# Joshua Bonnetta captures a year of life sounds in a single pine tree



Film-maker and artist Joshua Bonnetta has created an intricate sonic portrait capturing the sounds of a single pine tree over the span of a full year. Based in Munich since 2022 but originally from the United States, Bonnetta undertook the project in Tioga County, upstate New York, by recording continuously from May 2021 to April 2022. This amounted to an impressive 8,760 hours of environmental audio, all captured by a recording device secured ten feet up in the tree.

Bonnetta's approach evolved from his long-standing interest in documenting places through sound, initially as private mementos over a 20-year period. His technique was inspired by a previous residency in the Outer Hebrides between 2017 and 2019, where he created Brackish, a month-long continuous radio broadcast from an underwater microphone. He found that extending recording periods allowed for remarkable natural sound occurrences to emerge when human presence was absent, describing the experience as “a very privileged window into the space.”

In the forests near Ithaca, Bonnetta would occasionally hear the fleeting calls of owls and coyotes during night visits with friends, but these moments were rare. The extended recording method aimed to document the full spectrum of natural sounds in one location, including rain, wildlife, and the sounds of the trees themselves changing through the seasons. For instance, he notes that listeners can hear branches creak under snow or the subtle sound of leaves filling in on nearby deciduous trees.

The post-recording process was formidable. To analyse and edit the vast amount of data, Bonnetta collaborated with Holger Klinck, a conservation bioacoustics expert at Cornell University, who guided him on identifying sounds graphically using spectral analysis software. Additionally, sound engineer Josh Berger introduced him to an advanced editing programme likened to “Photoshop for sound,” enabling Bonnetta to layer and sculpt the recordings. The meticulous editing spanned three years, resulting in a four-hour album titled *The Pines*. Rather than featuring selective highlights, the album functions as a “spectral collage” or poetic soundscape where natural cycles and events overlap, such as the cumulative sound of all rainfall in July or the life cycles of insects and amphibians entering and exiting the sound field.

Bonnetta reflects on the project with a mix of awe and a subtle undercurrent of concern: “You could always be recording something that you might not be able to record again,” he said, referencing his earlier experiences where natural soundscapes faced disruption from development projects such as highway construction.

Looking ahead, Bonnetta plans to explore other fascinating natural sound phenomena. His upcoming work includes capturing the geological sounds of Mount Hochstaufen in the Alps, where small earthquakes triggered by heavy rain have been studied for centuries. He is also working on an audiovisual project depicting the Bavarian forest at night, a film on bioacoustics research on Rapa Nui (Easter Island), and the ambient sounds of Munich, where he appreciates the ability to hear distant church bells from various neighbourhoods—an experience new to him in Europe.

The Guardian highlights the evocative nature of Bonnetta’s work, which offers listeners an immersive experience of a living landscape filled with rich, overlapping natural sounds. Bonnetta concludes with a light-hearted warning to listeners: “Just don’t fall asleep, because there’s some pretty gnarly raccoon!”

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.whitechapelgallery.org/events/joshua-bonnetta-low-islands/> - This event featured Joshua Bonnetta's work 'Caolas na Hearadh (The Sound of Harris)', an experimental film created during his residency in the Outer Hebrides between 2017 and 2019, highlighting his long-standing interest in documenting places through sound.
2. <https://www.forcedexposure.com/Catalog/bonnetta-joshua-innse-gall-lp/SHELTER.127LP.html> - This LP, 'Innse Gall', comprises two audio works constructed by Bonnetta from field recordings made on the Outer Hebrides islands of Barra, Berneray, North Uist, Harris, and Lewis between 2017-2019, showcasing his technique of extended recording periods to capture natural sound occurrences.
3. <https://www.forcedexposure.com/Catalog/joshua-bonnetta-lago-lp/SHELTER.069LP.html> - This LP, 'Lago', is an audio work created in dialogue with the photobook of the same title by American photographer Ron Jude, involving field recordings and analog processing to craft an aural counterpoint to the photographs, reflecting Bonnetta's approach to documenting places through sound.
4. <https://iffr.com/en/person/joshua-bonnetta> - This page provides information about Joshua Bonnetta's work, including his film 'Strange Lines and Distances', which unites field and radio recordings along with double 16mm footage to explore the relationships between place, narrative, perception, and the physical environment.
5. <https://bleep.com/release/51391-joshua-bonnetta-strange-lines-and-distances> - This release features 'Strange Lines and Distances', a work by Bonnetta that combines field recordings, radio transmissions, and archival material to create a sonic exploration of historical and environmental narratives.
6. <https://www.soundohm.com/product/lago> - This page provides information about 'Lago', an LP by Bonnetta that uses field recordings and analog processing to craft an aural counterpoint to the photographs of Ron Jude, reflecting Bonnetta's method of documenting places through sound.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/apr/29/chipmunks-mics-joshua-bonnetta-who-recorded-a-tree-for-a-year> - Please view link - unable to able to access data