

Recording of the week: Toscanini conducts Elgar

This week's selection comes from Kevin Lemonnier, Preservation Audio Engineer.

This is the only known recording in existence of Arturo Toscanini (1867-1957) conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra performing Elgar's Introduction and Allegro Op. 47. The performance took place during the 1937 London Music Festival and was privately recorded off broadcast, onto a lacquer disc, by audio engineer [Kenneth H. Leech](#) (1892-1995).

[Toscanini conducting Elgar's Introduction and Allegro Op. 47](#)



Portrait of the composer Arturo Toscanini c.1926 (J. Paul Getty Museum)

The audio quality is rather poor due to wear and shrinkage of the cellulose nitrate but it still reveals a driving performance from the Italian master.

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Leafscape: an exhibition

Botanical artist [Jess Shepherd](#) has spent the past few years immersed in the world of leaves, both from a visual and sonic point of view. In this special guest post, Jess writes about how field recording became an intrinsic part of her creative process.

As a botanical painter, I specialise in painting very large watercolours of plants and am always working to surprise the viewer. Between 16th and 25th February, I will be holding my first solo exhibition of over 30 new watercolour paintings in Bloomsbury, London. For this exhibition, I explore my vision of a botanical dystopia, challenging our own sense of scale, its value and how we measure it.



The story began when I picked up a leaf from a London pavement in July 2014. At the time I was moving house and felt that the condition of the leaf told my own story. It had been scuffed by the streets of the city and was no longer attached to the tree, but blowing across the floor in the wind. Like me, it was on the move.

After carefully painting this leaf larger than life size I was drawn to paint another and another. Eventually, after months of painting these leaf portraits, all from different moments in time and place, I have created a visual story. Some of these leaves measure over a meter in length.



Leaf

041120151210, *Cercis siliquastrum*, Watercolour on paper, 760 x 560mm

For the past two years I have also collected the environmental sounds from where each leaf was growing using an Olympus LS-14 recorder. These sounds document a journey from the East End of London, through the avenues of Hyde Park and streets of Chelsea into the deep rural countryside of Granada in Spain where I now have a second studio. I started collecting these sounds because I became interested in documenting the elements of our existence that I could not capture with paint. I also began to wonder how leaves would interpret their spaces if trees could hear. By recording the sounds from the precise locations of my source material, I feel I have been able to add a new dimension to botanical art; that I am able to communicate the importance of plants and our environment more poignantly. It is my way of catapulting botanical art into the 21st Century whilst also looking at topics close to my heart such as what is reality and what it means to exist.

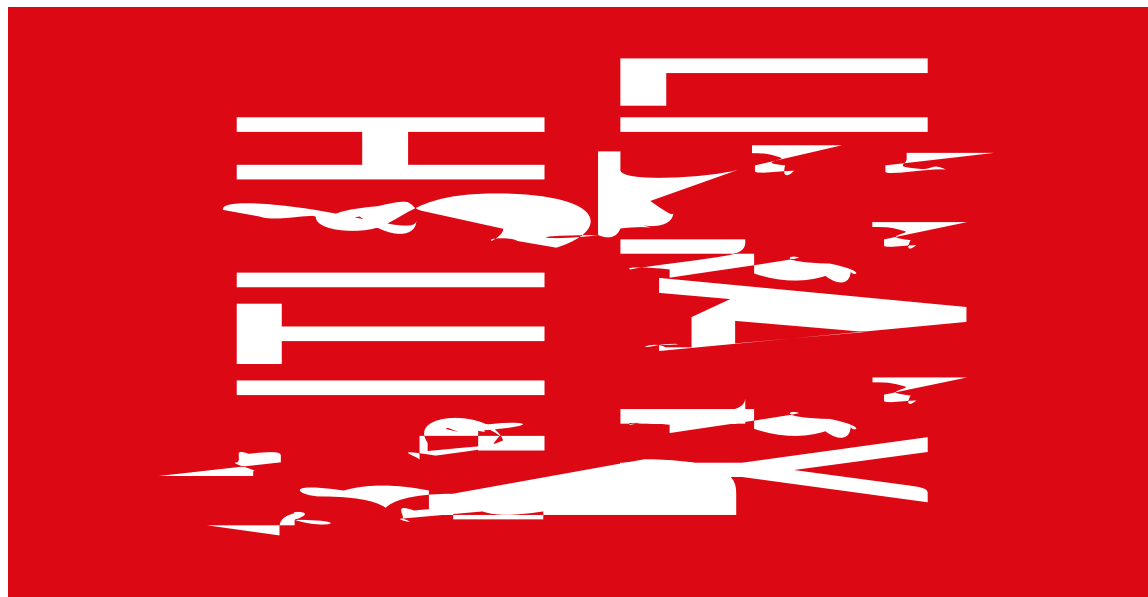
[Spain_birds and rain](#)

[Spain_goat bells](#)

All of these environmental sounds have been skilfully arranged by musician Derek Thompson (Hoodlum Priest) who, through a process of both precise and random digital manipulation, has created a composition where place, time and space become intertwined. This multimedia journey is our vision of a botanical dystopia; the natural world in a state of decay through interaction with the encroaching urban environment.

[Leafscape extract](#)

The idea of recording sound introduces a completely new element to botanical art and I hope that this interpretation of both the natural and human worlds will encourage listeners to be as aware of the diversity and beauty of sound in the city as much as that of the countryside.



[Leafscape](#) will be on show at Abbott and Holder from 16th-25th February 2017.

A copy of the accompanying book & soundtrack has been donated by the artist to the British Library and will soon be available in our Reading Rooms.

Audio clips and images courtesy of Jess Shepherd.

[Recording of the week: Linton Kwesi Johnson on dub poet Michael Smith](#)

This week's selection comes from Stephen Cleary, Lead Curator of Literary & Creative Recordings.

In this recording, poet and reggae artist Linton Kwesi Johnson gives a lecture on the late Jamaican performance poet Mikey Smith (1954-1983), author of 'Me Cyaan Believe It'. The talk is based on his personal knowledge of the poet and the obscure circumstances of his death.

[Remembering Michael Smith_Linton Kwesi Johnson](#)



The recording was made live in Cambridge in 2012, at the conference '[The Power of Caribbean Poetry: Word & Sound](#)'. [Linton Kwesi Johnson's oral history interview](#), made for the British Library project 'Authors' Lives' 2014-2015, is available to listen to at the Library by [appointment](#).

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