

Footpath for Otic Ghosts

by Loren Chasse

Commissioned by Third Angle New Music



*Sellwood Park, Oaks Bottom Wildlife Refuge,
& Sellwood Riverfront Park*

Footpath for Otic Ghosts

Listening from Sellwood Park to Oaks Bottom Refuge to Sellwood Riverfront Park

By Loren Chasse

Sometimes I wish for an object, a scene, or situation, to make a sound. Yet there it sits, stubbornly silent. This sonorous image before me--something between a sound, or arrangement of sounds, and a music--prods my otic imagination into action with nothing more than a dark and resonant hollow, or the material traces left behind human actions.

This walk is composed of such scenes in the landscape. The photographs included in this guide will help you find your way to the sites--between the parking lot of Sellwood Park and the Willamette River--that made me stop and listen for something. Much of what I heard required a little coaxing, so I recommend you find a round stone that fits comfortably in hand, and use it to activate some of the surfaces you will encounter in order to get them "singing". Some of what you will hear in my recordings is what I wished I could hear, and so there is a bit of fantasy as I have used sounds from other times and places to create something inferred or imagined.

The recording is episodic and meant to be played at the places denoted by the pictures along your path. After the finish of each 1-4 minute event, pause the recording (I have included six second gaps between each episode). The time in between is for walking and actually listening. Resume listening to the recording upon reaching the next picture clue.

To begin:

Park in the lot of Sellwood Park at SE 7th & Malden Street. Follow the path along the northernmost edge of the park and take the Oaks Bottom Bluff Trail down toward Oaks Bottom and the Springwater Trail.



As you walk, find a smooth stone that fits comfortably in your hand.

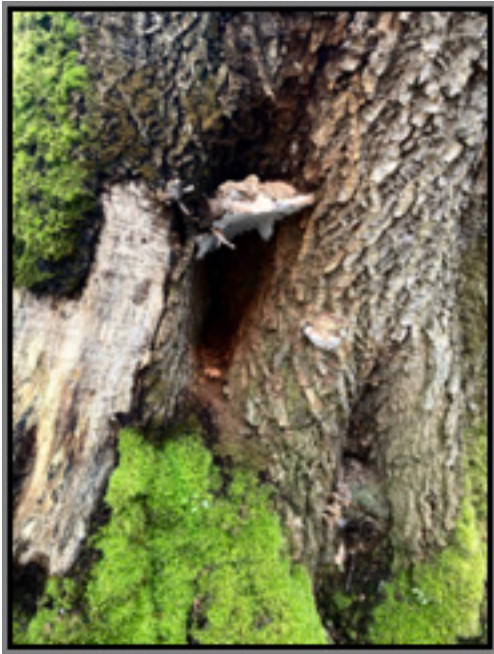
How might a stone be used to make sound along a surface?

Try circular motions.



Heading down the path of the bluff toward the Springwater Trail, find a resonator marked by a shelf fungus. What sounds might emanate, in arboreal time, from such a cavity?

Listen... [0:00]



What ghosts of human actions lie sleeping in the surface of these stones?

Listen... [begin at 1:05]





Try knowing a place by finding out how it sounds.



Look north toward the meadow of the Oaks Bottom Refuge and spot the powder blue post. What would the ear find if it could fit through one of these holes? How would outside sound in there?

Listen.... [begin at 2:00]



Several steps away, there, covered in a net of lifeless vines...
What sounds does such a thing imply? Again, how would outside sound from
in there?

Listen.... [begin at 3:52]



Betweenities – neither here nor there, yet there is something so distinct that happens in such places. A multiplicity of presences—though often out of sight—collects and overlaps, making a strange mix for a listener.



As you cross the meadow toward Wapato Marsh (and the largest hand-painted mural in the country on the backside of Portland Mausoleum), take in the tree line and the sky. Here, time, and the comings and goings of its birds, will overlap in you. Find a place out in the open or along the edge of the marsh.

Listen... [begin at 5:22]



*It is much like I am in two places at once; not quite a simultaneity,
but a feeling that time overlaps in me. I have a fuzzy understanding
of what it means to make oneself a field.*



Once you've explored the marsh and maybe even taken the trail for a way along its eastern edge below the Mausoleum, **head back toward the Springwater Trail along the path below the bluff.**

A cistern? An object that is solid, heavy, grounded. Immovable. An "appearance" of silence. At least until one really starts looking and discerns the movement of ants along a crack, or sunlight blinking in flecks of mica. And what sort of space lies beneath the metal cover? Could there be a ladder leading down?

Listen... [begin at 9:05]



Make a decision based on the sound you hear.



Return to the corner of the meadow, just past the stone steps, toward so many parallel lines running north and south, following the line of the river.

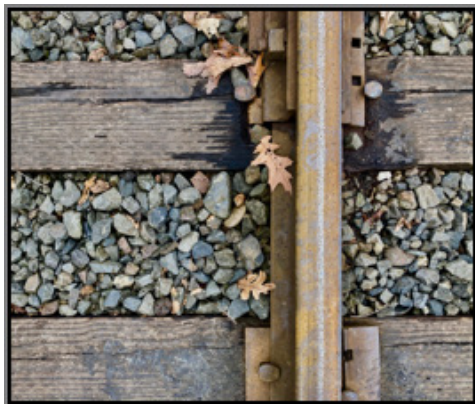
Under influence of the rain, something so ominous might even ominously sing.

Listen... [begin at 10:29]



Follow the rails south until you reach Spokane St. and can double back and head down to the Riverfront Park. Or cut across the Springwater Trail through an opening in the fence and find the dirt track down the hillside.

Listen... [begin at 13:16]





Put your ear to a surface and listen.

Find a ringing sound or find a way to make one.



Just below Oaks Park Way (the road to Oaks Park) and north of the dog park, you will find a boardwalk and a pond.

Listen... [begin at 16:13]



Where is the sound of something you can't see. What do you imagine it is?

Where were you looking when you were listening?



On Valentine's weekend, 2021, a rare ice storm came through Portland. Here, from that sliver of time, are some *ghosts* from the edges of the pond.

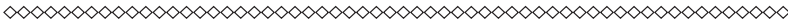
Listen... [begin at 19:43]



From the pond, make your way to the river and head north along the beach.

Choose some places along the way to make sounds using water, sand, mud, and stones.

Listen... [begin at 24:07]



Do you like this sound? Why or why not?



As you walk out onto the floating dock, consider all the ways for finding math in these interlocking polyethylene blocks. How does the volume of a single block respond to your footfall?

Listen.... [begin at 28:46]



From the floating dock, head to the footpath just behind the beach. Imagine a day when ice and snow was falling through the canopy.

Listen... [begin at 31:26]



What sound do you hear that reminds you of music?



Walk over to the railing and look out past the dock where a few sailboats may be moored. What are the voices of the river at this time of day? The drone of traffic on the bridge. Small boats motoring along. A paddle stirring. The clang of a halyard in the wind. Is that a child singing somewhere? What could be happening at those houses across the way?

Listen... [begin at 35:44]





What sounds did you make while you were walking?

