

# 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.

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## 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](#).*

*Follow [@BL\\_DramaSound](#) and [@soundarchive](#) for all the latest news.*

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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 16<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> 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.

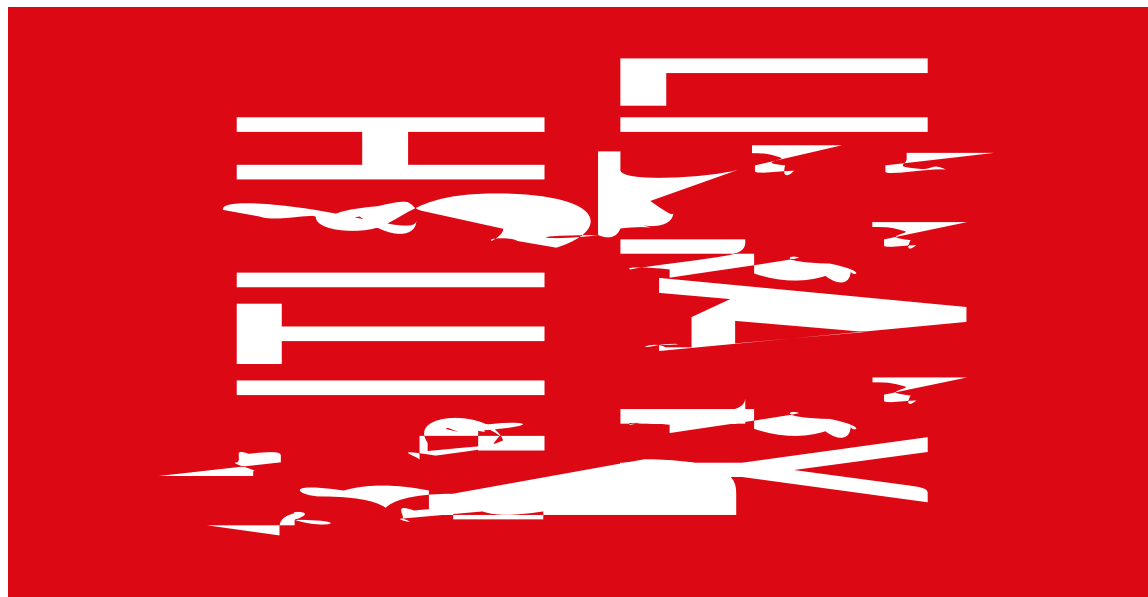
[Spain\\_birds and rain](#)

[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.



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[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.

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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.

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## [PhD Placement Opportunity: Developing Access to the Evolving English VoiceBank](#)

The *Evolving English VoiceBank* is an audio archive of approximately 15,000 voices created by visitors to the Library's *Evolving English* exhibition in 2010/11. This collection is only partly catalogued and a new placement opportunity at the British Library offers a PhD student the chance to work on this unique and so-far unexplored archive.

During the three-month placement (or part-time equivalent) the student will audit [VoiceBank](#) and [WordBank](#) audio files and prepare cataloguing metadata for about 500 to 750 files for the Sound and Moving Image catalogue. The student will receive training in audio editing software and in preparing cataloguing records, and will also be able to use the collection for original research or potentially to support their own doctoral project. The content will be particularly relevant for students of dialectology, sociolinguistics, phonetics or language variation and change.

The placement student will be a full member of the Spoken English team, which sits within the British Library's Sound & Vision team, and participate in the department's core activities. This may involve taking part in workshops or conferences, writing blog posts, and preparing content for online resources. The placement will support the development of transferrable skills in areas such as public engagement, team-working, and project planning and delivery. It will be an opportunity to engage in the work of a world-class research Library and to understand its content, structure and remit.

The placement would suit someone studying for a PhD in linguistics or English

Language. They would be expected to have a thorough grounding in dialectology, sociolinguistics and/or phonetics. Familiarity with British accents would also be desirable. View a detailed [placement profile](#).

### **Application guidelines**

For full application guidelines and profiles of the other placements offered under this scheme, visit the Library's [Research Collaboration webpages](#).

The application deadline is **20 February 2017**.

For any queries about this placement opportunity, please contact [Research.Development@bl.uk](mailto:Research.Development@bl.uk)

### **A note to interested applicants**

This is an unpaid professional development opportunity, which is open to current (or very recent) PhD researchers only. To apply, you need to have the approval of your PhD supervisor and your department's Graduate Tutor (or equivalent senior academic manager).

Our PhD placement scheme has been developed in consultation with Higher Education partners and stakeholders to provide opportunities for PhD students to develop and apply their research skills outside the university sector. Please note that the Library itself is not able to provide payment to placement students, nor can it provide costs for daily commuting or relocation to the site of the placement. Anyone applying for a placement at the Library is expected to consult their university or Doctoral Training Partnership/Doctoral Training Centre to ascertain what funding is available to support them. The Library strongly recommends to universities that a PhD student given approval to undertake a placement is in receipt of a stipend for the duration of the placement.