nomad, and Archos) struggled to gain widespread acceptance. Apple's iPod changed that in 2001. Digital sound players are now the norm, with the iPhone still leading Apple's rivals (like Microsoft's Zune). Do you think Apple will continue to dominate the market, or will rivals like Samsung and Google develop something even better soon?

TRACK INFORMATION

These recordings, made by Museum Director John Kannenberg, are of the magnetic fields generated by several historic portable electronic devices created for the purpose of listening to or making audio recordings. The sounds you will hear are the sounds of the magnetic fields generated by the devices themselves while the devices are in use; they are always there, but are unable to be heard by the human ear without the aid of special microphones.

iPhone 4S magnetic field (portable digital audio player & recorder), 2015

Digital recording with induction coil microphone, 1.00
This recording contains a sample of the Tom's Diner MP3, which was played by the iPhone 4S from the Museum's galleries.

iPod Classic magnetic field (portable digital audio player), 2015

Digital recording with induction coil microphone, 1.57
Switch on, menu scrolling, track selection, playing a track.

Olympus LS-10 magnetic field (portable digital audio recorder), 2015

Digital recording with induction coil microphone, 0.35
Switch on, menu selection, making a recording.

Zoom H2 magnetic field (portable digital audio recorder), 2015

Digital recording with induction coil microphone, 1.03
Switch on, menu selection, making a recording.

TECHNOLOGY
AUDIO
INTERFACES

Interface design, or 'User Experience Design (UXD),' tends to be thought of as a visual discipline. Yet countless audible interfaces surround us every day. Sound brings another level of communication to an interface, a visceral, almost haptic sensation of touch, an experience based on the sensation of sound brushing against our eardrums; sounds designed to help us complete a task or find our way around an unknown space can trigger instinctive, almost primal responses within us. How do you feel when you hear the 'ding' of an elevator bell, the 'beep' of a microwave oven, the startup sound of your laptop computer? What if you could change these sounds to radically different ones?

TRACK INFORMATION

Public Telephone in Telephone Booth, Zagreb, 2015
Digital recording, 0.26, made by John Kannenberg

Street Crossing Signal for Visually Impaired, Zagreb, 2015
Digital recording, 1.00, made by John Kannenberg

SOUNDSCAPES
MUSEUMS

Many of us tend to think of museums as silent. Maybe that outdated idea is comforting to some people, maybe it is annoying or threatening to others. But is it accurate? Museums themselves seem to have moved past the idea that they should only be soundless temples of thought. Many museums now feature late night events with loud music, dancing, or performances. Still, most of the 'noise' that museums encourage happens outside of 'regular business hours' – there is still an attempt to determine what is 'normal' sound for a museum. But as museums gradually come to the realisation that they are nothing without their audience, they need to come to grips with the notion that sound is an integral part of the museum experience.
How should a museum sound? Do you ever wonder why you're most always asked to look at things in museums rather than listen to them? What would it be like if museums collected sounds as well as pictures?

TRACK INFORMATION

Silence in the Acropolis Museum, Athens, 2010
Digital recording, 1.01, made by John Kannenberg

Slide projectors in the Ana Mendieta exhibition, Hayward Gallery, London, 2014
Digital recording, 1.01, made by John Kannenberg

Musical Bracket Clock, 1784, in Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 2015
Digital recording, 1.17, made by John Kannenberg

Las Vegas Pinball Hall of Fame and Players Museum, 2011
Digital recording, 1.00, made by John Kannenberg

Attic crawlspace Reverb Chamber, Motown Museum, Detroit, 2012
Digital recording, 1.08, made by John Kannenberg

Rainstorm on skylights inside the Museum of Broken Relationships, Zagreb, 2015
Digital recording, 1.00, made by John Kannenberg

Climate Control Device, Science Museum, Oxford, 2014
Digital recording, 1.00, made by John Kannenberg

Sherlock Holmes Museum interior, London, 2014
Digital recording, 1.00, made by John Kannenberg

Unidentified Clock, Sir John Soane's Museum, London, 2014
Digital recording, 1.00, made by John Kannenberg

Film projector, Modernism Gallery, Tate Britain, London, 2015
Digital recording, 1.01, made by John Kannenberg

SOUNDSCAPES
EXHIBITIONS OF SOUND

Some museums have not only begun to accept the idea that sound should be part of the museum experience, they have actually begun displaying sound like a visual object. This is happening quite frequently within art galleries, as more and more artists have begun to make work with sound rather than paint, or marble, or clay. Why do you think artists want to make art out of sound? What is different about listening to art rather than looking at it? Do you think a sound can be an object?

TRACK INFORMATION

First Floor gallery, *Art or Sound* exhibition, Fondazione Prada, Venice, 2014

Digital recording, 2.31, made by John Kannenberg

Two views (above and below) the Gravity Xylophone, *The World of Charles and Ray Eames* exhibition, Barbican Art Gallery, London, 2015

Digital recording, 1.14, made by John Kannenberg

Ground Floor exhibition space, *Sound Art: Sound as a Medium of Art* exhibition, ZKM, Karlsruhe, 2012

Digital recording, 1.16, made by John Kannenberg

SOUNDSCAPES ARCHIVES

Traditionally, when recorded sound has been collected by an institution, it has usually been collected by libraries and archives rather than museums. In America, the Library of Congress is responsible for archiving the sonic heritage of their country. In the United Kingdom, the British Library Sound Archive has been at the forefront of preserving British audio history. Recently, a new European initiative, Europeana Sounds, announced a bold new mission: to bring together sound archivists from across Europe to collectively decide on a 'universal' method for preserving European sonic heritage. Why do you think museums tend not to collect sounds? Doesn't something like an antique cuckoo clock collected by the Victoria and Albert Museum include a sound? Could it be that museums already have collected vast amounts of sounds but haven't figured out what to do with them yet? If you were the head curator of a museum, what sounds would you collect?

TRACK INFORMATION

Internet Archive Backup Server (exhaust fan), Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria, Egypt, 2010
Digital recording, 1.00, made by John Kannenberg

Melodic CD-R Printer, British Library Sound Archive, London, 2014
Digital recording, 0.34, made by John Kannenberg

Turning the pages of the 'Description de l'Égypte,' Kelsey Museum of Archaeology Archives Facility, Ann Arbor, 2012
Digital recording, 2.07, made by John Kannenberg

EXPOSITION SPACE
RYAN MAGUIRE
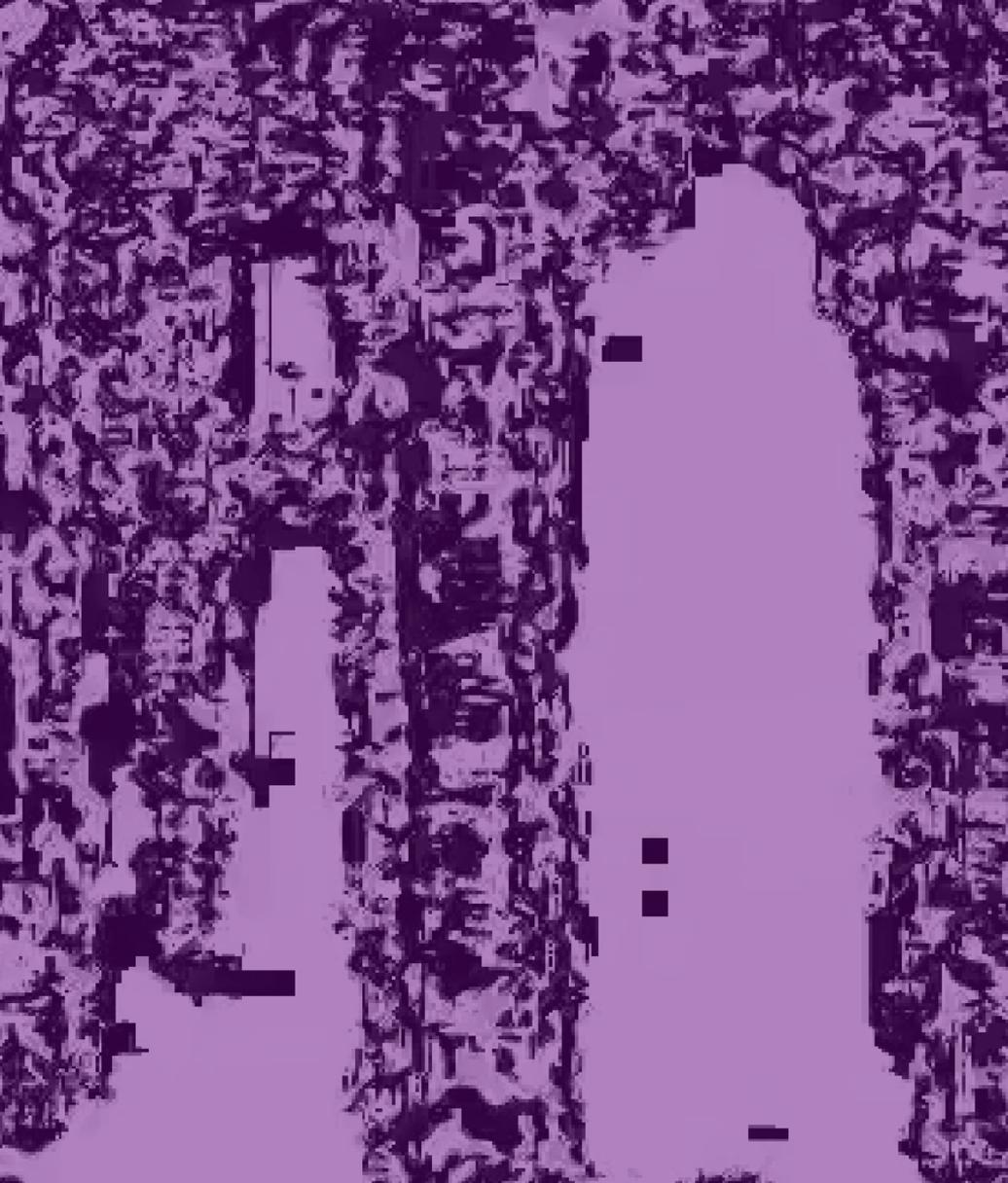
RYAN MAGUIRE:
THE GHOST IN THE MP3

Exposition Space is the Museum of Portable Sound's temporary exhibit gallery. Our inaugural exhibition is a solo show by sound artist, mathematician, and composer Ryan Maguire. As an artist, Ryan explores technology's role as an intermediary between human experience and the natural world, and the pieces he has selected for inclusion in our first temporary exhibition explore the sonic artifacts of MP3 compression. Ryan's work has been featured by the BBC, NPR, Deutschlandradio Kultur, and CBC, and been written about online by Vice NOISEY, Vox, the Onion's AV Club, and io9.com. Ryan's work will be featured in the Exposition Space during the Autumn/Winter 2015-2016 season.

TRACK LISTING NOTES BY RYAN MAGUIRE

moDernisT, 2015
Digital recording, 2.10, made by Ryan Maguire

"moDernisT" was created by salvaging the sounds lost to mp3 compression from the song "Tom's Diner", famously used as one of the main controls in the listening tests to develop the MP3 encoding algorithm. Here we find the form of the song intact, but the details are just remnants of the original, scrambled artifacts hinting at what once was.

Anyplace, 2015
Digital recording, 5.00, made by Ryan Maguire

"Anyplace" is composed from the material deleted during MP3 compression of the song "Fast Car" by Tracy Chapman, one of the original listening test songs used during the creation of the MP3. It is commonly accepted that MP3's create audible artifacts such as pre-echo, but what does the music which this codec deletes sound like? In the work presented here, these lost sounds are recovered, the ghosts in the MP3, and reformulated as art.

formatBreak0.1, 2015
Digital recording, 1.08, made by Ryan Maguire

Digital file formats act as filters through which we pass information, transforming it from indecipherable streams of 1's and 0's into human comprehensible media. This transformation is not as clean as we often imagine however- it leaves a residue on the data we thus access. For example, if you open a .txt file with its intended software, you will find the written information which the document was meant to convey. Open that same file using the wrong software, say an audio editor, and you will hear a seemingly random stream of noise, clicks, beeps, and drones. Convert the same text file into a different format before opening it as audio, and you will hear something different at the last stage. The data is ordered and thus colored by its format. 'formatBreak0.1' is music composed from the raw data of various digital file formats transformed into sonic material.

ABOUT RYAN MAGUIRE

Inspired by the infinity of the cosmos, the indeterminacy of the subatomic, and the complexity of life, Ryan Maguire explores the boundaries between the natural world, human experience, and the technologies that act as intermediaries between the two. His work is equal parts technical virtuosity and folk humanism, blurring lines between composition & improvisation, sound & video, acoustic & electric, deterministic & stochastic, fabricated & hand-crafted, analog & digital, lo-fi & high tech, and ultimately between poetry & science. He plays stringed instruments and programs computers, molds materials and builds circuits, writes essays and sings songs. Currently a Ph.D. student in Composition and Computer Technologies at the University of Virginia, Ryan earned his B.A. in Physics and taught math before completing postgraduate degrees at the New England Conservatory of Music and Dartmouth College in Composition and Digital Musics, respectively.

ryanmaguiremusic.com

theghostinthemp3.com

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