

Octet (2016)
Matt Rogalsky

Sound installation with eight SM58 vocal microphones wired in reverse as tiny loudspeakers, and eight modified archival birdsong recordings by William WH Gunn (1951, with permission of the Macaulay Library of Environmental Sound, Cornell University).

This sound installation, which repurposes common stage vocal microphones as tiny loudspeakers - eight of them hanging from the widespread branches of a tree - is part of ongoing research with Laura J Cameron into the life and work of William WH Gunn, early Canadian environmental sound recordist. It is a creative response to Gunn's practice, which will be followed by at least two other sound installations exploring his sound library, in 2017 (at the Fieldwork site, near Perth Ontario) and 2018 (TBA).

Beginning in 1951, Gunn recorded environmental sounds all over Canada and around the world. He gave numerous public lectures on birdsong and to reveal its intricacies he often played his tapes back at slow speeds. This presentation of the piece employs eight birdsong recordings made by Gunn in Ontario in 1951. You will periodically hear Gunn's voice introducing a recording, followed by playback slowed down by 80%. Each microphone-speaker is a unique source.

The piece, situated in a leafy tree, plays with the culture of "soloist" birdsong recording (isolating one bird from its surrounding "noise" as much as possible), the notion of birds as performers, the "reversibility principle" of microphones and loudspeakers, and Gunn's encouragement of birdsong identification and appreciation through his lectures and the "Sounds of Nature" LP series he produced from the 1950s into the 1970s.

About the accompanying audio documentation

This recording was made at 4Elements Living Arts on Manitoulin Island, Ontario, where the piece was installed for a week in July 2016. The chosen tree was located beside the 4Elements workspace, adjacent to a busy roadway.



Skeleton Park Arts Festival
June 2016, Kingston Ontario Canada



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Skeleton Park Arts Festival
June 2016, Kingston Ontario Canada

4Elements Living Arts
July 2016, Manitoulin Island Ontario



Hornby Island Arts Council
August 2016, Hornby Island BC Canada

