

# **AUDIOMOTH**

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## PROGRAM

Prescript .....	3
▲ .....	4
Movement I. ....	6
✂ .....	12
Movement II. ....	14
Interlude .....	17
Movement III. ....	18
Outro.....	22

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Prescript

“Trees that fall, with nobody around, in the woods”

*[do make a sound]*

*[why ask at all]*

because, of course trees make sound everywhere they fall  
displacing air molecules round trunks  
round Earth

because, even “with nobody around” there must include some  
deer, squirrel, ant, plant,  
to feel vibrations @ frequencies  
we cannot perceive

from a distance  
we cannot reach

between the closest human being &  
this toppled trunk.

Human-ear efficiency  
sits perched

upon a mechanism of evolution,  
stereo cohesion:  
a couple of Corti organs organized  
in contra cochlea;  
sea of Fibonacci figures  
make a spiral snail shell  
in your inner ear.

Fanwise across one’s heart the music spreads,  
strikes a loving chord  
tears induced  
from fourth to fifth—  
greeted by the warm lips of a lover,  
or the soft patter of water on a tin roof,  
or water itself.



When I lived in a different city  
my parents  
were different parents  
than the ones I have now

They wore  
different glasses  
hair different styled  
paddling the rushes  
quick with the music

Memories of our place in Belleknowes  
(across from our park &  
(the wedding church down the road  
one night of harsh weather  
sheets of rain cover the whole house  
rush in pour down  
drops pelt our front windows  
trees bow backwards in the wind  
rush in pour down  
Astral Weeks on the stereo—  
no rainbow in weeks,  
otherwise  
cloud-shrouded beneath embankments of mist

& now  
when Astral Weeks plays  
I hear  
the soft flipping of an “Uno” deck  
the patter of windowpane rain  
music in itself  
cooing voice  
mother, Cyprus Avenue, dust, clear in the hazy distance  
a country I had yet to inhabit  
laid out at my docks through song—  
pure through the eyes of the equipped storyteller  
that night,  
my mother became the music  
rain & wind & storm & card games  
logic & order through disorder & accidentals  
she became them all.

When, last winter, the system's  
compact disc tray  
jammed  
    (a dislodged belt  
    from overuse  
my father incurred the cost  
refused to replace  
the thirty-year old  
relic  
got the old  
thing  
fixed.

At the time he told me  
    *The music is everywhere,*  
    *but you can't recreate some experiences*

I later found out he had no intention of purchasing  
another system after this one this—it turned out—pinnacle of stereo functionality.

I had a theory  
when I was a boy  
that the modern music  
quartet  
equals  
the modern body:  
of drums as heartbeat & bass as heart  
    (internal life- meter  
& piano, no, voice, too, naked  
must be allegory for the body.

Music as body  
some ancient combination  
voice cadence tone  
primal understands roots  
predate lunar sun dims, roost,  
where trumpets mimicry out in voices all their own  
added banging of drums or tapping of feet must  
predate the swirl and tuck of fetal pre-birth  
cacophony of voices  
choir of planets  
    the chatter of experiences through bone      amniotic  
    any means necessary to share  
    & make felt







one spring  
spent  
hours  
walking campus  
with a soundtrack of radiowaves  
recorded planetary voices  
    picked up by microphones  
    mounted  
    like gum-pressed to desks  
    to satellites  
    @  $\frac{3}{4}$  volume            in terrestrial ears            forty second clips

notes:

{*Mercury*}  
rippling silvery tension  
bubbling echo chamber  
jawbone held in attention  
hollowed out amber  
blood

{*Venus*}  
voice falters  
to hold  
the note  
bell synth empty  
a vacuum  
held down  
endlessly

{*us*}  
womb. aqueous. eerily familiar.

{*Mars*}

a conversation in a bunker between a father and son  
whistles through canyons of rust  
knocks a dullness in the skull  
hammer chisel the side of white-feathered dread  
the son hisses, *Stop*, the father  
plunges the knife

{*Jupiter*}

apparition distance

{*Saturn*}

angry turmoil sliding on  
surface skin taught like a drum  
interlocution this side of the rings  
sickly. remorse,  
leaden. pale

{*Uranus*}

arctic soundscape the length of Texas  
the soft chugging of helium:  
torch-blowing  
nightmare

{*Neptune*}

wet wind soothes oceans  
ebb & flow the tide  
trapped in a perfect bottle



Place extremities  
@ the edge of history & see the overlap, &  
find that it's the overtones that shock the senses,  
not the words  
and what hurts is not the recycling  
but the demarcation of sounds  
    (this cannot go here;  
    this hurts head  
    this heart  
on repeat through history  
tumble repeat grief,  
phrases and pains,  
that bulbous word "intention"  
shuffling  
across centuries

is this gong gone quick  
to flush hush to push to pull  
at once, column out scenes  
pharaoh love  
rigid hearths stir  
satiated youth

rumble downhill  
undergo solfège engagement

words bonedry  
tongue caught in desert flood  
hot cold  
plumb  
play with thumbs  
& perform scale pattern runs  
for walls to hear

wheeze, concede out to sea  
beat refuses  
to wait up for you

lives you will never sit beside  
expression grow & sovereign ear

exhort timeline, re: why skin shivers & crawls  
    sound bound within walls  
    why foot taps obscured nails  
    musicians tap on taped rails  
        crumble with words  
    and sometimes  
        with  
    silence itself

parallel lines don't meet, so trains stay on course  
here I am, here we are, all @ once  
strapped to the tracks, I feel my back  
stretch muscles I could never reach,  
tied  
to parallels—  
actors, I will never meet  
extras in movies I have not seen,  
I will never meet,  
soundtracks I will never hear,  
fragments of songs by fragments of people,  
I will never  
attempt to learn on the upright piano in basement  
pluck my prepubescent violin in Belleknowes  
round lives, lives not wholly unlike my own, gone

millenia have commuted through this station. questions asked:  
    next "big thing"  
    next obsession  
    next hot sweat driven to supernatural  
        depths where ghosts remind you of dead  
        versions of yourself

we are one glowing yellow light  
in a lifeless building

Movement II. – “Moth” in  $\frac{3}{4}$  Time

A E I,            A/E I  
A on Use,  
iron fuse,  
    can't refuse  
    refuse re  
fuse    re: the

moon soothes wounds  
sun makes room,        &

crystal lists:  
my dust-borne  
    chrysalis.  
    amnesia,  
    silent sea  
shipwrecker.

Sights set on  
pathways set

on the moon  
and back to

soon. To steep,  
glow of night,

darkness looms  
in daytime:

mental sketch  
author as moth

tied to light  
hitthelight

sharp like a  
butterknife

against some  
readily

adjusted  
line of best  
split angle  
lunar large

& fat bulb

& drip dodge.

Puffed wing-tip  
extensions

between home  
state city

goal pastured  
phosphor looms

weavechurn sound  
&&&  
surface tense  
your blindness  
with planet  
frequency.

Angle a  
buzz-candle,  
take aimless  
direction,  
cardinal  
direction  
planetary  
instrument.

The moth pawns  
memory  
of what works  
what does not  
what can not,  
never can  
actually  
remember.

Quite the hair  
(viscous, prime)  
I've got here



Crumpled wing  
embouchure  
takes off, flies,  
uses moon  
for guidance  
& wavelengths  
I can't sing  
can only  
listen.

*Grey/White (An Interlude)*

plane view split sky  
forgotten in shower  
lo & behold  
chance reaction  
soliloquy in the waves  
survival of the rhythmic  
my friends  
pluck cough guides  
i pull the weight towards me  
dust-pit pilots carve recalled moonbeams  
slovenly domino  
whirr of motor  
gripped mass  
speed of sound equals 770 miles per hour  
but how fast do memories travel  
the last time  
sea  
peacock's tail  
in ritual  
paris is hell

forge thought  
of self  
of woodwork  
of fellow  
sufferers  
flutter awake  
reptilian breadth  
sunset  
crashing over waves  
cheesecake pleasure seeker  
sex language love  
memory drizzle  
memory cyphoned  
eroding cliff  
genome home  
pushing off to sonic  
spandrel chance  
stained glass  
my friends  
sleeplessly  
quasar night impossible to face  
camera-ear without film



{circa nineteen-sixty-nine} caetano veloso  
banished for “anti-state action”  
(spread bread & circuses  
in Rio favelas)  
then moved to/ in London  
& crated songs back to Brazil  
to his friends, to the left  
behind thinkers  
left-fighting

Our species cannot grasp  
that which is sponge absorbed  
dead silence requiring  
rare negative action

pablo picasso claimed  
meaning arose inside  
of existent spaces  
“what we think is there”  
so @ once motion is  
both intended &  
not

pink mitochondria  
is *pamplמושse* if you want  
lucid doodles to shift  
your camera-ear, about face,  
funhouse mirror projects  
this world this world in you  
& pablo plays audio,  
canvas film music speech  
the ache the love ripples  
throated impressions paired  
eclipsing sound found in  
the silence,  
the negative spaces

same abstract absence miles  
davis feared, leaned on. "air"  
gaps between more air, gaps  
for breath gaps whisper faint:  
rigid humanisms,  
A → G, notation  
arrange hertz scale gaps  
notes, empty of meaning  
except in a brainscape

in the brain's ocean deep,  
surfing grey/white matter,  
orchestral emotion  
flex-dicated to, led  
by a neuron choir

masterkey to love life  
pine for definition,  
½ justified for  
ears, mouth, and spinal cord  
we do not float alone

*Hear I am*, say the silent  
centuries  
we talk to the dead

generativation (an outro)  
from *pendulum music*

steve reich hung mikes  
from the ramparts of the late sixties  
measured entropy  
like how windchimes govern themselves  
river courses under a concrete case  
soft ripples  
lap tongues, outflow channel  
feedback river, loop pool loop

eno couldn't help  
gorged on process placing silence  
before

music  
universe withstands hum  
an interference  
human interference  
in tiers ineffable sonority  
understood bare  
single atom fits square  
gaps to make sense  
vibrations  
vibrations  
vibrations  
in your ear canal

hang steve reich mikes  
ramparts to watch measure  
late sixties in the entropy  
of windchimes tied to bone governance  
themselves a river cast in concrete  
ripple soft  
tongues on the lap of channel three  
loop feedback pool

loop eno one pool  
silence before process gorge

sound

loop

hum hum inference

stand bare  
atom square single fits  
gap sense  
vibrations

vibrations  
vibrations  
bone knocks window

“duchamp has dropped his string”  
wheel  
rolled away,  
we'll say

no wisdom  
the universe sings

## CREDITS

*Charles Darwin*, *The Descent of Man*; *Steve Reich*, *Pendulum Music*; YouTube video: “All Planet Sounds From Space”.



## Reflection

This composition took place over several stages, with regular revisions throughout the entire writing process. My goal, or central thesis, at its onset, was to explore music's place in the lives of the human species—even suggesting it as an integral aspect to what makes the human experience so unique. For me, music has always been an integral part of my life and I grew curious about how music interacts with the rest of world and or collected human history. To attempt to achieve this, I reflected on my own experiences with music, examined historical movements, learned about moths, pieces of music, studies and scholarly publications, listened to planets, and cast my sponge brain out into the world of research.

Drawing from as many experiences and resources as I could, this project encompasses a wide array of explorations into the science, history, and mechanics of music. In an attempt to compose musical poems (poems which are both syntactically and structurally musical), I turned to other poets—Charles Olsen, Yona Harvey, and Patti Smith—for their use of diverse vocal sounds in this craft. The bare-bones research for this project spanned many disciplines: brain and behavior, the natural sciences, astronomy, evolutionary history, music history. Daniel J. Levitin's *This Is Your Brain On Music* and Oliver Sachs's *Musicophilia* both served as important benchmarks in contemporary understandings of music's influence on the human brain and history. These texts led me to Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man*, which examines, among many other things, music's role in other species and suggests music as an integral part of our existence, by way of other animals. And from there I was led into other “histories”: moments in which music becomes more than just a series of sounds and expressions—but a tool for solidarity and bearing witness to change

and pain. I listened to musical movements and meditated on their relation to history, like Caetano Veloso's "Tropicalismo" and Shostakovich's *Leningrad*.

The title of the project took some soul-searching. I tried several placeholders, but each felt artificial and forced. Until, a few weeks ago, when Kohoutek Music & Arts came to Pitzer and a dear friend of mine called me an "audiomoth" during a performance at the fest—the word felt fresh, compounding, expansive. And so I set out to make some changes to the existing manuscript. In addition to the more readily accepted interpretations of music, I read a fair amount of ancient music theory ("Musica universalis" is fascinating, and worth a read) and history (development of prehistoric instruments), in order to gain a more hollistic perspective not just limited to Earth. Suddenly, I began to feel light-attraction toward something more than constructed melodies and rhythms, and turned my attention to the sound of the planets.

Music wouldn't be music without musicians, and therefore, I am indebted to those I listen to. Musicians Steve Reich and Brian Eno, who are notable for their pioneering of "generative music" (music created, in essence, by the entropy of the universe) influenced the experimental ethos of the project. The writings and lectures of John Cage (*Silence*) contributed a great deal to my understanding of performative music, and the many uses of silence in composing. All three of these artists—Reich, Eno, and Cage—have had an influence over my taste in music, but more than that have contributed a great deal to my understanding of how music operates.

*AudioMoth* is divided into three main sections, or movements, with short interludes peppered throughout. Each of the three movements deals with a different aspect of music in my life, and also incorporates a different "time signature". These time signatures are loose,

but the first movement (autobiographical and anecdotal), is in *very loose* 4/4 time, otherwise known as “common” time. The second movement, in 3/4 (or, waltz) time, develops the “moth” theme of the project and uses the concept of transverse orientation (using the moon as a fixed point for navigation) in order to examine my dependency on music. And the third movement, in 6/8 time, reflects music’s place in history, and balances a “rubato” structure (meaning on and off beats) to demonstrate an unbalanced world and music’s potential to balance such a world.

The two most experimental poems found in this collection are “Grey/White” and “Generativation”. Both of these are experimental in their structure, in order to demonstrate the arbitrary nature of, well, order. The first uses a cut-up technique: I wrote a poem, cut it up into pieces, put them into a hat, and drew lines at random. The visual arrangement of “Grey/White”—a kind of rhythm tablature—was inspired by some works found in Yona Harvey’s *Hemming the Water*. “Generativation” explores the slipperiness of language and the recycling of sounds: the poem on the left can be read stand-alone, just as the poem on the right can be, but when read together the poem takes on new meaning (I hope).

Ironically, the amount of research made it difficult to keep a central narrative throughout the project. As I began to learn more and more about music outside of the music industry as I know it today, my thoughtstream became cluttered with ideas on where to take it. Often, my thoughts would change about *how* I wanted the whole project to read, but I believe a central thesis is sustained over the course of the work. In order to get the project as cohesive, and succinct, as possible, I would read and reread the collection in the orders I had it and see what parts didn’t fit and what parts served “no” purpose.

This was another difficulty—how to transmit these expansive findings, as fascinating as they were, to a reader, through poetry? Herein lies the most blaring weakness, in my opinion, that the weight of the material, I feared, would become too much for a reader to access. In attempts to counter this notion, I included more autobiographical elements which I think helped to round out some of the more abstract ideas found in the collection. In some ways, I think the grand scope of this collection also helped to supplement the more abstract portions.