

LISTENING SESSIONS, TALKS, PANELS, AND CONVERSATIONS

# SONCITIES SOUNDSCAPES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

AIN BAILEY

OLANI EWUNNET

MIKE BULLOCK

LOUIS CHUDE-SOKEI

EDZI'U

ALISON MARTIN

GASCIA OUZOUNIAN

JACEK SMOLICKI

CHRISTABEL STIRLING

TOM WESTERN

YVETTE JANINE JACKSON

**2-day online symposium**

**7 and 8 December 2022**

**10 AM - 2 PM (EST)**

**3 PM - 7 PM (GMT)**

Please register through [\*\*EVENTBRITE\*\*](#)

Presented by Harvard University Department of Music  
and SONCITIES, Faculty of Music, University of Oxford

## **SOUNDSCAPES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE SYMPOSIUM**

Wednesday 7 December and Thursday 8 December 2022  
10 AM - 2 PM Eastern Standard Time (EST) on both days  
3 PM - 7 PM Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) on both days

Co-hosted by the Harvard University Department of Music and the SONCITIES Research Project at the Faculty of Music, University of Oxford

This online symposium, co-presented by SONCITIES and the Harvard University Department of Music, brings together sound artists, composers, and sonic theorists in a 2-day gathering exploring issues of soundscape and social justice, through talks, listening sessions, artist presentations, conversations, and panels. We are thrilled to welcome a vibrant group of speakers whose work engages with social and political issues in relation to listening, field recording, and sonic ecologies. The symposium features keynote speakers Ain Bailey and Louis Chude-Sokei, whose work tackles issues of race, memory, community, and technology in connection to soundscape and listening, and invited speakers Mike Bullock, Edzi'u, Olani Ewunnet, Allie Martin, Jacek Smolicki, Christabel Stirling, and Tom Western, whose music, sound art, and writing forges new ways of engaging with soundscape, from issues of sonic citizenship and belonging to urban sonic ecologies, the sonic dimensions of gentrification and climate crisis, and soundscape and field recording in relation to indigeneity, vocality, and power.

### **SCHEDULE OF EVENTS**

*Please note all times below given in Eastern Standard Time (EST)*

#### **WEDNESDAY 7 DECEMBER**

*All times given in Eastern Standard Time (EST)*

**10.00-10.15 AM EST** Welcome by Yvette Janine Jackson and Gascia Ouzounian

**10.15-11.00 AM EST** Olani Ewunnet, 'YE DEJI ABEBA NEGN: Sonic Floral Imaginaries in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia'

#### **11 AM-12.45 PM EST PANEL**

Christabel Stirling, 'Sound, City Life, and Critical Ethnographic Scholarship'

Allison Martin, 'Freedom Sounds in the Nation's Capital: Juneteenth Weekend in Washington, DC'

Tom Western, 'Covered Mouths Still have Voices'

**1-2 PM EST** Modes of Sonic Assembly: A Keynote Conversation with Ain Bailey

## **THURSDAY 8 DECEMBER**

*All times given in Eastern Standard Time (EST)*

**10 AM – 11.45 AM EST** Listening session with Edzi'u, 'Ts'ats'ee Sounds,' and Mike Bullock, 'Energy, industry, and emergency.' Moderated by Yvette Jackson.

**12.00 PM - 12.45 PM EST** Jacek Smolicki, 'From Soundmarks to Soundscars (and back): Socio-environmental imaginations in soundwalking and field recording practices'

**1-2 PM EST** Keynote lecture. Louis Chude-Sokei, 'Race and the Prosthetic Ear'

## **ABSTRACTS: WEDNESDAY 7 DECEMBER**

*In chronological order*

### **Olani Ewunnet, 'YE DEJI ABEBA NEGN: Sonic Floral Imaginaries in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia'**

If one wants to understand flowers in Ethiopia, one should listen. One might then ask, listen to what? Situated at the intersection of indigenous Ethiopian epistemologies, soundscape, and landscape theory, the project proposes contemporary urban applications for a 1500-year-old mode of environmental listening. Listening to two flowers, Adey Abeba, the wild yellow daisies of Ethiopian New Year that grow in fallow land across the country, and the Rose, the most profitable flower of Ethiopia's booming cut-flower industry, the project then turns to the formation and namesake of the Ethiopian capital as the 'New Flower', sonifying the city's sprawling network of rose greenhouses rapidly replacing fallow and cultivated land of local farmers while bringing in foreign currency and employing hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians. Through the documentation and excavation of sonic floral cultural artifacts, I recompose the constituent parts of Ethiopia's embodied relationships with flowers, revealing the capacity of flowers as drivers of the sonic and built environment.

### **Christabel Stirling, 'Sound, City Life, and Critical Ethnographic Scholarship'**

What can an ethnographic approach to the study of cities and their complex sonic social environments reveal about contemporary urban life? More specifically, how can urban ethnography conducted in a sonic register contribute to our understanding of the erupting problems and possibilities of life in the twenty-first-century city? This paper offers some reflections on these questions at a time when ethnography itself has come under renewed scrutiny and critique. Drawing on existing urban (sonic) ethnographies, as well as my own ethnographic fieldwork for SONCITIES (2021-22), I consider the kinds of knowledge and understanding that an ethnographic approach to urban sound environments might produce. Combining sonic methods with ethnographic interviews and participant observation, I draw focus to the discordancy and historical multiplicity of the urban present, exploring how social and cultural locations traverse sonic experience, how sound gets entangled in the politics of belonging, and how, in densely multicultural cities, different understandings of what public space is and how it 'should' sound are constantly encountering one other in ways that produce both complex negotiations and striking connections.

### **Alison Martin, 'Freedom Sounds in the Nation's Capital: Juneteenth Weekend in Washington DC'**

In 2022, a year after the Biden administration declared Juneteenth a federal holiday in 2021, Washington, DC was teeming with events celebrating Black freedom in the United States. Recording artist Pharrell brought his festival "Something in the Water" to the city, local community organizations planned free concerts at Freedom Plaza, and Moechella (one of DC's local go-go music's fiercest advocates) held a show in the U Street Corridor. In this talk, I tell stories of Juneteenth weekend 2022 in DC, of a city that on the surface is welcoming the sounds of Black life but continues to gentrify rapidly and become more sonically and financially exclusive.

### **Tom Western, 'Covered Mouths Still Have Voices'**

The title of this paper is a political slogan. It borrows from the chant of medical workers in Greece, who have been asserting that covered mouths still have a voice ("Και τα καλυμμένα στόματα βγάζουν φωνή") since long before the Covid-19 pandemic began at the start of 2020. The slogan has become politically useful on wider scales since then, and I take it as a jumping off point – a means of understanding political techniques of vocality that have been retuned in pandemic contexts. My focus is on forms of *vocal-spatial resistance*, hearing how people contest political hierarchies of vocality that have been tightened during Covid, and create new spatialities of voice through pandemic activism. The paper listens to how voices signal and sound out multiple forms of mobilisation, and it outlines a global sense of voice that develops as a result. From this, ways of hearing mouths and voices emerge not just in terms of speaking and sounding, or only as forms of identity and agency, but as a gathering, a refusal, a resource, a navigational tool, a transformation.

### **Modes of Sonic Assembly: A Keynote Conversation with Ain Bailey**

The composer, artist and DJ Ain Bailey has developed a uniquely social perspective in her artistic and musical practice, which engages communities and collaborators' voices in articulating ideas about sound, place, and personal and shared histories. For her sound work *Atlantic Railton* (2021), for example, exhibited as part of the 2021 Serpentine Pavilion by Summaya Vally/Counterspace, Bailey told a multi-voiced story of Brixton's social and sonic histories, focusing on social movements and sites of community organising, including Brixton Neighbourhood Community Association, Big Up, and Lambeth Women's Project. In developing this project, Bailey engaged a number of collaborators in 'intimate conversations that sonically reflect on the memories, actions and relationships held in sites of community care and resistance'.

Bailey has developed the methodologies of 'sonic autobiography' and 'sonic round table,' which engage communities, cultural practitioners and collaborators in listening sessions in which they share sounds that hold special meaning for them, and collectively listen to the sounds of each another's lives and environments. Her work suggests various modes of sonic assembly, for example by using collective listening as a social and political practice, a form of community-building, gathering, and resistance.

This conversation is hosted by Gascia Ouzounian as part of the series Countersonics: Radical Sonic Imaginaries.

**ABSTRACTS, THURSDAY 8 DECEMBER**  
*In chronological order*

**Listening Session with Edzi'u and Mike Bullock. Moderated by Yvette Jackson.**

Independent and collaborative sound-making, critical listening, and inquiry have the potential to positively impact issues related to social justice. This session provides an opportunity for collective listening and discussion. What can we learn from ever-changing soundscapes and how can the act of soundscape composition influence activism? We will be joined by [Edzi'u](#) and [Mike Bullock](#), who will share recent recordings. Listening with headphones or speakers is encouraged. The panel will be moderated by Yvette Janine Jackson.

**Edzi'u, 'Ts'ats'ee Sounds'**

Step into the lush and heart wrenching sounds of **Edzi'u**, an innovative sound and performance artist, producer, and composer who paints stories of the past, present and future with textures, community voices and words, and her ethereal voice. Being rich in culture, full of passion and spirit, the power behind their use of sound goes deep within the listener, inspiring them to be bold and genuine, while living fully within their hearts. Edzi'u has a style and sound like no other, a quiet icon in the landscape of Indigenous music on Turtle Island.

In this event we will discuss Edzi'u's process for creating sound pieces and considerations while creating on occupied Indigenous lands, as well as what it means to reclaim narratives as an Indigenous queer artist. Two sound pieces will be shared and discussed.

**Mike Bullock, 'Energy, industry, and emergency'**

In this session I will share several short recordings made in and around the Étang de Berre, a salt water lagoon in the south of France near the Mediterranean. With the local economy built on oil and hydroelectric power, the Étang and its communities face ongoing challenges to both the ecology and public health. I will discuss my thoughts around using soundscape recording to unpack this complex environment, as part of my collaboration with France-based American filmmaker and researcher Jeff Silva.

**Jacek Smolicki, 'From Soundmarks to Soundscars (And Back): Socio-environmental imaginations in soundwalking and field recording practices'**

In this talk, I will discuss the potential of soundwalking and field recording practices to rearticulate certain preconceptions about the soundscapes of particular sites. Departing from the notion of a *soundmark* (a sound that is unique or loaded with qualities that make it special to a specific group of people), I will talk about how recognizing and giving justice to other, imperceptible and neglected listening positionalities might drastically reconfigure our aural perception of and navigation through the surrounding environments. More specifically, drawing on examples from my recent projects, soundwalking workshops, and field recording sessions (in Switzerland, Sweden, Canada, and the US), I will talk about different techniques for mobilizing and destabilizing our listening positionalities to acknowledge and better account for power relations and forms of socio-environmental injustice, often deeply ingrained in those very positions and soundscapes we peregrinate through. Lastly, I will speculate how critically rethought practices of soundwalking and field recording can trigger more careful, empathetic, and just approaches to composing (with) our lived environments, their soundmarks, and soundscapes.

### **Louis Chude-Sokei, Keynote Lecture: 'Race and the Prosthetic Ear'**

Black musical forms have bequeathed a range of techniques of listening, and of exploring space via sound. These techniques are born out of the work of Black artists, thinkers, and recordists, who begin to appropriate “the prosthetic ear” of microphones from the colonial postures and oftentimes racist meanings and practices associated with field recording from the late 19th/early 20th century.

My ongoing project, Echolocation, deploys field recording and sound walking as ways of engaging race and history through sound. It focusses on recording spaces in the African Diaspora that are associated with historical trauma and are prime sites for commemoration. It has, however, been expanded to engage wider worlds of history, and race, most notably, the Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg, Germany. By centering areas replete with a surplus of history and unresolved conflicts, Echolocation insists that race is as central to listening as it is to history.

But to tell the story of the project’s development requires a history of my listening across the African Diaspora, and a corresponding discussion about how distinct thinkers impacted and shaped my listening—most notably African American writer and musician Ralph Ellison, and Canadian composer, writer and environmentalist, R. Murray Schafer.

### **BIOGRAPHIES**

*In alphabetical order*

**Ain Bailey** is a composer, artist, and DJ. She facilitates workshops considering the role of sound in the formation of identity. Exhibitions include: ‘The Range’ at Eastside Projects, Birmingham; ‘RE:Respite’ at Transmission Gallery, Glasgow, Scotland, and ‘And We’ll Always Be A Disco In The Glow Of Love’, a solo show at Cubitt Gallery, London. Bailey was also commissioned by Supernormal/Jupiter festivals to create and perform a new composition, ‘Super JR’. In 2020, Bailey was commissioned by Radiophrenia Glasgow, a temporary art radio station, to create a new composition entitled ‘Ode To The N.H.S.’. Ongoing is a commission by Serpentine Projects, in which Bailey conducts sound workshops with LGBTI+ refugees and asylum seekers. In 2021, Bailey has her second solo show ‘Version’ at Wysing Arts Centre and has also been commissioned to create a sound work/performance for the 2021 Serpentine Pavilion.

**Mike Bullock** is a composer and environmental sound recordist based in rural Massachusetts. He has been creating electroacoustic and improvised music since the mid 90s, and has performed across North America and Europe. Bullock has received grants from the Pew Center for Arts & Heritage and the Foundation for Contemporary Arts. As Ears In Space, he also designs and builds wave field synthesis and other spatial audio arrays.

Bullock’s work has been presented at ISSUE Project Room, Experimental Intermedia, and the Park Avenue Armory in NYC; Fylkingen, Stockholm, Sweden; Instants Chavirés in Paris; Café OTO in London; The Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Goethe Institut Boston; and EMPAC in Troy, NY.

**Louis Chude-Sokei** is a Professor of English at Boston University and directs its African American and Black Diaspora Studies Program. His works include the award-winning *The Last Darcy: Bert Williams, Black on Black Minstrelsy and the African Diaspora* (2005), *The Sound of Culture: Diaspora and Black Technopoetics* (2015) and the acclaimed memoir, *Floating in A Most Peculiar Way* (2021). He is Editor of *The Black Scholar*, one of the oldest and leading journals of Black Studies in the United States and founder of the sonic art and archival project, Echolocation. Other projects include collaborations with artists such as electronic music icons, Mouse on Mars, and legendary choreographer Bill T. Jones. Chude-Sokei was also a curator of Carnegie Hall's 2022 Festival of Afrofuturism.

**Edzi'u** is Tahltan and Taku River Tlingit. She was born and mostly raised in Whitehorse, YT, spending a large part of that time in her Tahltan traditional territory of Dease Lake, BC. She received a Bachelors of Applied Music in Composition with a Classical Voice Minor in 2019. Edzi'u has been performing nationally for the better part of ten years, in festivals, cafes, bars and street corners. Her debut album, *Kime Ani*, samples audio from vintage recordings of her grandmothers' stories. *Kime Ani* has been featured in imagineNATIVE's 2018, 2019 and 2020 audio selections, CBC Radio's *reclaimed* in 2019 and 2020, and True Calling Media's short doc: *Edzi'u, Sound Artist and Indigenous Storyteller*. Edzi'u strives to hold spaces for community in her work and artistic process while fully encompassing her views and colonial inheritance as a twenty-first century 2spirit person.

**Olani Ewunnet** is an Ethiopian-American urbanist, designer, and artist. She holds a Masters in Design with a concentration in Urbanism, Landscape and Ecology from Harvard University and a BA in Urban and Environmental Policy from Occidental College. Working at the threshold between design, the arts, and environment-making practices, she examines Africa's growing urban landscapes through ecological thinking, speculative and indigenous design techniques. She is curator and research lead of art and architectural projects in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Germany, and the United States - through community-oriented research, oscillating across disciplines and geographies.

**Allie Martin** is an ethnomusicologist and artist from Prince George's County, Maryland. She is currently an assistant professor at Dartmouth College in the Music Department and the Cluster for Digital Humanities and Social Engagement. Her work is attuned to questions of race, sound and power. Her forthcoming first book, *Intersectional Listening: Gentrification and Black Sonic Life in Washington, DC*, explores the relationships between race, sound, and gentrification in Washington, DC. Utilizing a combination of ethnographic fieldwork and digital humanities methodologies, Martin considers how African-American people in the city experience gentrification as a sonic, racialized process. Her work has been supported by the Ford Foundation, the Smithsonian Institution, the Society for American Music, and the American Musicological Society. Martin is the director of the Black Sound Lab at Dartmouth College, a research environment dedicated to amplifying Black life and decriminalizing Black sound through digital practice.

**Jacek Smolicki** is an artist, designer, researcher and educator. His work brings temporal, existential and critical dimensions to listening, recording and archiving practices and technologies in diverse contexts. Besides working with historical archives and documents, Smolicki develops other modes of sensing, recording, and mediating stories and signals from specific sites, scales, and temporalities. His work is manifested through soundwalks, soundscape compositions, diverse forms of writing, site-responsive performances, experimental para-archives, and audio-visual installations. He has performed, published, and exhibited internationally (e.g., In-Sonora Madrid, Moscow International

Biennale for Young Art, AudioArt Kraków, Ars Electronica, Linz, and Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo) and between 2020-2023 pursues an international postdoc within artistic research funded by the Swedish Research Council. Located at Linköping University in Sweden, Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada, and Harvard, USA (Fulbright Visiting Scholarship), his research explores the history and prospects of field recording and soundwalking practices from the perspective of arts, environmental humanities, and philosophy of technology. He is also an associate scholar at the Informatics and Media Hub for Digital Existence at Uppsala University where he explores sonic capture cultures and the impact of AI technologies on human and other-than-human voices. He is a co-founder of Walking Festival of Sound, a transdisciplinary and nomadic event exploring the critical and reflective role of walking through and listening to our everyday surroundings. More on [www.smolicki.com](http://www.smolicki.com)

**Christabel Stirling** is a musicologist specialising in ethnographic approaches to music and sound art in contemporary urban environments. She is currently a postdoctoral researcher on the ERC-funded project 'Sonorous Cities: Towards a Sonic Urbanism' at Oxford University, having completed her DPhil there in 2019 with a thesis entitled *Orbital Transmissions: Affect and Musical Public-Making in London*. Prior to this, she obtained an MA in Popular Music and Culture from Oxford Brookes University and a BMus from King's College London, where she received the Purcell Prize for Music. Christabel's research draws from music, anthropology, cultural studies, and history, and it has links to ethnomusicology, popular music studies, and sound studies. Her DPhil research focused on the reception of classical, popular music and sound art in the UK, using a range of qualitative methods to explore the embodied experiences and social matrices that music and sound produce in their live performances. Her work has been published in the *Journal of Sonic Studies*, *Contemporary Music Review*, and several edited book collections.

**Tom Western** is a Lecturer in Social and Cultural Geography at UCL. His teaching and research centre on movements and migrations, cities and citizenships, relations and imaginations, activisms and anticolonialisms – usually working with methods that foreground sound and voice. He works primarily in Athens, Greece, where he is a member of the Syrian and Greek Youth Forum, who together run the [Active Citizens Sound Archive](#) – a space for amplifying citizenship work, youth activism, community mobilising, and collective research and knowledge production. Tom is writing his first book, titled *Circular Movements: Migratory Activisms and Creative Citizenships in Athens*.

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