

Recording of the week: Sparkie Williams the talking budgerigar

This week's selection comes from Cheryl Tipp, Curator of Wildlife and Environmental Sounds.

Sparkie Williams was a prize-winning talking budgerigar, renowned for his impressive vocabulary of over 500 words, sayings and rhymes. In 1958 he was crowned top bird in the BBC's International Cage Word Contest which turned him into an overnight star. His success led him to be the face (or should that be beak?) of an ad campaign for leading bird seed producer Capern and so impressed Parlophone that they offered him a record deal.

His owner, Mrs Mattie Williams, employed an almost military approach to Sparkie's oral development, dedicating several hours a day to teaching her beloved budgie to speak. Her Geordie accent can clearly be heard in Sparkie's delivery of the rhyme at the end of this [recording](#).

[Excerpts from Philip Marsden introduces Sparkie Williams_Parlophone 1958](#)



Sparkie Williams

(courtesy of the Great North Museum: Hancock)

After his death in 1962, Sparkie was stuffed and donated to the [Great North Museum: Hancock](#) in Newcastle where he is currently on display.

Follow [@CherylTipp](#) and [@soundarchive](#) for all the latest news.

Recording of the week: Pierre Bourdieu and Terry Eagleton

This week's selection comes from Dr Eva del Rey, Curator of Drama and Literature Recordings and Digital Performance.

In this recording, made in 1991 at the [Institute of Contemporary Arts](#) in London, British literary theorist Terry Eagleton discusses the intricacies of the concept of ideology with French sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002).

Bourdieu explains his concept of symbolic violence, by which he means the systems of meaning that legitimize and thus solidify structures of inequality, often in a way that is undetectable and invisible to its very victims.

[Pierre Bourdieu and Terry Eagleton in conversation](#)



Fight with Cudgels (c.1820-1823), Francisco de Goya. Wikimedia Commons.

This recording is an accessible introduction to one of the most influential social thinkers of the last three decades of the twentieth century, and also one of the very few available online featuring Pierre Bourdieu explaining his work in the English language.

Over 800 recordings of talks and discussions held at the ICA between 1982-1993 can be explored on [British Library Sounds](#).

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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.



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.

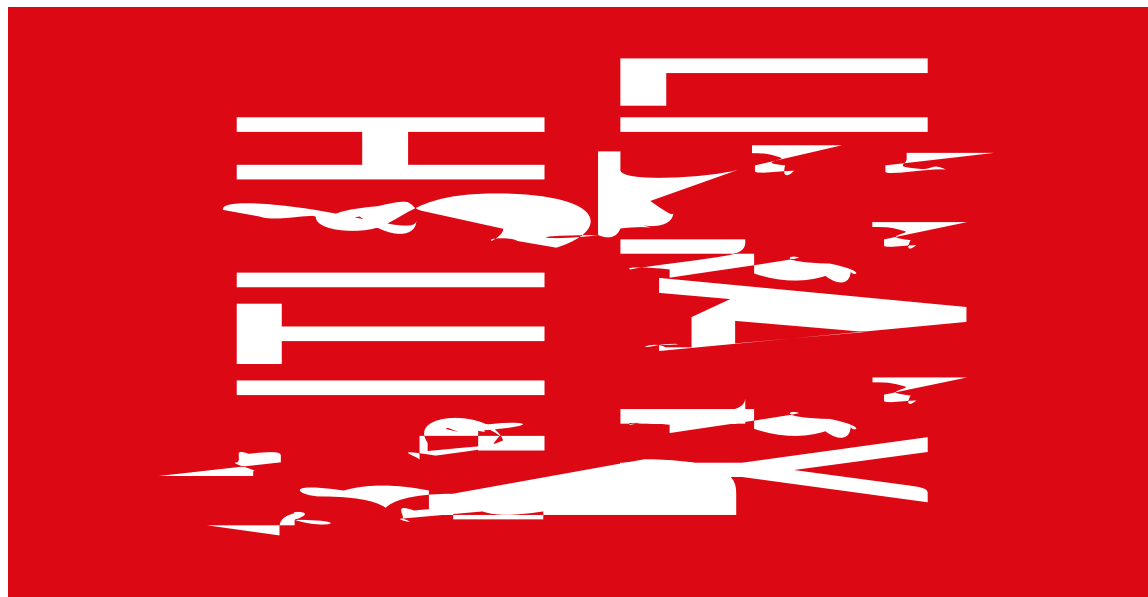
[Spain_birds and rain](#)

[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: John Blackwood McEwen](#)

This week's selection comes from Jonathan Summers, Curator of Classical Music Recordings.

Scottish composer Sir John Blackwood McEwen (1868-1948) had a distinguished career producing a large amount of music, little of which is heard today. He was Principal of the Royal Academy of Music from 1924-1936 and was knighted in 1931. His String Quartet No. 6, 'Biscay', written in 1913 (and confusingly published as No. 8), consists of three movements. The second and third were recorded in 1916 by the London String Quartet and a live recording from 1951 of the complete work exists from the Library of Congress. Here is the delightful third movement, [La racleuse](#) (The Oyster-Raker) from 1916.

[String Quartet No. 6 \(Biscay\)_La racleuse](#)



Portrait of Sir John Blackwood McEwan by Reginald Grenville Eves (Royal College of Music, CC BY-SA 4.0) via Wikimedia Commons

Visit [Chamber Music](#) on British Library Sounds to listen to more performances by the London String Quartet.

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[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](#).

Follow [@BL_DramaSound](#) and [@soundarchive](#) for all the latest news.