

The Nature of Music: Polar Soundscapes

featuring Cheryl E. Leonard with Phillip Greenlief

Presented by Other Minds and the David Brower Center

Wednesday, May 11, 2016 7:30pm

Goldman Theater, David Brower Center, Berkeley, CA

Meltwater (2013)

Cheryl E. Leonard & Phillip Greenlief - icicles, scientific glassware, penguin bones, and Antarctic rocks

Glugge (2014)

Cheryl E. Leonard - amplified sand, glass, kelp flutes, water, limpet shells, saw blades, rocks

Oona Stern - video

Ablation Zone (2014)

Cheryl E. Leonard - amplified penguin bones, penguin nesting stones

Oona Stern - video

Brief Intermission

Conversation with Cheryl E. Leonard and Paul Dresher

Special thanks to Barbara Bessey for her support of this event, in memory of her late husband Kevin Gilmartin, who traveled with her at one time to Antarctica.

Meltwater (2013) for two performers on icicles, scientific glassware, penguin bones, and Antarctic rocks, with field recordings of the Marr Ice Piedmont on Anvers Island in Antarctica

In 2009 I spent a month at Palmer Research Station on Anvers Island off the Antarctic Peninsula. Palmer is built on a sliver of exposed rock at the edge of the Marr Ice Piedmont, a vast glacier that enshrouds the island. Like most glaciers along the Western Antarctic Peninsula, the Marr is shrinking, its surface increasingly fractured by exposed crevasses and its periphery collapsing into the sea. Behind the station the ice has retreated more than 1500 feet over the last 50 years.

Along the fringes of the Marr I recorded meltwater streams, towers of calving ice, and icicles inside crevasses. I also heard things that eluded my microphones: faint whispers and gurgles, lost languages of air and stone, songs blown away by the wind, gamelans cached in ice and water. This piece is a contemplation of Antarctica's melting glaciers and a re-imagining of some of their transitory, fading voices.

Glugge (2014) for one player on amplified sand, glass, kelp flutes, water, limpet shells, saw blades, and rocks from Trygghamna, Svalbard; together with field recordings of the barkentine Antigua sailing and motoring through the Arctic Ocean. Video footage shot on location in Forlundsundet, Raudfjorden, and Woodfjorden, Svalbard.

Glugge is a collaborative piece from composer Cheryl E. Leonard and visual artist Oona Stern. It is part of *Adfreeze Project*, a series of multidisciplinary artworks that grew out of their 2011 residency in Svalbard, a remote archipelago above the Arctic Circle.

"Glugge" is the Norwegian word for window or porthole. This piece is a response to the threat of increasing industrialization in the Arctic Ocean, and an elegy for the Arctic icecap and the ecosystem it supports. As sea ice in the region continues to shrink, shipping routes across the Arctic Ocean are becoming increasingly viable, and nations are eager to exploit newly accessible natural resources. These kinds of invasive human activities are likely to further disrupt the already struggling Arctic ecosystem. *Glugge* also references the history of European explorations of the Arctic and the many doomed quests to reach the

North Pole or discover a Northwest Passage.

Ablation Zone (2014) for one player on penguin nesting stones and amplified Adélie penguin bones, with field recordings of the Marr Ice Piedmont on Anvers Island in Antarctica

The “ablation zone” of a glacier is the area below a certain elevation where there is a net loss of ice mass due to melting, evaporation, sublimation, calving, wind scouring, and so forth. Within the Marr’s ablation zone I collected sounds from meltwater streams and crevasses teeming with icicles. In the ocean near the Marr’s terminal ice cliffs I recorded icebergs, brash ice and bergy bits that it had jettisoned.

The Marr produced a beguiling array of unique sounds. Each meltwater stream bubbled, gurgled, or sputtered it’s own rhythms and melodies, sometimes sounding like electronics or machinery. Icicles dripped the intricate layers of gamelan songs. Icebergs crackled and snapped like giant pop-rocks, or provided large cavities for waves to resonate within. To these field recordings, full of motion and energy, I added the subtle sound of polished penguin nesting stones rubbing together, and then otherworldly moans and howls produced by bowing Adélie penguin vertebrae.

Cheryl E. Leonard is a composer, performer, and instrument builder. Over the last decade she has focused on investigating sounds, structures, and objects from the natural world. Her recent works cultivate stones, wood, water, ice, sand, shells, feathers, and bones as musical instruments. Leonard is fascinated by the subtle intricacies of sounds. She uses microphones to explore micro-aural worlds hidden within her sound sources and develops compositions that highlight the unique voices they contain. Her projects often feature one-of-a-kind sculptural instruments that are played live onstage and field recordings from remote locales. Leonard enjoys collaborating across artistic disciplines and creating site-specific works. In addition to developing her own projects, she has composed numerous soundtracks for film, video, dance, and theater, and has designed sounds for exhibits at the Monterey Bay Aquarium and the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture.

Leonard holds a BA from Hampshire College and an MA from Mills College. Her music has been performed worldwide and she has been commissioned to create instruments and music for Kronos Quartet, Illuminated Corridor, and Michael Straus. She has received grants from the National Science Foundation’s Antarctic Artists and Writers Program, ASCAP, American Composers Forum, American Music Center, Meet the Composer, and the Eric Stokes Fund. Leonard has been awarded residencies at Oberpfälzer Künstlerhaus, Djerassi, the Arctic Circle, Villa Montalvo, the Paul Drescher Ensemble Studio, and Engine 27. Recordings of her music are available from NEXMAP, Unusual Animals, Ubuibi, Pax, Apraxia, 23 Five, and Great Hoary Marmot Music.

Since his emergence on the west coast in the late 1970s, Evander Music founder and saxophonist **Phillip Greenlief** has achieved international critical acclaim for his recordings and performances with musicians and composers in the post-jazz continuum as well as new music innovators and virtuosic improvisers. He has performed and recorded with Fred Frith, Meredith Monk, Nels Cline, and They Might Be Giants; albums include *THAT OVERT DESIRE OF OBJECT* with Joelle Leandre, and *ALL AT ONCE* with FPR (Frank Gratkowski, Jon Raskin, Phillip Greenlief). Recent residencies have included Headlands Center for the Arts and from 2012 to 2014 he was the curator at Berkeley Arts, a home for progressive music. He is the recipient of a San Francisco Bay Guardian Goldie Award.

The Nature of Music

From the music of Haydn, Dvorak and Messiaen, classical composers have long been using the sounds of the natural world as source material. With the advent of reel-to-reel tape recorders that inspired composers of the *musique concrete* movement, we could hear sounds slowed down or speeded up to bring new ears to common everyday sources. Along the way John Cage proposed in 1952, with *4'33"*, a silent piece for piano, that a listener could create their own concert by simply listening to ambient sounds without altering them, recognizing that they too have form and content. With the advent of personal recording equipment like the cassette recorder, environmental sounds have been recorded, sampled and integrated into composed and improvised music. In 1970, Charles Amirkhania and Richard Friedman launched the World Ear Project at KPFA in Berkeley. They invited people from around the world to record continuous sound for 15 minutes or longer without alteration. The result was a long-running program in which listeners driving over the Bay Bridge would be mystified by long segments of sounds of a street market in India or frogs and crickets at night in Cayucos, California. The David Brower Center and Other Minds will present complementary concerts for each visual art show in the Hazel Wolf Gallery.

Other Minds, is dedicated to the encouragement and propagation of contemporary music in all its forms through concerts, workshops and conferences that bring together artists and audiences of diverse traditions, generations and cultural backgrounds. By fostering cross-cultural exchange and creative dialogue, and by encouraging exploration of areas in new music seldom touched upon by mainstream music institutions, Other Minds is committed to expanding and reshaping the definition of what constitutes "serious music."

The David Brower Center provides a home for the environmental movement by advocating for the beauty, diversity and ecological integrity of Earth. The Brower Center accomplishes this mission through a distinctive combination of permanent infrastructure and ongoing programs in a unique civic institution that informs the public about the environmental challenges we face and the bold actions we must take if ours is to remain a living planet; inspires people to recognize their own power and responsibility to act on behalf of the Earth; and connects individuals and organizations dedicated to social equity and ecological sustainability.