

## **One Sixteen Thirty-Eight**

*[CD playing time: 54:35 – 5,435 words]*

*[Total lengths of the nine tracks as if they read “hundreds,” not “minutes and seconds”: 5,241  
– 39 shortwave bleeps short of a mile in someone else’s cobbled shoes]*

*[‘39 – when folks could first hear the ye olde records – that exasperating gap twixt  
performing/recording and publishing/listening – that difference]*

*[194 – static-combed difference between 5,435 and 5,241 words]*

*[194 – essayourian residuoatum – January slush – total word-count of this essay’s title, its  
italicized parentheticals, its bold-faced headers deployed as track names slash section  
breaks – the peripheral speaker-leaked words I urge you not to count in the structural  
correspondence twixt CD and text, the ridiculously rigorous architectonics]*

*[Our great theme: Function Follows Form. That’s the modern predicament. Choices  
constrain.]*

### **Track One – “Radio Tangier Internationale” – 3:43 – 343 words**

Efflorescence.

Welling up from nowhere: from the lived human past.

*Etched.*

That's the word. Etched onto wax. Golden plates.

*Echt.* Dumpling gemütlichkeit Viennese for *authentic* or *indigenous* – or *extinct* – in my radio fuzz-brained swinging weltanschauung.

What would you give—

—To hear the Benny Goodman Orchestra scandalize stuffy electrically abuzz Carnegie Hall – crass collective breath – awright you crazy Krupa kats, let's *break* this January ice!

—To hear cello and horn trepidatiously... portentously... raptly intone those first few pulsing bars of Mahler's Ninth, the Vienna Philharmonic throbbing to nervy life under the "irresistible" baton of Bruno Walter, the work's dedicatee, sound-saturating their beloved Musikverein – now Nazi-stalked – "as if their corporate life [were] at stake" which, for some, it literally was in this, the work's first recording and the final concert those same "some" would ever perform in their homeland

—To hear those piercing chimes from nowhere, welling up shrill and warm, the contradiction itself, could be a bicycle boy's low-fi ear-worm, could be a hot-mic field recording down some cool-shadowed alley older than the New World, or maybe a pop LP

which assaulted Tangier in 1938 or 1983 cut off in mid-panic – arresting every time – just those very first few seconds – no “bar lines” anywhere, Paradise be praised – make sure your volume’s set to the ideal – ideal tingling *spaciousness* set forth at once – immediate laying bare of the acoustic field to unknown splendors to come

What it must have cost them to create.

Jews, weren’t they. Some of them. Many of them.

On all three recordings. Even though we’ll never truly know. *Es muss sein.*

For those listeners who’ve always known the greatest thrills of any concert are either

a.) the musicians’ tuning up

or

b.) those final flowing moments: the ecstatic fluidities, the hush in the hall...

...etched onto grooves.

The labels! Fitting words—

Benny Goodman, The Carnegie Hall Concert – *Columbia!*

Gustav Mahler, Symphony No. 9 – *His Master’s Voice!*

Radio Morocco – must I reckon the terms? – they’ve got Google, we’ve got Babel – “an encyclopedia without an index,” “an atlas without a key” – *Sublime Frequencies*

**Track Two – “Quarternote Winds” – 5:20 – 520 words**

*Radio Morocco* was the first. *Radio India*, permanent denizen of my desert-isle six-pack, is the most rollicking serene open-hearted panorama I know; *Radio Java* the most exotic and ethereal, the one with which I’d urge your cousins or even my own constellated daughter to elope; *Radio Thailand* the most fun: opaque Mekong broth roiling unending. But *Radio Morocco* he fabricated first.

Just Alan Bishop, “sun city girl” from Seattle, Lebanon, running a label named Sublime Frequencies. “All he did” was visit some far-flung locales, tune the local dial, and press *record*. Returned with rucksacks: dross, static, wax, riches.

Now: edit.

Anthony Braxton: “What you hear and how you organize and unify, in terms of how you hear, is very important to who you are.”

How to map Alan's ear?

Or is it the ossicles of Place, the macro-cochlea of People—

Doug Harvey: “Bishop’s soundscapes veer wildly and abruptly in tone and content, mixing gorgeous shards of traditional and pop forms of local music with advertising babble, English language news broadcasts, strange eruptions of western classical and easy listening music, street ambience, and a rainbow of shortwave radio noise.”

What’s authentic... plastic... hybrid? How live... studio... ancient... contemporary? Where indigenous classical... folk... pop?

Martians will never truly *want* to know because each boundary-slurring collage, totally contingent upon Mr. Bishop’s *in situ* tuning and *ex post facto* editing, comes – eventually, inexorably – to acquire more unfurling inevitability than any other recording on Earth.

First year, college. Prof. Damon’s seminar collage, ANTH 334, “Culture, Space, and Nature.” Just the name alone! First ear-tuning to *in situ* and *ex post facto*, *swidden* and *structuralism*, *synchronic* and *exchange value*. Perused the list of books we could review, one jumped out: *The Pivot of the Four Quarters*. Just the label alone. Arbitrary methods? Yet true.

Want to become a beloved critic? Never fail to pay nostalgic homage to “those golden spots on the dial” where three different broadcast signals struggled to assert their supremacy as you Jeeped across the open-aired Western Sahara. Dust-storm orchestras tuning up. Pinpoint unrepeatable sweet spots.

Venn:

First region: Compilations of ye olde 78s. *Longing for the Past*. *Opika Pende*. *The Hugo Masters*. *Anthology of American Folk Music*.

Second: Field recordings. Lomaxes. Hugh Tracey. Pygmies. *Music in the World of Islam*.

Third: Radio art. Topic’s conscientious *Radio Ballads*. Winter & Winter’s stylish reconstructions. Negativland. *Telemusik*.

Alone, each region is just too sober, too pure.

Ah, but that stereophonic-slushed sweet spot where all three Venny *overlap*...

Harvey again—

—his voice the DJ on *Radio Morocco* who returns periodically to reassure, to punctuate—

—“a unique conflation of ethnomusical documentation and subjective creative editing. Acting as much as snapshot maps of the ever-shifting sonic geography of radiospace as diaristic records of Bishop’s singular interaction with a series of complex musical, sound and information environments, the Sublime Frequencies’ radio collage series offers the listener a new experiential definition of ‘authenticity’ that, while the polar opposite of the pristine accuracy of academic recordings, offers as many moments of musical pleasure and infinitely more surprises”—

—a supremely *echt*-inauthentic quarter upon which an entire resounding Authentic is made to pivot.

### **Track Three – “Radio Chechaouen” – 7:29 – 729 words**

One, two-three,, ,onetwothreefour—

—opening ppfflatt beat-blasts of this track. As cliff-edged anticipatory as those of “Folk Forms No. 1,” the piano-less theme-less blues – flourless chocolate cake – Mingus cut for Candid with the Ericle of Dolphi in 1960. Crashes, cascades, mono-vox and gourd-calabashes so regular and insistent that letting it chug for its full 3:15 might be the only time on this entire rarefied record that Bishop’s ear errs. Some insistent facts you’d be tempted to skip. Duke Ellington himself,

“you’d be delighted to know” – producer Schaap’s liners – attended BG’s Carnegie Hall extravaganza. As a teen soon to flee Austria, Hans Fantel attended the concert where the VPO’s “original recording was cut into soft, palpable wax.” The National Aeronautics and Space Administration equipped the *Voyager* probe with the *Golden Record*. Guy Davenport: “a page of *Finnegans Wake* is the voice of the century, the polyglot murmur from Buchenwald, the Babel in the corridors of the UN, the Russian short-wave voice jamming a Hungarian poem.” At one point the famous “Goodman stare” shuts down some misguided audience clapping-along. Applause, crackles, glitches, distortions – who could love these records without them? Imagine NASA’s immaculately misconceived apologetics: “Terra’s peoples nourish many musics. We here present a representative gamut, from the most primitive folk forms to the most complex structures conceived by hominid minds.” Hence the architectonics: JSB to kick off, LvB to close. Of course, rite? I usually skip the Ninth’s frenetic Ländler and Rondo-Burleske. Surely Sagan himself hummed along to the “Sing, Sing, Sing” immortalized here. The most heartening heartbreaking category in that toilet-top tome, *1,000 Buildings to See Before You Die*, is labelled “Vernacular.” The Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini, Davenport explains, “is a shell of neoclassical marble encasing a Gothic church. Like *The Cantos* it is unfinished, is a monument to the skill and sensitivity of its creator, and yet is a realized, useful part of the world: one can go to mass in the Tempio, one can read *The Cantos*.” The only female performer on either record: jazz chanteuse Martha Tilton singing “Bei Mir Bist du Schoen,” written for the Second Avenue Yiddish Theater by Sholom Secunda. Hans Fantel’s father, with whom, at that concert, Hans had “shared 71 minutes out of the 16 years we had together,” soon “disappeared into Hitler’s abyss.” Can’t skip this track because of its west-dawning second half: Judaism, Christianity, Islam...



Finally gallops to its end. Bishop tunes us. Appealing chatter, tune-y clatter—

next—

embedded—

the “humming song,” my son calls it; he’s seven; he dearly hopes you’ll eventually hear it—

the world that created its (slightly) cheesy (breathtakingly) plangent strains cannot have  
imagined torture—

it buds – greatest pop song ever waxed – blossoms—

Biba Kopf in the most evocative paragraph ever penned about AMM: “And then a lost radio voice is fed through [Keith] Rowe's pickup, temporarily anchoring the night in space and time. Rowe's ether-trawling catapults you back to the excitement of the dawn of broadcasting. Way back then, a listener was asked if he could hear the singing of Caruso. No, he replied, but ‘I could occasionally catch the ecstasy.’ Just picture that early, primitive listening pleasure, when

radio hams strained to pick up music over transatlantic wires, unsure whether they were tuning into heavenly static or the voices of angels, and you begin to get close to the pleasure of AMM.”

So now a new strand has entered our texture, some autumnal hue heretofore unheard, and the total effect is that all these laminal layers are oscillating in a hallucinatory coherence, a kind of slow-motion hysterical depth, such that one thing we can say for sure is that all around us the sunset has come alive in visual-sonic Frequencies which Allah himself must have locked away long ago and which are now finally splitting open in a heavenly high-ball just for you, *ahh-ll daa-aaayyy*, see-er at the center of the Sahara, this long-appointed riot of unalloyed wallowing pleasure, this lilting wavering anthem flushing itself down an oscillating drain of Casios and AM flutes and faux-mountain winds, this massive fluming world-swallow that’s just been *unlocked* and now all is revolving, teetering, preening, sweetening eternity itself, these nameless numberless musicians as dancers as messiahs as egoless vessels of the Sublime. O please make it last forever this time.

He always cuts it off, though. Canny uncanny Mr. Bishop. Just before too stupefied luxurious curious—BLAMM

#### **Track Four – “Chante Du Tamri” – 5:52 – 552 words**

Now for absurd turns.

I'd wanted to chunk some aleatory flecks in here. Daily Trump headlines, Cappello-almanck'd moods... I'd give them their head so that my own words would date. I'd let them dapple some lived moments from 2017, just as this track's British football announcer scrapples a few indelible seconds from 1983.

Just didn't expect *this*—

—...googling late nite...—

—Wesleyan U. Press, 2016... Michael E. Veal and Tammy Kim, editors... *Punk Ethnography: Artists and Scholars Listen to Sublime Frequencies*.

Waaaat. Only one thing can ever side-eye recorded sound's ineffable experiential magic: the Gaze of Academia. Methodological frames, critical detachment, scrupulous strictures which by definition/design can never exude what *Dusted* mag dubs "simple, even naïve, but always overpowering exuberance."

So skip ahead, comfortably ignorant—

—but ARGH, no, I'm *compelled* to enter the commodity web with a used-book dealer. What's now flying my way? Google divulges such chapter titles as "Collage, Creativity, and Copyright:

Sublime Frequencies and the Ethics of Intellectual Property” and “Engineering Social Space: The ‘Silent Structures’ of Alan Bishop’s *Radio Palestine*” and “*Radio India*: Eternal Dream or Ephemeral Illusion?” Presumably nuanced re-centered aware-echoes of folk refrains:

“musical tourism,” sniffs Mudd on the *ihatemusic* forum

“just record a bunch of stuff off the radio in various exotic locations and then burn it onto CDs to sell to pseudo-bohemians in New York,” scoffs someone at [charliegillett.com](http://charliegillett.com)

“*Radio Algeria* is dilettantism and, to paraphrase the anthropologist Edmund Leach, musical butterfly collecting,” scolds Roland Kapferer on [frieze.com](http://frieze.com).

Prof. Damon’s midden/office in Brooks Hall... I swear it harbored a hand-signed letter from Leach!

Isn’t *all* listening “tourism”? Is it still kosher to honeymoon in the impoverished colorful Caribbean? Neo-colonialism – what counts? *Here’s* some nonfiction for ya: a blog post dated December 1, 2016, from one Dr. Fredrik deBoer: a title that’s true: “No One Has the Slightest Idea What Is and Isn’t Cultural Appropriation.” Warbling, querulous – and now irretrievably lost to the aether.

Some folks refuse to listen to Wagner because of the composer’s antisemitism. Huh. Did you hear that Miles Davis could be... *prickly*? Didja realize that a trucker who delivered Columbia’s CDs to retailers was a teen-aged bully? Couldn’t tell you which one, though...

Is it kosher to prefer *all* the dark-hued tracks which feature “authentic” jazzmen – Wilson, Hampton, Ellington and Basie sidemen – to *any* which do not?

Kosher musicians? BG, consummate pro. Kindhearted Bruno Walter. Mahler, stammering-hearted Superjew.

And Nat Hentoff – “this bow-shaped man... face like an Old Testament prophet” – of the *Village Voice*.

Civic exemplar...

civil rights lion...

and...

once upon a time...

impresario of a record label called Candid.

*Village Voice*: “Obsessive, if attention deficient, Alan Bishop's radio collages define a scratchy, off-the-cuff sort of shortwave pop where taste doubles as style.”

“Karajan’s features that exquisite sheen, yes, and Bernstein strains toward higher planes, sure, but do not overlook the warmly sculpted Abbado, or the humane ghosts of Mitropoulos, or even the redoubtably analytic Maderna...”

Modest (still intact!) life goal: to expire having never heard *any other recording* of Mahler’s Ninth. The 1938 Walter/VPO *is* Mahler.

So I’ll read those chapters – and do my damndest not to let their rectitudinal admonitions chime too closely with those renewing nostalgic factasies called “listening.”

I just didn’t expect *this*—

—January 7, 2017: Mr. Hentoff himself expired.

Our raveling world spins, turns more absurd.

### **Track Five – “Radio Fes” – 6:31 – 631 words**

Good Jewish boys who grew up to be musical geographers. Still orbiting our orb.

Lift, if you are able, historian Hillel Schwartz's spectrum monument, *Making Noise: From Babel to the Big Bang and Beyond* (Zone Books, 2011), a mighty tome – Old Testament authority – through whose fugitive footnotes ether crackles – New World swing – a one-man('s) encyclopedia which stands in that unhierarchized field of Sound roughly as Vollmann's *Imperial* stands in its asparagus field of Region, a book meant, sonores its author, "to be read aloud." Tune to any random page—

Map, if your umbilicus be stable, the encyclopedic liners of peripatetic improviser/composer/violinist Malcolm Goldstein's *A Sounding of Sources* (New World, 2008). May their wax-cylinder-thru-cable collages warble and thump into your resonant bosom simultaneous "layers of time embedded in noise. The fleeting gesture of song (the human voice of Ishi in 1914); the resonance of a culture, our living, extended as a memory into future time"—

Fuzz that bunny-eared antenna, stipple finger-warmth 'round those plastic speaker curves harboring Al Kaline's lithium, you can almost embody it into existence, a private pinpoint Theremin weaving a wave-stream whose ephemeral intimacies cannot be predicted transcribed repeated. Paeans to Radio itself, improvised crystal sets, hearts aflutter, "the whisper the leaps the hemisphere... the wisdom of the ages revived in a single breath"—

—isn't all this stuff so joyously *irrelevant* in the face of actual soundings!!

(But some arc's building here. Isn't there? As early as the prior track...? Bishop's editing is a matter of subtle architectonics, of felt/remembered order. Here the collaged sense is somehow sculpting in step toward a momentous public occasion, some concert lying in ritualistic wait whose definitive spatial moment, which we'll know when we hear, must justify all this spent momentum...)

Not yet.

It can tantalize. The eternal search. Undreamt treasures embedded in the dreck of the done.

Google "I love stage noise" – naturally! – because – of course! – you live in a world where bumper stickers trumpet "I love jet noise." Prepare to be deflated by the apparent lack of any constituency, by dead air.

I *do* love stage noise. I almost – almost – cannot tolerate any studio recording of any opera. I nearly – nearly – cannot abide any Wagner not recorded live at Bayreuth.

So commodity fetishes? Holy relics.



The Abendroth *Meistersinger*, Bayreuth, 1943, everyone pouring themselves into the life-affirming drama as everything around them burned.

Cecil Taylor kineticking across Copenhagen's Café Montmartre in 1962, a saturated heat-steep of a deepening during which the phrase "sweaty socks" assumes its most vital inspired guise.

Mengelberg and his venerable Dutch cohorts breathing incremental and wildly idiosyncratic – read: *loving* – life into the *St. Matthew Passion* in 1939.

Trane and Dolphy's peals peeling paint off the walls at the Vanguard.

Perhaps the summa of this sort of talisman: *Billy Budd*'s premiere in 1951, conducted by Britten himself. Good luck separating content from form – full-fathom grooves flowing against themselves – background screeds, sonar pings, radio-channel (?) interference – the tapes, warped, water-logged, having welled up from the wreckage of the *Titanic*, also picked up ghostly echoes of the salvage ops. Great thing about these noises: you can't ignore them. They're not "incidental." They're endemic – structural – the ideal acoustic medium for some of the most atmospheric "water music" ever composed. Chorales, muffled and cavernous, waver & quaver with nothing less than their own species of maritime authenticity, present on no other recording.

"Hold on! You can't just... *impute* all these after-the-fact 'meanings'—"

Actually, you can.

In fact, we must.

Paul Dolden: “Recordings always ‘freeze’ or crystallise musical and spectral meaning for the listener. An odd sound combination that you have grown fond of in the old master may not appear in the same way in the new one...”

I simply consume. Give me that never-change, entire. *Ex post facto* marvels. Mosaic of mind.

**Track Six – “The Medina of Sound” – 9:24 – 924 words**

We might understand. Historically significant things might be unfolding here in real time not only because of this track’s impelling impetus, but also because of its

a.) length

and

b.) cheeky ambitious tympani-tickling title. “Evaporating Borders.” “The Fading of Fidelity.” “Folk DJs Armed with Technology.” “The Islamic Experience in Frequency Modulation.” “Oddities in Humidity.” “Tropic Audio Ephemera.” “Morning Exercise in the Coded Ether.”

“Trolling the Crossroads of Bliss.” “Torrential Nostalgia.” “The Shiny Radio in a Blind Man’s Wallet.” “Silent or Noisy World?” Enter the flea market of imaginears.

Phil Schaap, Jew, cousin of sportswriting Dick Schaap, is locally (read *personally*) infamous for his broadcasting the same Mingusiana on WKCR every single April 22 (the Taurus’s birthday). (“New’ *Tijuana Moods*. Bill Triglia. Rhymes with ‘thrill ya’.” Hey! Where’s the epochal European ’64 tour with Dolphy??) But the very first sentence in his liner essay tells ya like it is: “This expanded edition of Benny Goodman’s famous 1938 Carnegie Hall concert contains the entire concert – the most historically significant one in jazz history – in real time.” We’re alive for this.

Ms. Bowen, seventh and eighth grade English and Latin, Land O’ Pines Elementary School, was the best teacher I ever had. A lapsed nun, she held us to standards of rigor and breadth perfectly calibrated to our coming into sentience. She explained to us mere kids the etymology of *pyrrhic* and *philippic*. Larry, a new kid in class, was a little pudgy, a lahttle awkward, glasses, Jewish. He positively thrived within Ms. Bowen’s meritocracy. He and I used to gape guiltily at Tom Clancy’s characters’ using the phrase “black-assed Muslim.” I was jealous both of his worldly knowledge – he knew the names and ideological orientations of countless Congressmen – and of his skills on the licorice stick, which we both played. This is the late 80s, when Bishop was compiling *Radio Java*. No question who Larry’s idol was: a fellow “Benny,” a good man.

BOOM – it hits, 3:23, it hits *us* by slow-mo exploding.

Portentous orchestral unspooling...

Echo-y vox...

It's tempting, Eden-style, to call this long-awaited moment by many names.

Throbbing.

Fathomless.

Acoustic sweaters donned by my mother's Christmas carols whose LP static bathed our childhood living room in golden fruitcake rays, permanently rendering all Decembers sacred.

Thermonuclear.

The "still point of the turning of the world."

The "O"s beginning and ending *OULIPO*.

Who's the voice? The dominant transcendent diva – who is it?

I have to say Umm Kulthumm. It's *gotta* be her.

We're alive for this. Youtube exists. It can tantalize.

The passage sounds like a “transitional climax” of a (presumably) hour-long piece, a flowing floe whose every diverse element – martial percussion thuds, male chants welling up, the diva's melisma, echoes of the broadcast slash concert slash ritual slash slick LP slash who knows – by design or chance, *coalesces*. The kind of transcendent unplannable you listen to hour-long pieces *for* – and constantly replay.

Only... lapsed Bishop saved me – yes, just me – that work!

And then, as the moment drifts into sleep, we immediately get *another* orchestrated Kulthumm – please confirm it's her, please don't – only this time, just *before* the chorus can really take off – BLAMM. It's as if Bishop conveys just her essence – not philosophical or spiritual – but our *listening-to-her* essence, and nothing more (or less).

Back to grinding commercial Terra and Schaap's final sentence: “If my life depended on a clarinetist playing a passage of music, then I would want my champion to be Benny Goodman.”

Oh I dunno, Phil, I'd probably go with John Carter myself, such tender piercings, talk about radiophonic—

—It came! Air mail. Quick: the Wesleyan U.P. chapter on *Radio India*: “Who owns the right to decide what a particular musical performance means?”

Everyone?

Anyone??

Air mail. Planes serve anyone/everyone who can pay. Historians note that for aerospace R & D, that’s been government. Especially “our” military.

Humanitarian Lewis Thomas once wrote an essay I assign to my worldly freshmen every semester. It’s called “Late Night Thoughts While Listening to Mahler’s Ninth Symphony.”

It’s devastating.

At least, I hope so.

Should I?

“I cannot listen to the last movement of the Mahler Ninth without the door-smashing intrusion of a huge new thought: death everywhere, the dying of everything, the end of humanity.”

G-ddamn nukes.

“If I were sixteen or seventeen years old and had to listen to that,” Thomas writes of bloodless bureaucratic cost-benefit analyses of nuclear war, “I would want to give up listening and reading.”

Larry and I were alive for it. Even as we drifted apart in high school, we understood something of past choices constraining us, of our historic moment’s discivilizational significance.

“The sense of looming catastrophe is palpable in more than one respect,” opines David Gutman in *Gramophone*. “This is music-making in which scrappiness and fervour are indissolubly linked, an emblematic last gasp of the old world that Hitler would shortly sweep away.”

The *echt* lilt of an indigenous Mahlerian performing tradition, the piercingly palpable nostalgia that Ives and Janáček tried so valiantly to “notate” – you can *actually hear* it, dug into wax hillocks, welling up, surging forth, cumulative collapse—

*Allmusic* guide: “There will be casual listeners, however, who won't like this release because Schaap has chosen to leave a lot of surface noise, in the interest of preserving the original concert ambience.”

Thomas's final line: “I would begin thinking up new kinds of sounds, different from any music heard before, and I would be twisting and turning to rid myself of human language.”

Ever wonder, these days, what “understanding” must *sound like* to mere kids?

### **Track Seven – “Radio Marrakesh” – 4:59 – 459 words**

First, I'd thought Zukofsky would be chosen to chime our Chords of Yiddish Significance.

Louis Zukofsky, sawhorse poet of Brooklyn. “Fellow artists have treated him as a phenomenon,” Davenport wrote, “a force, a man... to make obeisance to whether you understand his work or not. His appearance in Brakhage's *23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm Branch* is characteristic of such homage. In a sequence about the Nazi concentration camps, Zukofsky's face is introduced as a motif. He was the kind of man who would have suffered Mandelstam's fate in Russia, Max Jacob's in France.”



LZ's mega-poem "A" opens with a Passover performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* – at Carnegie Hall! Perfect!

Only... no. Too early by a decade: 1928, not 1938.

So I turned next to Goldbarth.

Albert Goldbarth, meisterscobbler of worlds. One such, "The History of the Universe Is Important to This Story," chimed nicely indeed. For our fifteenth anniversary, my wife and I splurged. We knew we wanted a river cruise. Which? Then we saw it: "Delightful Danube." Prague, Nuremberg, Vienna, Budapest: Janáček, *Meistersinger*, Mahler, Walter, Bartók. You could not have pushed more buttons on my personal bandoneon. (Reveling in delectable atmospheres of laminal touristic authenticities, I asked the roving fiddler at Gundel, culinary seat of Hungary, to play us "something by Astor Piazzolla, the tango master of Argentina." Eyes flashed. Recognition? Respect? Pity? He launched into something suitably lurching, queasy, piquant. Was it indeed Piazzolla? Never tell me.) Cruising the Wachau, turbid meady Stift Engelszell Gregorius in hand... *Mazel tov*, ye who had writ so poignantly of Rabbi Loew and of the Golem's rising out of Prague's river clay, those folk forms which, *in situ*, only grew!

Only crap. Off by a decade the *other* way. AB joined this world in 1948.

So then Curran, surely?

Alvin Curran, composer, improviser, shofar aficionado. His magnificent *Maritime Rites*: ten “environmental concerts for radio.” In 1984 AC and Melissa Gould traversed the Eastern seaboard interviewing locals and recording “virtually every foghorn, bell buoy, maritime gong and whistle along the way.” Improvisers then played over the tapes, yielding “ravishing montages of speech, music and environmental sound,” equal parts bracing, fun, and heart-fluttering. Dan Warburton in *Paris Transatlantic*: “The ear is utterly outstanding, and examples are numerous, from the marriage of Malcolm Goldstein's [!] skittery harmonic-saturated *From Center of Rainbow* and the honking seals and ducks of Lime Island via the Robinson's Rock whistle buoy accompanying Pauline Oliveros' *Rattlesnake Mountain* to the work's deeply moving conclusion, folklorist Bill Bonyun of Westport Island Maine singing ‘Rolling Home’ along with the foghorns of Upper New York Harbour. ‘When that fog horn blows I will be coming home’ indeed.”

We've got it—Curran was born in 1938—*L'chaim* chime!!

Well, to be exact... December thirteenth.

Okay. But still!

**Track Eight – “The Color of Frequency” – 6:25 – 625 words**

I’m not saying it happened. I’m saying it would’ve been *possible*.

What was his name? The cobbler. From that quarter in Prague.

Was it Alvin? Albert? Started with “A”...

Aaron. Aaron Zubkoff. That old soul, A-Z eccentric, pivoting upon feet of all too human clay. He reveled in resonances, in fuzzes, in listening-lines of cellos and propellers. He’d always needle his nephew, “What color is *their* frequency, see?” Mr. Aaron Zubkoff, Jew. Husband of Hans Fantel’s father’s sister.

Nerves. Tensions roiling Old Europe. But still, he’d made it to Vienna last night.

“Of course, special occasion!”

A Sunday morning concert. Cold. Bitterly cold.

“Of course, look at the calendar!”

January 16, 1938.

Hans noticed moments. He’d noticed his father with Uncle Aaron, how heartily they hugged, their scrappy scarves, their clenched eyes. He’d noticed his uncle in his bow-shaped shoes during the orchestra’s tuning up, chatting choppily, despite his nerves, with... who?

“Mr. Gaisberg! Funny fellow.”

“What’s that... blunderboose he’s working?”

“*Blunderboose?*” his uncle echoed. “You must mean the disc-cutter, yes? That’s for later: for the re-*cordings.*”

Fred Gaisberg. His Master’s Voice impresario. Pioneer sonic engineer. Techno-spiritual kin to Nat Hentoff, Phil Schaap, Alan Bishop... and to Hans Fantel (1922-2006), founding editor of *Stereo Review*.

Then, solemn, intense: Maestro Walter himself. (“Our little giant,” Uncle Aaron proudly intoned.) Then the Mahler! O, from such modest beginnings. Those *flows*. Song of the Earth, songs of children unborn, of loves, of country, an entire aching world of regrets, goodbyes, such tumultuous cumulatives of cumulonimbus sound.

Hans couldn’t have imagined. He could never forget.

When it was over—

“Another treat. A gift. I take you on a flight. In an *aeroplane!*”

*Go, go with your uncle*, urged his father. Something strange, inevitable. Hans told himself that it was okay – scary but okay – if he didn’t quite understand how to read his father’s eyes. Maybe he was fooling himself. Maybe only later. Years. Regrets. He’d keep trying to press *play*, praying it all could flood impossibly back.

Uncle Aaron moved quickly. He’d made all the arrangements. They reached the airfield... well past the Ringstrasse... and there it was. Lufthansa’s prize Focke-Wulf 200 Condor. A steel stallion, steaming in the cold. Silver shining so bright it gleamed mica-green. Not one, but *four* propellers.

To fly! The oldest dream – sung by bards, by Berbers ‘neath desert stars – and here they somehow were, two of twenty-six passengers, anonymous burghers on a transcontinental highball all the way to America.

“Broik-lyn! Field named, ‘Floyd Bennett’.”

But Hans didn’t really hear.

Our planetary plaything? It’s a giant spinning ball. One complete spin: one single day. One enormous loudspeaker, a single rotund radio known as Earth.

Pre-U.N. unreeling...

...onrushing reals...

...nimbuses...

...oceans...

...symphonies...

Above, Hans, silent, awed, soared.

Sunday *night* now—zat’s da ticket. Uncle Aaron’s Brooklyn brother actually had tickets!

“First time Noo York, all the noise, these lights – all my money! – and we must have this what, *jass?*”

“Brother, you will love it! This is Benny Gewd-man! This is our people!”

Carnegie Hall? Heartbeat of this suddenly mosaic planet?

This 30-hour day!

Hans knew they must go.

“You *see?* Your young nephew already understands America!”

“Bah,” retorted the old soul.

But they went.

Those rhythms... their ebony skin... *Mister* BG... and she... she was *beautiful*... singing in  
*German!* Was it all a dream??

You can hear what they heard.

(Never, of course, in the same ways. Not everything is possible.)

But still. *They went.*

The only two people on the planet who attended both concerts—

—that single Earthly rotation—

—1/16/38

And at the end—

One unearthly ovation.

Hans Fantel would never forget

one date



two concerts

this track

his entire world

How it ended. People – adults, kids – everything blooming onrushing shouting musical  
somehow SHOUTING

**Track Nine – “Radio Essaouira” – 4:58 – 458 words**

Peace.

Balm.

Not a bomb. No A-bomb.

The peace is here. Valedictory.

And though Bishop-or-I must include these crucial final clippings, they must not be crammed.

Our DJ – Arabic, French, both. Mr. “DJ” Harvey: “The real-sound information environment of the average 21st century industrialized urban consciousness is fragmentary, discontinuous, and leaky – and it’s only fair that documentary soundscape recordings should be able to represent such subjective sound experiences as emphatically as they do the objectivity of the songcatchers.”

Warburton, reviewing Rev. Dwight Frizzell’s monumental *Building the Earth*, argued that Charles Ives, had he lived today, would have realized his visions using every technology at his disposal – sampling, field recordings, remixing. That lost-yet-real review appeared in *Signal to Noise*.

The singer here, the heavenly plucked strings – farewell, rapt...

...an Isaiah of upwellings.

Harvey’s title: “Transcendental Modulations.” Walter imagined the Adagio as “a peaceful farewell; with the conclusion, the clouds dissolve in the blue of heaven.” Thomas tells how “a short passage near the very end of the Mahler in which the almost vanishing violins, all engaged in a sustained backward glance, are edged aside for a few bars by the cellos. Those lower notes pick up fragments from the first movement, as though prepared to begin everything all over again, and then the cellos subside and disappear, like an exhalation. I used to hear this as a

wonderful few seconds of encouragement: we'll be back, we're still here, keep going, keep going...”

Will the Sublime Frequencies radio collages live forever? Will future NASAs revere them like Bach?

Hans Fantel himself: “My father saw in the new technology something miraculous: a machine to transcend the limits of time and space that had constrained music since its beginning...”

Hans was named after that compassionate cobbler of *Meistersinger*, a Good Man if there ever was one.

“...That's what made me realize something about the nature of phonographs: they admit no ending. They imply perpetuity...”

What terrifies my naïve impossible Gaze-Self the most about nuclear holocaust: starting over. There'd be *no more recordings!*

“...In the perennial rebirth of music through recordings, something of life itself steps over the normal limits of time...”

The alley disappears. We must follow.

“Collage is retrospective in content, modern in its design. Kept up, it will recapitulate and summarize the history of its own being...” ...this is Davenport’s ghost... “...Ives got as far as Isaiah asking *What is Man?* in the Fourth Symphony. History answers in the spiritual articulation of music, and finally a chorus of unidentifiable voices answers, in inarticulate words.”

Hey immortal, just you try listening to this track’s title, to those final fading impossible vowels...

The name of every continent save one begins and ends with an “A.” *Europe* begins and ends with an “E.”

[192... 193... *reverberate*]

## Sources

The nine “track” timings and titles exactly match those of *Radio Morocco* (Sublime Frequencies, 1983). All the Davenport stuff comes from *The Geography of the Imagination* (Godine, 1997). Harvey on the SF collages: [http://dougharvey.la/doug\\_harvey.php?ID=206](http://dougharvey.la/doug_harvey.php?ID=206). The quotes from and about Hans Fantel haunt two *New York Times* articles: his own, “Poignance Measured in Digits” (July 16, 1989); and his obituary, “Hans Fantel, 84, of The Times, Dies; Wrote Widely on Electronics” (May 23, 2004). Thomas’s “Late Night Thoughts on Listening to Mahler’s Ninth Symphony” is the title track of an eponymous album of essays (Penguin, 1983). Reviews of the Walter/VPO Mahler Ninth: *Penguin Guide to Compact Discs and Cassettes* (1992); *Gramophone Good CD Guide* (1999); [www.gramophone.co.uk/review/mahler-symphony-no-9-39](http://www.gramophone.co.uk/review/mahler-symphony-no-9-39) (Gutman). Braxton’s quote comes from Graham Lock’s liners to *Willisau (Quartet) 1991* (Hat ART). The lines, “an encyclopedia without an index,” “an atlas without a key,” highlight Bishop’s own liners to *Radio India*. Kopf’s review of AMM’s *Newfoundland* (Matchless, 1992): [www.cafeoto.co.uk](http://www.cafeoto.co.uk). Alexander Provan profiles SF at [www.dustedmagazine.com/features/228](http://www.dustedmagazine.com/features/228). Blogs which, as yet, still exist and immortalize fragments of Freddie’s post from December 1, 2016: [paulvanderklay.me/2016/12/01/no-one-has-the-slightest-idea-what-is-and-isnt-cultural-appropriation/](http://paulvanderklay.me/2016/12/01/no-one-has-the-slightest-idea-what-is-and-isnt-cultural-appropriation/); [ordinary-gentlemen.com/2016/12/02/freddie-no-one-has-the-slightest-idea-what-is-and-isnt-cultural-appropriation/](http://ordinary-gentlemen.com/2016/12/02/freddie-no-one-has-the-slightest-idea-what-is-and-isnt-cultural-appropriation/). Nat Hentoff’s in-house obituary, “The Voice of the Voice: Nat Hentoff, 1925-2017,” was written by Tom Robbins on January 9, 2017. The *Village Voice* blurbs Bishop in “East Via Shortwave,” Richard Gehr’s article from March 30, 2004. Goldstein’s “composer’s notes” for *A Sounding of Sources* are on the New World Records website. Dolden’s sage admonition abides inside his liners for *L’ivresse de la vitesse* at [www.electrocd.com](http://www.electrocd.com). Past paeans to radio warble within Ruth Schwartz Cowan’s *A Social History of American Technology* (Oxford, 1997). *Allmusic* is an eponymous dot com. Warburton’s review of Curran’s *Maritime Rites* (New World, 1984) appears in the January 2005 *Paris Transatlantic*, but I still haven’t re-located his review of *Building the Earth* within my *Signal to Noise* back issues. Goldbarth’s essay graces *Great Topics of the World* (Godine, 1994). Those Sublime Frequency track titles are stranger than fiction. “The still point of the turning of the world” is how Leonard Bernstein supposedly described *Tristan*. (Only *ex post facto* do I discover the phrase is rooted in T.S. Eliot and that the wording is wrong; desert-island *sics*-pack.)

The ostensible quotes by/on NASA, Karajan *et al*, someone objecting to imputing *ex post facto* meanings to records, and Cecil Taylor's sweaty socks are my own fabrications; the precise recollected verbiage of Phil Schaap's annual Mingusiana sort of is. But "I Love Jet Noise" is an actual bumper sticker.