



Title

edgewise, Kittie Cooper



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Abstract

Not Applicable

Keywords: sound art, electroacoustic music, electronic voice phenomena, field recording

edgewise was commissioned and premiered by New York-based saxophone & percussion duo Popebama. The piece is for two performers and live processing in Max/MSP—the electronics feature my own recordings of room tone and electronic voice phenomena (EVPs) run through an amplitude tracker. Performers each wear masks of their own faces that I constructed specifically for this duo. The masks, alongside unsettling physical gestures, create an unstable space in which electronic and acoustic sounds interrupt and subvert each other.

edgewise's original program notes are as follows:

Electronic voice phenomena (EVPs) are recorded sounds that are interpreted as the voices of ghosts, spirits, and other paranormal entities. EVPs can be recorded unintentionally or can be intentionally requested and recorded, usually via human-conducted conversation in supernaturally active spaces. During this process, people speak to and record the space, and then listen to and edit recordings later, interpreting any replies. EVPs provide the text and much of the sonic material for *edgewise*.

edgewise engages with the relationship between humans and space in the documentation of EVPs, as well as the power dynamics at play when humans seek to project meaning onto sound and space. This piece creates an environment in which humans, recordings, and spaces struggle to be heard amidst conflicting modes of communication and interpretation.

edgewise examines communication across a number of spatial and sonic thresholds. One that is central to the piece is the threshold between the worlds of the living and of the dead. EVPs function on the belief that these two worlds (and the beings inhabiting them) can bleed into each

other, allowing humans to receive sonic communication from spirits—and vice versa—while sharing the same physical spaces. In the case of EVPs, these interactions are site-specific and mediated by a combination of recording technology and human interpretation, creating environments where humans, spirits, spaces, and technology all contribute to and interfere with communication.

I chose to examine a few aural thresholds within *edgewise*, namely those between real and imagined sounds and between audible and inaudible sounds. EVPs allow for the exploration of these in-between spaces through the interpretation of humans (listening to recorded sounds and interpreting them as fragmented speech), and through technology (amplifying room tone far above the threshold of human perception). *edgewise* explores the roles of humans and technology in crossing these thresholds, and the ways in which humans interact with these thresholds in order to project meaning onto sounds and spaces.

I started composing *edgewise* before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and completed it during the summer of 2020. Crossing this threshold completely changed the course of this piece, though you can still see the remnants of both sides.

edgewise was commissioned and premiered by Popebama (Erin Rogers and Dennis K. Sullivan II), with the assistance of the Johnstone Fund for New Music. My deepest thanks go to both of these groups for making this piece possible.

About the Author

Kittie Cooper is a sound and intermedia artist, performer, and educator based in Vancouver, BC. She makes work that explores identity, feminism, and the spectrum between silliness and seriousness. Her work has been called "highly original and wonderfully fun." They are interested in text and graphic scores, improvisation, and DIY electronic instruments. They have performed and presented at a variety of festivals and conferences across the United States, and perform regularly as a guitarist, electronic musician, and improviser.

Kittie's music has been commissioned and performed by International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), Ensemble Dal Niente, Splinter Reeds, Warp Trio, Hub New Music, Popebama, and Ghost Ensemble. She serves as Director of Composers Forums and Faculty for The Walden School Young Musicians Program. She holds a BM from Northwestern University in music education and guitar performance, and an MEd in teaching students with visual impairments from George Mason University. They are currently working toward an MFA in interdisciplinary arts at Simon Fraser University. Kittie also likes ghost stories, chili, and cats.

You can find more information and documentation of Kittie's work at kittiecooper.com.