

██████████ SK Arts Independent Artist Grant Application - Production Stream
Successfully applied ██████████ - received 75% of requested funds.

Personal Statement:

Regarding genre, I would describe my music as listening-based, often soundscape-based, sometimes ambient, often electronic, and always experimental.

Regarding form, my pieces are often long, gradual processes where an object can be examined from different perspectives. For live performance pieces, I like movable forms, where the performer has the agency to unravel the musical materials for themselves.

Regarding medium, I am always working with sound. If the work is “fixed media” then I am interested in headphones as a specific medium for listening. I like the closeness and the intimacy of that technology.

Regarding theme, I am engaged with themes of examination and interrogation through listening, themes of “noticing” and “paying attention” as an act of love, and the theme of place, both in time and space.

When asked the question “why make music?” I sometimes give the glib answer of “nothing else to do.” Maybe that’s not a good answer, but I really feel this way. Growing up, I sort of just fell into being a musician, but once I realized that this is the only thing that seriously interested me, I started to work really hard at developing my craft.

I don’t think I know how to be goal-oriented in the creative process; I once heard ██████████ say that her work is about “not knowing where I am going, but listening all the time,” and this has become a mantra for me in my own work. When I make music, the primary audience member is myself; I make music because it’s the music that I want to hear, but my goal for my work as a whole is to open up the world as I hear it for other people who might be interested in taking the time to listen to my music.

When I started making field recording-based compositions in ██████████ didn’t know very much about basic audio-engineering techniques or recording practices, but I was interested in listening as a starting point for composing. At the same time I was developing my instrumental compositions with a totally disconnected approach, based on 20th-century Western Music theory and the study of logical and mathematical systems. Since then, I feel like my compositional practice has become much more cohesive and holistic. I’ve been learning how to synthesize the divergent worlds of soundscape music and logical systems by interrogating my relationships with technology, with music theory, and with my environment.

I feel like this project is just right for where I’m at in this present moment. I will be able to interrogate the themes of listening, attention, and place. I will continue to engage with the medium of experimental, electronic, soundscape-based music, and to explore long form compositions, examining sonic objects and situations from an array of perspectives. This project will be an opportunity for me to take stock of where and when I am now, and to develop further skills and knowledge as I establish my creative practice and identity.

Project Description:

Over the course of this project, I will be collecting field recordings and interrogating them using digital sound tools, leading to a five-track cycle of experimental, electronic, ambient music pieces. The field recordings will be collected in my current city of [REDACTED]. Since moving here last summer, I have undertaken a personal project to walk all of the streets and pathways in the city, a project which I am now close to completing. As a way of getting to know my new home, I also started collecting field recordings while walking, using in-ear binaural microphones, with the goal of creating a soundscape composition. The working title for this project is “walking music.” I think that my strongest idea for an actual title so far is “Go for a walk.”

I fell into the habit of going on these soundwalks on a loop near my apartment on the northeast side of town, and made six recordings of this walk in October of last year. I began working with the recordings in Ableton Live in late October and early November, but the project fell by the wayside as I pursued other work. With this grant, I would like to set aside time to refocus on this project, collect additional recordings, and work on the digital processing work in earnest, leading to a completed set of fixed-media pieces.

The five tracks of the cycle come from the five sections of the walk, please see the attached file “walking_music_map.pdf” in my support materials to see each section labeled, along with the working titles for the five tracks:

1. [REDACTED] (~7:00 minutes)
2. [REDACTED] (~9:00 minutes)
3. [REDACTED] (~8:50 minutes)
4. [REDACTED] (~9:00 minutes)
5. [REDACTED] (~9:30 minutes)

Beyond my initial recordings, my progress so far has entailed working out the guiding concepts of the project, developing the overall form of the cycle, and determining my general workflow within Ableton Live. In the fall I was experimenting with Max for Live Devices (some which are existing and some which I programmed myself) to perform pitch and envelope following procedures on my soundscape recordings; these devices will create a means to use the recordings themselves as controllers for digital instruments.

Pitch is an important aspect of the overarching formal organization of the cycle; I came up with one potential system which uses my six already-collected recordings, and assigns each of them one pitch class to control on a digital instrument. The pitches come from the first 6 unique pitches of the Harmonic Series, in Just Intonation. Each track is then based on a different fundamental pitch, traversing F#, A#, B#, G#, and C#. I like this progression because the overall tonal structure is plagal, but the final two tracks form a perfect, descending fifth relationship, and the end of the cycle loops back to the beginning with another perfect, descending fifth

relationship. This would conducive for listening to the cycle “on repeat” as ambient background music. Over the whole cycle, the use of Just Intonation results in two pitches of the same name having different tunings in different tracks. For example, the F#, which is the fundamental pitch of track 1, is 98 cents lower when it appears in track 3, as it is the 11th overtone of B#, which is itself the 11th overtone of F#. The 11th overtone of any given fundamental is 49 cents lower in Just Intonation than 12 Tone Equal Tempered tuning. I hear this exploration of tuning as related to my process of interrogating the soundscapes of my neighbourhood; the change of intonation with modulation is related to the change in perception of an object when it is seen or heard from a different location. This phenomenon is realized naturally whenever I walk on my usual loop; I encircle the schoolyards and approach objects from a long distance and then pass them by. My system of pitch organization may change as I continue to work on the project, but I hope to maintain a structure which creates good musical relationships which also interrogate the listening process of the soundwalks.

I want the tracks to all flow together very smoothly, as they are all parts of the same walk(s). Some distinct differences between the tracks will come about because of the content of the soundscapes. For example, when I walk along [REDACTED] tracks 1 and 5, there is denser traffic noise, and in track 3, when I’m on the walking path between the schoolyard and a pasture, there is more wind sound than anything else. I will also explore different musical ideas in each track, especially with regard to rhythm and texture, as a way to express the different moods I associate with the different sections of the walking loop.

My current organization of the project in Ableton has each track of the cycle in its own Live Set. Each field recording is in a group of tracks which divide the recording using various filters, and send the filtered audio to a digital instrument, controlling its volume. This organization is pretty good for creating a clean workstation and a clear workflow, but I have run into problems of CPU usage, with the high number of complex digital instruments running at the same time. Therefore, I may approach the work in stages, rendering the outputs of each digital instrument separately, and then layering them back in with the field recordings afterwards. This is the method I used to create the sample excerpt attached in my support materials. I am currently considering my six recordings from the fall as “bed tracks” for the pieces, and I will collect additional recordings with a focus on finding interesting moments and sounds, while maintaining the walking-loop structure.

The planned timeline for my project is as follows:

March 18th-April 18th:

Additional recording and revisiting the digital production process:

- I will be moving away from [REDACTED], and so I want to ensure that I have all of the recordings that I may need.
- I will continue to develop and organize my Ableton Live Sets, and program additional Max for Live objects as needed.
- During this period I will take the time to record diligent notes on my plans and processes, so that I can easily pick up the project later on.

I have a different project already planned from late April until late October, and while I will certainly work sporadically on this cycle, and continue to add ideas for the electronic production, I won't be able to work full time on this project again until the fall.

October 31st-January 16th:

8 weeks total time (budgeting 2 weeks lost for travel around the holidays).

- Two weeks to refine my process and complete the first track (currently the most developed of the cycle).
- Four weeks (one week each) to complete the following 4 tracks. I anticipate this work going fairly quickly once my process is well developed.
- Two weeks to revise and refine the project as a whole and to make additional edits. I often find that as I work on a large scale project, my work towards the end of a piece has evolved since the I started, and I need to make additions or alterations to earlier sections.

At the end of this period, I hope that the project will be ready for mastering and eventual release as an EP. I don't have any experience working with a mastering engineer nor with releasing my recorded music commercially, so this will be the next stage of the project, beyond the scope of this grant.

Over the course of this project I hope to strengthen my knowledge of digital sound design, to learn new techniques in Ableton Live, and to improve my workflow for audio production. I hope to continue to interrogate the way that I listen, and to discover new ways to listen to the soundscapes around me. I hope that I will learn new ways to consider musical form, and to relate musical forms and ideas to my musical materials and to my practice of listening. I hope that this project, in its completed form, will be an aid to other people who are interested in listening interrogatively. I hope that the music encourages close listening, but also welcomes background listening. This "walking music" or whatever I end up actually calling it, should be music made by walking, for walking: an accompaniment to whatever world the listener finds themselves in. I hope that this project will be a significant step for me in developing a holistic creative practice that engages with experimental music techniques, my relationship with technology, and the place that I am in, here and now, in [REDACTED]